Dyslexia, the self and higher education: learning life histories of students identified as dyslexic

Volume 2: Appendices & References

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# Appendices

## Volume Two

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Appendix I: four case studies of informants

Data presentation and analysis inevitably involves the selection and grouping of short quotations from individual informants, but no overview of any one person. The first reason for including these case studies is to provide some fuller portraits of informants.

In view of the research findings, a further reason for presenting case studies is that they illustrate ways in which informants’ discourses of dyslexia affect their University experience. They also provide background information for substantive Chapters and recommendations. One case study will be presented for each of the four discourses of dyslexia identified. As each interview (although broadly chronological) followed the themes suggested by the informant, these portraits do not all contain precisely the same set of topics, and hence will not be subdivided.

Jeremy, a young 'patient'

Jeremy was interviewed within a few days of his twentieth birthday. He was in the first year of a degree in applied biochemistry; short and dark-haired, he was wearing a sweatshirt with the badge of the University table tennis team. Jeremy soon relaxed, made frequent eye contact and spoke fluently and openly. He came from London, and remembered little about his primary school except that he had been happy there overall, but had had difficulty with spelling. He had found Maths easy, and like several other younger respondents, he recalled working rapidly through a scheme of workbooks. In common with 50% of respondents, Jeremy had been regarded as lazy by teachers; he had early come to believe that, because he was intelligent and good at most school subjects, his disinclination to read and poor spelling must be the result of laziness.

Jeremy has only one sibling, an older brother who had mental health problems. His family are Jewish and middle class; the two boys were sent to a Jewish school. Here, Jeremy had his first experience of French, and simultaneously had to start Hebrew; lessons in both languages involved writing and spelling, as well
as reading. He quickly found himself in the bottom set for both; his inability to remember parts of speech continued to be put down to 'me being lazy – my English, and not reading, and – that was always the option'. Jeremy had done well orally, particularly in English lessons; in French, on the other hand, he 'could have been – probably was – slightly disruptive'.

Jeremy had heard of dyslexia at this point, through other pupils at the school, but he did not associate it with himself. His school reports had spoken regularly of lack of reading, bad spelling and very bad handwriting, but no one seems to have mentioned dyslexia. His first comment which revealed a 'patient' discourse of dyslexic came as he spoke about the possibility of his brother's being dyslexic; Jeremy said his brother had 'a few other mental illnesses', and that his difficulties had been ascribed to these.

GCSE brought Jeremy 8 passes, including English Language (where the teacher corrected the spelling in his course-work, having struggled in vain to help him to remember common homophones). Because of his oral ability, Jeremy mixed socially with pupils in top sets, and gained a grade one in English oral: 'I can handle myself in a talk', he said, but 'the words I speak, I can't spell or write'. (In spite of this, it should be noted that in the course of the interview, Jeremy told me that he 'hanged around with' certain people; he also used the word 'cleansiness', and said his brother had a chemical 'disbalance' in his brain.)

Jeremy's showed self-awareness as he dissected his language difficulties. He described his inability to remember parts of speech, and the way he tended to mix tenses in essays. His self-image as a writer is summed up by his statement that 'I can't really express myself on paper'. His handwriting was very poor, but he finished examinations before the due time, because he wrote very fast; he felt that his brain was 'working way ahead of what I'm writing, which is probably – accounts for half the mistakes'.

He was also quite clear about his difficulty with essay-writing, drawing a distinction between an essay which gives a series of facts (which he felt he could cope with) and one which presents arguments, which he could not manage. He
had been interested in doing History A Level, but the teacher had persuaded him that the requisite essay-writing would be beyond him.

Then Jeremy described his struggles with reading comprehension. As the time to apply to University approached, Jeremy determined to try some fiction, 'just to say I'd read a book'. He chose something of which he had seen the film, hoping that this would help, but his short-term memory weakness meant it was too much for him. Turning to a simple thriller, again one where he had seen the video, Jeremy tried again:

...because I wanted to read a book, that was my ultimate goal. But then I thought "I'm just reading it page after page, I can't, you can't, no one can ask, if anyone asked me a question, I've got absolutely no idea what I've just read." So that was that for books. But I did try.

This was the only point where Jeremy expressed any envy of non-dyslexic fellow students; he went on to talk about the others 'going through novel after novel', adding wistfully that his own poor performance meant that: 'I just kicked it on the head, sort of thing'. However, keen to demonstrate his successful strategies, he added that nowadays he asks his girl-friend to read text-books aloud to him.

Jeremy also showed self-knowledge in respect of lecture notes, explaining that because he cannot 'write down all the information and listen to it and take it in', he concentrates on writing it all down so that he can try to understand and absorb it later. When it comes to writing in exams, he tries to avoid words he cannot spell; the frustration of this was clear in the way he spoke about this:

I'm using loads of little short words to get to the same answer, which might take me half a page to do. (...) I'll use the most appalling waffled English to try and say those words I can't spell.

This under-current of pride and sensitivity emerged again when Jeremy talked about his embarrassment at being asked for the loan of his lecture notes, because of his poor handwriting. It came out further when he spoke of his girl-friend (who was reading psychology) telling him she thought he was dyslexic: 'I had all the, like, I don't mean symptoms, I can't think of a better word'.
At Burtonforth University, students are assessed for dyslexia by a Senior Lecturer in Psychology, who uses the results for his research. Jeremy’s theme of detailed self-knowledge was exhibited again when he described this assessment, which had taken place over two meetings about three months before our interview. He had been successful with a picture vocabulary test and with digit span, but overall it had been ‘very very nerve-wracking’, and he had had great difficulty with non-word reading and spelling, as well as with comprehension. He showed awareness of the culture-specific nature of parts of the test, mentioning a ‘priest’s hat’ and a ‘Muslim scarf’ which he had been unable to identify; Jeremy also said:

\[ I \text{ have a slight problem with my speech, like when I say, as in ‘free’ the number, that’s how I say it, I can’t say it properly. (....)My brother does it, my Mum does it (....). } \]

Talking about his assessment reminded Jeremy of a recent occasion when he had been working in a rehabilitation centre, and a speech therapist had shown him a picture language test ‘which she would give to a head-injury patient’, and he had found it very difficult: ‘I didn’t like that at all, I must be honest’. He added: ‘I really had to concentrate. I was very very nervous when I was doing it’.

Jeremy again spoke in a business-like manner of his reaction to receiving the psychologist’s report: ‘I took it as: “Well that’s an explanation for this, now I’ve got something, now I know what I’ve got to do to improve it.”’ The report did not in fact make any recommendations as to strategies; Jeremy did not seem to have really come to terms with what it did say (see below).

The next theme of Jeremy’s interview was relationships with the University and tutors. There was no individual learning support available at Burtonforth at the time (and in accordance with the rules which then applied, he was ineligible for the DSA because of the level of his parents’ income). He was given extra time in examinations; however, the issue arose as to whether that ‘concession’ alone meant that he was on a level with non-dyslexic students, or whether he should identify his work as that of a dyslexic student. Jeremy did not have a problem with finishing exams in time, but was highly conscious of the rubric which he quoted: ‘You will be penalised for poor spelling, grammar and handwriting’. He had been advised to identify himself as dyslexic at the top of his papers, but:
I'm very conscious that people see it as an excuse. Now I don't want it -- I want them to know I'm dyslexic and they don't mark me down for my handwriting and spelling. I don't want any special conditions, I don't want special exceptions; if I've got it wrong, I've got it wrong.

Most of the informants who made this kind of point adopted a 'patient' discourse of dyslexia.

Jeremy exhibited a contradictory attitude to the University's efforts to support him, as he did not want his peers to believe he was being given an unfair advantage, but at the same time he was keen not to lose marks because examiners were unaware that he was dyslexic. He claimed to have detected inconsistency within the Faculty as well, talking of what he saw as the view of his Department that 'being dyslexic is just a fault. It's (...) a fault in your personality', although 'younger lecturers actually speak to me and ask me what my problem is, so that they can learn'. The old guard he saw as 'your 40-year-old teachers, they've been in the trade all their life'.

Jeremy's coping strategies can be summed up by his attitude to invitations to the dyslexic students' support group: 'It's not a social thing, it's a problem I have which I'm overcoming'. Many informants mentioned the fact that they did not want to use dyslexia as an excuse for special treatment or sub-standard work; Jeremy was the most forceful on this point. 'I don't like the fact that I should be writing I'm dyslexic on the top of my paper, because that to me says this is an excuse -- look, I'm writing it on my paper just to remind you'. He was using a combination of ICT ('I typed it out, I spell checked it, I grammar checked it') and human support (i.e. getting his girlfriend to proof-read his work). He summarised his approach: 'I will always ask for help. I am not one who will struggle through, bashing my head against the wall'.

An aspect of his relationships with tutors which was clearly important to Jeremy was connected with references for jobs, currently work placements. He seemed fairly happy to talk to lecturers and friends about being dyslexic, but had been taken aback when his tutor said he was obliged to inform companies he was applying to for work placements: 'He said it could be an issue, because it's
research’. Jeremy had in fact succeeded in obtaining a placement with a cancer research group, but the tutor had telephoned them and said: ‘You know Jeremy is dyslexic; is he going to be a problem with not getting the letters in the wrong (sic) order?’ Jeremy’s knowledge about dyslexia meant that he was aware of two points which are relevant to job applications: that dyslexia is an umbrella term, covering a range of issues, and that many people have views about it which may be based on ignorance.

It was clear that Jeremy was keen to present his dyslexia in as positive a light as possible:

I’m probably only very mild in my – my English is only where I’m dyslexic, not verbally; it’s only when I write things down. (...) I’m only affected in one area.

This statement ignores the reading difficulty clearly identified in the psychologist’s assessment, where Jeremy had correctly read only 15 words out of 50 in the National Adult Reading Test. The psychologist had felt it necessary to add: ‘This is considerably lower than in my sample of ordinary undergraduates, whose mean score is 36.3/50’.

Nevertheless, when I asked Jeremy how he would describe dyslexia, he said:

I probably would start by saying there are different forms of it, different types, different levels. You’re not dyslexic and that’s it; that’s not - it’s not (a) classification. I’d probably try to explain that there are different levels of dyslexia, different, um serious ca-, I mean some people are really affected, some people only slightly. And then I’d bring myself into it, what I am; because again I suppose with pride I would say there are different levels, and I’m not at the bottom of it, I’m not a very bad dyslexic, which there are. I’m only affected (in) a certain side of it.

This again is at odds with the psychologists’ report, which stated: ‘The problems that you have with reading and spelling are severe and reflect a significant degree of disability’. Jeremy had received a copy of this. However, he did say that he needed help with English because it was ‘a real real fault’. This is typical of one whose image of dyslexia is medical: he sees it as a biological failing. He
linked his difficulty in understanding Maths questions which were couched as paragraphs of information with his difficulty in *doing a neat paragraph* himself.

Twelve respondents (36%) replied when I sent them transcripts and copies of the interview tape, but only six of these wrote any substantial comments. Jeremy was one of these six; his letter consisted mainly of an 'update' on some of the themes from the interview. He had been for a summer holiday (aged 20):

*During the holiday I read my first book, and I really enjoyed it, I even found it hard to put it down. The book was called Rose Madder by Stephen King. I found it easy to read and his language easy to understand. Unfortunately I have not read another book since.*

This success seemed to have given him courage to tackle the task of reading the background papers on the cancer research project he was joining for his placement, which he described as *'a daunting task'*, adding that he had written notes on each paper as a comprehension aid.

To sum up: I class Jeremy as a 'patient' because of his own language about dyslexia. As well as the examples quotes above, he described a lecturer as having asked him about his difficulties *'so that she knows what's wrong with me'*. Jeremy's discourse of dyslexia had come to him via a variety of routes:

- his brother's difficulties, and the family's language about him
- his own placement in remedial classes at school for handwriting, reading and spelling; through meeting the other students there, he came to view dyslexia as a serious problem, but classed himself as *'shall we say higher than what the other students were'.*
- his girl-friend who was studying psychology, had read about dyslexia, and identified him from this
- the University psychologist's assessment, which referred to *'a significant degree of disability' and *'a specific impairment'*.  
- the speech therapist at his work placement.

Jeremy was only in the second term of his degree course when we met; he spoke of doing a PhD in due course, because *'you can't see anyone who's not a Doctor*
in our field’. However, when I telephoned him in April 1998, in his final year, he told me he was applying for jobs as a medical representative; he described this as 'the managerial side of medical research,' and good for his 'career plan'. This was not an easy matter for him; one company had set applicants a 'verbal analysis' test involving an eight-page set of 35 questions to be answered in half an hour, and Jeremy had 'failed'. Nevertheless, in Nov 1998 I received an e-mail from him saying that he had graduated with a 2:1, was working for a chemical and drug company as a 'technical advisor' to customers, and had an ambition to move into sales.

At the end of 2001, he told me that he had indeed moved into sales. He had been so successful at this that he had become the company's 'sales account manager' for London, co-ordinating a sales team; this was using his 'people skills'. Jeremy said that at work, dyslexia was 'not an obstacle'; he had a secretary for standard letters, and took great care with his reports. His view of dyslexia was 'I don’t think about it – I just get on with it'. He had taken to listening to audio books for pleasure, and no longer regarded dyslexia as a defect.
Stephen, a young ‘hemispherist’

Stephen was 22 years old when interviewed; tall, thin, pale and quite reserved at first, he was studying Geology. He described his reading and spelling as ‘a bit of a mess’ in his first years at school, and remembered having extra help with this.

Stephen’s mother took him to the Dyslexia Institute for assessment when he was nine, at which point it had been explained to him by the EP that he had been ‘born with it’. Overall, the label felt like ‘something’s wrong with me’, although when reporting on Stephen’s ‘performance scale’ (i.e. non-verbal) sub-tests, that EP had used language such as ‘an extremely high level of visual thinking skills’. He had also defined Stephen’s Full Scale IQ (of 124) as ‘in the superior ability band’.

This assessment led to three years of weekly support sessions at the Institute (during school hours), at which Stephen was encouraged to use his strengths. On the subject of spelling, he said:

*I sort of visualise it as the word written in my house. I’ve got a sort of picture memory.*

He liked the Institute’s handwriting style, which he described as ‘cool’.

While these sessions were encouraging, Stephen had been glad that when he first started leaving his class to go to the Institute, he had a broken arm; the other children were accustomed to his departures for medical treatment, and he did not have to ‘feel like a thicky’. In terms of other affective aspects, a strong element in Stephen’s interview was the support of his parents, particularly his mother, who had made him flash-cards at home and put pressure on staff at each school he attended.

Stephen retained a view of dyslexia as developmental: ‘you pop out with it, and you have to deal with it’. On the other hand, the label had its reassuring aspects:

*It was nice to know you’re not just – it’s not just like – you have got a problem, so it’s not just because you’re, you can’t do it.*
There had been another recurrent affective theme in Stephen’s schooldays: his dread of reading aloud in class. During his GCSE years, hearing him read aloud had led to friends asking whether he was dyslexic, and his first ‘coming out’ about it. He described reading aloud as ‘really embarrassing and humiliating’.

His GCSEs were taken at a private school. The LEA at the time used what Stephen called the 12 plus to place children at different comprehensive schools, and his parents decided not to let him do this. He enjoyed classes of 15, even though ‘the English teacher didn’t have a clue what dyslexia was’. He remembered that the other children had not worked very hard, but that he had, because his parents were paying for him to go to the school (as well as being qualified professionals who believed in education, as he described them). Although he had no special arrangements such as extra time, Stephen achieved good grades for his GCSEs and thought A Levels would not be difficult.

Moving to the Sixth Form at the local Grammar School for A Level Maths, Physics and Geography, Stephen was soon put in what he felt was ‘the reject class’ for Maths and put on a ‘report card’ because staff assumed he was not trying. However, Stephen had maintained his self-esteem through his enjoyment of physical Geography. He was aware that this suited his learning style, particularly on field trips:

   *It was easy to relate to – I could see the system working. It’s like the physical properties are there. In Physics, I couldn’t see the electric current.*

However, the school had suggested that he drop an A Level; ‘luckily good old Mum and Dad came in again and bollocked everybody’. Examinations remained a problem. In the case of Geography, reading and question comprehension were issues for Stephen: ‘all the Geography exams seem to be like really poncil worded’. He returned to the Dyslexia Institute EP for a re-assessment, and was given extra time; he wrote ‘I am a dyslexic student’ on the papers. In spite if this, he only managed an E for Physics and an N for Maths to go with his B for Geography (and C for General Studies). Nevertheless, he achieved a place on a foundation year in Civil Engineering (his father was an engineer). Although he
had indicated dyslexia on the application form, this was not mentioned at interview.

Engineering did not however suit him, and he applied for a transfer to Geology. Describing this led Stephen on to a more cognitive theme, as he explained why his Geology degree suited him:

\[ I \text{ think one of the good things about the Geology Department is they seem to structure notes so it all just builds up into a big thing at the end. } \]

He also liked lecturers who used diagrams and flow charts. When it came to revision, Stephen used his visual memory, so that in examinations he could ‘read the notes out in my head’.

The social dimension at University included for Stephen an issue also referred to by Jeremy: identifying himself as dyslexic on examination papers. Unlike Jeremy, Stephen made a point of always doing this, although he expressed doubt as to whether it helped him and whether ‘the markers understand’. He felt that all staff should be ‘educate(d)’ about dyslexia. Another social aspect concerned the student-led dyslexia support group. Again unlike Jeremy, Stephen had been to a meeting, but had not felt it was useful: ‘A meeting for a little chat about “oh what subject are you doing?”’

The social dimension, in terms of tutors’ attitude to him, was the area in which Stephen exemplified the ‘hemispherist’ discourse most clearly, as the following statements illustrate:

- They don’t seem to understand like you can’t learn it that way, but you can learn it this way.
- The more diagrammatic it is, I find it easier to remember.
- I’ve got really good spatial and visual skills (...) but the education system is just narrowed along one little line.

However, the main social theme in Stephen’s interview was his isolation. He described himself as ‘quite a big loner’, and felt that dyslexia contributed to this, as he wanted to protect himself against being hurt by identifying himself as
‘different’. He had enjoyed a field trip to Iceland, where he had worked on his own for eight hours a day; the tutor had said his maps were ‘absolutely brilliant’.

Stephen seemed to have developed his discourse of dyslexia from a combination of EPs’ comments (when he was re-assessed at 17, the earlier conclusions were confirmed), his D.I. tutor’s support for his cognitive strengths and his own observation of learning and teaching approaches which suited him. At one point, he remarked: ‘I think my brain’s a lot better than a lot of people’. However, he went on to tell me that he avoided reading; he found the library catalogue difficult to use, and in any case, reading took him a frustratingly long time. Altogether, his course was ‘very hard work’, but he seemed to be enjoying the academic content.

After graduating with a 2:1, Stephen spent six months on a research project investigating windmills in Germany. He then took an MRes course at a University in London, where he volunteered to take part in dyslexia research at the Institute of Neurology, which involved having his brain scanned. By 1999, Stephen was working for the Environment Agency in Reading and taking a computer programming course in his spare time. He had become a team leader and less of a ‘loner’.

When I spoke to him in late 2001, Stephen’s current job involved touring the country carrying out what he called ‘stack emission analysis’. He had not referred to dyslexia when he applied for the job, but described his boss as ‘OK about it’. Stephen said he still avoided reading and writing as far as possible; reports for work were easy because the vocabulary and language style were limited. He did not think about dyslexia very often; when he did, he felt proud to be dyslexic because of his ‘good visual eye’. Since having his brain scanned, Stephen had come to see dyslexia as definitely a physiological matter, but one which conferred advantages.

Now 27, Stephen was unattached, and said he was still ‘not good at trusting people’ and ‘wary of getting hurt’. He felt that dyslexia was definitely connected with this. On the other hand, he was considering a PhD.
Alice – a mature ‘student’

Alice was 37 when interviewed, and studying for an M.A. in education (F.E.) Of Irish extraction, she has curly dark hair and black eyes. Alice is quite corpulent, and speaks in a bright, vivacious manner, making frequent eye contact. She was a rewarding informant because of her articulate self-disclosure.

The most striking aspect of the content of Alice’s interview lay in the way in which dyslexia has affected her whole life, although she was only assessed formally not long before we met. Feeling that ‘I knew I had a problem, but I didn’t know what it was’, she has been driven by great determination to prove that she can achieve educationally.

Perhaps because of her professional experience of interviewing in personnel work, Alice introduced both herself and her main theme within the first minute of our meeting, as well as the heredity aspect:

My parents are Irish, and Catholic, first generation English. I’m one of four. I’m the second eldest, boy girl boy girl, and we all have a slight trace of dyslexia. We get it from my father, who’s extremely dyslexic, and I am probably the worst of the four children.

Shortly after that, she added:

(....)I pushed myself on and on to do well, and at every stage people said ‘you won’t go any higher’, you know, ‘you aren’t capable, you can’t expect any more’. And that would almost motivate me even more, to do more.

This was further evidence if her self-awareness, in that this had indeed apparently been the major theme of her life.

As well as her determination, a further theme of Alice’s interview was parental support, which in her case had continued in a practical sense for many years after she reached adulthood.
Faced with difficulties in acquiring literacy skills at primary school, many dyslexic children are inclined to give up and see themselves as failures. Their behaviour, as with all behaviour, is a result of a combination of intrinsic personality factors and experience. It would be simplistic to state that Alice’s life-long drive to prove herself resulted purely from her awareness that she had a learning difficulty; she must have brought pre-existing personality traits to bear. However, she does seem to have responded to many learning setbacks by refusal to be defeated, as is shown by the episode of the class library at primary school. There was what she described as ‘a special sort of more advanced little library’; denied access to this, Alice went to the public library, found the same books and took them out in pairs. She also made her own discovery about what the literature on learning support calls ‘overlearning’: she studied spellings by repetition.

Failing the 11+ was a major setback:

*There were a lot of reinforcements that I wasn’t very bright that kept on coming home.*

Children who were not at the Grammar School were not entered for O Levels, but Alice was determined to try O Level English. Her parents supported her, although they had to pay the entry fees; she passed at the third attempt. Meanwhile, a school-mate had commented to her on the kind of discrepancy which often appears in the educational histories of dyslexic learners: she did very well in class, but badly in exams.

This, and the social pressure of arriving as a second-class citizen, did not deter Alice from entering the Sixth Form. She spoke bitterly of the day she referred to a simile as a ‘smiley’, whereupon the teacher had made sarcastic comments about children from her school attempting A Levels.

(Accuracy of language was clearly a weak area for Alice; in the course of the interview, she made the following statements:

* Well I’ve shunned away to be honest from....
* What really spurned me on, spurted me on, was....*

Alice’s theme of refusal to be denied received a setback when she decided to abandon her A Level courses. She went to a College of Further Education to do a Business Studies sandwich course, and enjoyed her work experience placement in
a company personnel department, where her interpersonal skills were useful. This led to her ambition to pursue an HND in business studies:

And she just said to me: "I don’t think you’d be able to cope with it, don’t do it." So I did it, of course.

It was for that course that Alice first attended Axbridge University, as it was one of only two colleges which offered personnel as an option within the HND in Business Studies; she was also able to live with her parents.

This latter fact became significant at this stage, as she found the HND ‘a real strain’. Alice was 19 when she began the HND; she described her parents as supporting her ‘financially and emotionally’. Having no experience themselves of any kind of studying, however, they were unable to help her when her determination to do well led her to make disproportionate efforts. This was evidenced by her ‘Long Study’, where she reviewed the discipline policies of twenty ‘major companies’, a project she now realises was far too extensive for the course.

Alice hand-wrote all her assignments; this was in the days before cheap word-processors and spell-checkers. She spoke angrily of being penalised for spelling, attributing to this the fact that she was not awarded a Distinction overall for her HND. She had not even been aware of ‘Tippex’, and would spend hours rewriting, making such common dyslexic mistakes as omitting words or whole lines.

This determination co-existed with fundamentally poor self-esteem: ‘I thought it was a fluke that I was there’.

I’m in the second year of an M.A. now, and it’s only now that I’m beginning to think ‘well, you know, maybe I’ - I don’t think clever is the word.....

Having experienced what she described as humiliation in personality tests on the ‘milk round’ for personnel posts, Alice was advised that she should learn to type. Here she did speak with direct pride:

I took a post-graduate typing and shorthand course; and that, that’s an achievement; I got 60 words a minute shorthand as quite a severe dyslexic.
Eventually, Alice obtained work in personnel. Her constant fear of being ‘found out’, that her underlying weaknesses (as she saw it) would be discovered, meant that she avoided close personal relationships and worked far too hard. She bought her own house near her parents; in trying to support her (by ‘taking my washing, doing my shopping’), they unwittingly encouraged her to work day and night. Inevitably, Alice had what she termed ‘a total breakdown’.

Her treatment led to the discovery that her stomach pains were psychosomatic, and she was referred to a psychiatrist. Having recovered (after problems with drug treatment) and returned to work, she found that the Managing Director had decided that all senior personnel should have intelligence and personality tests. By now, Alice had heard of dyslexia and suspected that the term applied to her. The organisation brought in to test the employees told her that they did not use ‘tests for dyslexics’ because they did not expect top personnel to be dyslexic. This episode was too much for Alice, who had another breakdown and was back in hospital:

*I didn’t come out for a month(....) I just let go totally. And then that made me realise what I was doing; I couldn’t keep running away.*

Mental breakdown was outside the experience of Alice’s parents, who were dismayed by her long periods of crying. But her mother ‘knew somebody who knew somebody who’d been to a counsellor’, and thus Alice was at last enabled to start feeling her anger about being dyslexic and her years of frustration. She had wanted to become a teacher while still at school herself, and now she began part-time work in F.E. teaching business studies. With her continuing urge to obtain qualifications, Alice soon embarked on a Cert. Ed., and this led to the M.A. in education which she was pursuing when we met.

A significant moment in terms of Alice’s developing self-confidence occurred at the end of her Cert. Ed., when she was interviewed for the M.A. The tutor who interviewed her seems to have had some insight:

*Someone had written ‘only an HND’ across the top of my form for the entry, and he said: ‘Isn’t it strange what one word can do?’ And he said: ‘How do you feel about that?’*
This had hit home, because for Alice it had ‘always been ‘only’, and not quite enough’. She had told the tutor that she was concerned about her ability to manage the quantity of reading required, because she believed herself to be dyslexic. The course tutor gave the common response, that this could not be true, because she had achieved so much. However, she was seen by an EP in due course, and this assessment was another trial for her:

I was just reduced to tears when I did it. It was so emotional for me, because it was bringing back things like when you did the 11+, things that I just – they hurt me to try and do.

The psychologist gave her some feedback on the day, stating that on a scale of severity of dyslexia from 1 to 10, she was at about number 7, but that her coping strategies reduced this to 5. Alice was unable to remember his explanations of his findings, and could not understand many of the technical terms which appeared in the written report. She also explained that the assessment session had made her realise that she had been pinning her hopes on recovery from her psychosomatic stomach pains: when these were cured, her learning difficulties ‘would go away’. Now she had to come to terms with the fact that even if I get really well, I’m never going to be able to read any better, and I’m never going to be able to find my way.

(Direction and navigation were difficult for her.) Alice blamed herself for being unable to talk to the EP about her fears, and blamed him for assuming that she would not be very upset by his report because she had achieved so much already. Such dilemmas of adult assessment were mentioned by many of my older respondents.

The ‘student’ discourse of dyslexia is not explicitly stated in EPs’ reports. Regarding dyslexia as something confined to academic or literacy matters is partly a response to the label. Alice’s EP used the language of IQ/attainment discrepancy, and also the ‘pattern of difficulties’ metaphor. However, in common with most of the Psychologists who reported on these informants, he confined his discussion of the implications of his findings to academic matters. Alice seems to have made an impression on him; he ended his report by complimenting her on ‘the workmanlike way in which you have managed your learning difficulties’.
Having been formally assessed, Alice felt able to enrol for a module specifically for dyslexic learners, offered by her University. Through this, she told me, she had learnt about tuning her ability to visualise, and about the use of colour and mind-mapping. She had also studied grammar and spelling, and she had come to believe that dyslexic learners ‘get there in the end’ by doing things their own way. Perhaps most importantly, Alice began to realise that ‘it was emotion that was pulling me down’. She talked to her counsellor about her years of feeling ‘you’re not really who you think you are, you’re not that bright’, and ‘you’re going to get caught out, you’re not really able for this’.

Alice was also able finally to talk to her father about dyslexia:

> And I said ‘Dad, have you ever heard of something called dyslexia?’
> And he was sort of quiet. And I said ‘you know, it’s where you have problems with the type of things we have problems with’. And he said ‘why do you ask?’ And I said ‘well, because I think I might be, and I think you might be’. And he said ‘I never wanted to mention it to you’.

Her father went on to explain that he and Alice’s mother had believed that she ‘might see it as an excuse not to try’ if they had talked to her about dyslexia. (One might speculate that it would also have involved her father, and possibly her mother as well, according to one statement Alice made, in admitting their own difficulties to her.) Alice described her brothers as both being very good at mathematical tasks, but bad at literacy.

Alice’s growing self-awareness was evidenced by her anecdote about her way of avoiding social situations where she would have to remember people’s names, as well as by her acceptance that ‘when I’m tired, I haven’t got the energy to get it right (....) so I just let it be’. The dyslexia module at Axbridge had helped her to ease up, and say ‘OK, so you’re going to worry about it for a couple of days, but you’ll get it done.

She was also encouraged by a television programme about a special school which employed supportive devices such as coloured arrows on the floor to guide pupils to their classrooms, and displays of labelled photographs of students and staff. (As well as a naming difficulty, Alice also mentioned her fear of getting lost when she started secondary school, and the way she still joined groups of fellow
students rather than trying to find her way around Axbridge University on her own.)

Alice’s counsellor had wondered about her need to label herself, rather than simply 'deal(ing) with "this is how I am."' Alice commented that, in talking to me, 'it’s highlighted a bit more how kind of it is in there', i.e. she saw dyslexia as playing an important role in making her the way she is.

Alice is a member of several sub-groups within my cohort of subjects: she is an 11+ failure; she has dyslexic parents; she has dyslexic siblings; she is undertaking post-graduate study; she has completed the dyslexia module at Axbridge University; she goes to a counsellor. She seemed to be achieving through a combination of her innate determination, belief that she must prove herself, and support from other people.
Mel, a mature ‘campaigner’

Mel was 32 years old and following a modular degree course in Education Studies and Intelligent Systems. Short and slim, she smiled frequently, although this was often rueful or sardonic.

Mel’s learning life history contained elements of the ‘campaigner’ almost from the start, although initially the campaign was simply for herself. She reported trying to persuade a teacher to tell her how to spell the words she wanted to use, refusing to be kept down a year at a boarding school and persuading her parents to take her away, and reading a magazine article on dyslexia in which she recognised herself. (This information was stored away for a future campaign.) Mel used the language of battle frequently; she described examinations as a ‘fair fight’ (meaning that as she saw it, all the students had an equal amount of time to demonstrate their ability unaided).

When she was in the Lower Sixth form, a teacher suggested to Mel that she might be dyslexic. Being fore-warned (having read the magazine article), Mel acknowledged this; however, she felt the need to prove her intellectual ability:

Let’s see: if I’m not that bright, then I’ve missed the point, and I can be deluding myself that I understand what’s going on in class.

She therefore took the entrance test for the ‘Mensa’ society and passed; armed with this information, Mel asked her teachers to arrange a dyslexia assessment. Obtaining entrance to ‘Mensa’ for Mel was ‘preparing my case’. When the assessment (at Aston University) duly confirmed that she was dyslexic, Mel described this as doing ‘a lot to make it easy for other people’ at the school; she saw the assessment report as ‘the nearest available weapon that was going to make some sort of impact’.

There is probably a history of conflict behind the English teacher’s reported comment (on seeing the dyslexia report) that ‘you’ve got a higher IQ than I have, I can’t teach you anything’. Mel’s language in our interview implied that she might not have been an easy student for a Convent Sixth Form; she used
expressions such as 'I took this a little badly', 'I annihilated their summer exams and then left', and (of a teacher) 'she was going to back off completely, throw her hands up and – brilliant!'

Mel then decided she wanted to do an HND in Computing. Here again, she had tactics worked out, deciding not to mention dyslexia at interview because it might be 'a hazard:'

Now I view it more along the lines that everybody seems to have disabled counts, and if they can have you as a dyslexic, then their disabled stats will look good, and they're quite happy to handle you.

In the USA for a year as a computer programmer, Mel met a family with several dyslexic children whose parents had little hope that they could be helped. Her reaction was determined: 'I started getting cross about it'. Back in England, she volunteered as an Adult Basic Education tutor, which she described as 'a step in the plan' for working in learning support without teacher training.

Mel's course at Axbridge was another step along that route. She had adopted what might be described as a campaign approach to finding a course, studying 'twenty-odd prospectuses'. Axbridge not only had strong dyslexia support, but also the option of combining computer studies with an education course which did not prescribe teaching practice. Mel was in the process of setting up what she called a peer support group for dyslexic students, backed up by e-mail.

A few months before we met, Mel had been re-assessed by an EP. (Her earlier Aston University report had been lost, and was in any case some 15 years old.) The E.P.'s report was a model of its kind, including as it did explanations of terminology such as 'standard score' and 'centile', explanations of the significance of the various tests and graphical representations of many of the results. The report also confirmed Mel's belief, since her 'Mensa' test, that she had definite strengths, referring to 'a very high level of verbal ability'. It did not however mention anything about learning style, but identified her need for support with reading comprehension and spelling and noted her lack of confidence about the production of written work.
Her somewhat dry and occasionally sarcastic tone hid the fact that Mel occasionally had emotional 'crises'. One of these has been quoted in Chapter 7 above: it was she who had to leave a seminar because she could not cope (see section 7.4.1). Although she did not refer to seeing a counsellor, Mel had a high degree of self-awareness; she knew that sometimes she would see a 'blank expression' on someone’s face, and that this might be because she had 'launch(ed) into the middle' of an idea instead of taking it step by step. But she was ‘not so tolerant’ on other occasions:

(...) what I perceive as being ignored, overlooked or talked down – I get very cross very quickly, defensive I think.

One further quotation from Mel sums up her hopes for the future, a world for which she continues to campaign:

If you’re going to teach everybody, right-brained and left-brained, a sort of approach that you call on all the senses, make it multi-media, is that something that works exclusively, just for dyslexics? Or isn’t it a thing which everybody does better with? So in a way, if you dealt with that, would you be making the issue of being dyslexic almost redundant?

After graduating, Mel remained at Axbridge, delivering sessional learning support to dyslexic undergraduates and administering the peer support system.
Appendix II: Policy on health & education before the word dyslexia was coined

History of medicine
Two major influences on medicine in the nineteenth century were Darwin’s ideas on the evolution of physical development and biology’s enthusiasm for classification (Tomlinson 1982). According to Tomlinson (ibid.:39), the medical profession

*developed an interest in mental defect, and the profession of medicine was considerably enhanced by medical claims to care for and control the mentally defective.*

Doctors began to devise labels for various classes of defect and handicap, a process which has continued to the present day.

The 1858 Medical Act established a national register of practitioners, and the confidence of the profession increased rapidly, so much so that a complete nosology, or system of classifying all disease, was attempted (Foucault 1976:172). Interestingly, the term reappears in Critchley’s ‘The dyslexic Child’, first drafted in 1964. Critchley (1970:11) described dyslexia as ‘occurring in the midst of but nosologically apart from the *olla podrida* of bad readers’ (*olla podrida* being translated in the Oxford Dictionary as ‘rotten pot’).

One strand of this thinking was the contemporary belief that defects were hereditary (Tomlinson 1982), supported by the work of Galton (1869). Such beliefs led to the growth of the eugenics movement (Rodwell 2000), the influence of which (in the USA and in the UK, involving plans to improve the human race through selective breeding) came to a head in the early part of the twentieth century. The British Eugenic Education Society was founded in 1900 by Dr Caleb Saleeby (ibid.); policy regarding handicapped children, at least until the first world war, was influenced by the notion that they were ‘defective’, and this seemed to be confirmed by early intelligence tests such as those of Binet (1916).
History of literacy in education

But what of literacy? During the nineteenth century, the percentage of the population of Britain who were able to read and write increased rapidly. As regards writing: in 1850, some fifty per cent of women and seventy percent of men were able to sign their own names in a marriage register; by 1900, these rates had both exceeded ninety percent (Sturges 1994). An Elementary Education Act was passed in 1870 which was somewhat limited in scope; compulsory education was not introduced until 1880, but this was not free of fees until 1891 (ibid.). “What we see here in the second half of the nineteenth century is the crucial phase of the process of Britain becoming a fully schooled society” (ibid. page 7).

The nineteenth century had begun with the belief that the working classes might read the Bible, but writing was not necessary for them (Simon 1960). As late as 1862, reading (in a state-funded school) was regarded as an oral activity, and writing was to be from dictation (ibid.). However, such practices did not produce results which met with universal approval. There were ‘many committees convened over the years to investigate the state of literacy in Britain’, (McGuinness 1998:111), and one reported in 1895 that there was a high level of functional illiteracy. What this nevertheless indicates is that the government’s goal had become what Hannon (1995:14) calls ‘mass education for the working classes’. The school leaving age was raised to fourteen in 1918; compulsory secondary education was not funded by the government until the 1944 Education Act; the school leaving age did not rise to fifteen until the 1960s, and reached sixteen in the 1970s, when there was much controversy over what was known as ROSLA (Raising Of the School Leaving Age).

19th century responses to failure and difference

With the goal of universal literacy came the notion that ‘if a child failed to learn to read, this was viewed as unnatural’ (McGuinness 1998:121). Kohl (1973) has an idiosyncratic way of looking at this. He first explains the term ‘iatrogenic disease’, calling this a way of “locating the problem with the patient and creating the impression that (the doctor) has a professional understanding of what is wrong” (Kohl 1973:13), although the word ‘iatrogenic’ means ‘caused by the doctor’. Kohl then coins the ironic expression ‘didagenic learning problems’ as a parallel
way of simultaneously acknowledging that a child’s difficulties have been caused
by teaching, and placing the blame on the child. “There is a tendency in our
culture to overclassify problems of learning and turn them into diseases,” says
Kohl (ibid.:179).

That tendency had in fact begun a century earlier. In 1886, the Idiots Act
distinguished ‘idiots’ and ‘imbeciles’ from ‘lunatics’ (Tomlinson 1982). The table
below, abbreviated from Tomlinson 1982:30-35, shows some key events in the
history of special education in Britain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1760-1842</td>
<td>Various asylums and schools for the blind and deaf established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846-1874</td>
<td>Asylums and schools for idiots and imbeciles opened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Education Act established the principle of mass elementary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Idiots Act separated idiots and imbeciles from lunatics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>'Journal of Mental Science' article appealed for 'auxiliary classes' for children not 'irretrievably deficient'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Invalid Children's Aid Association set up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>London School Board prepared a scheme for special schools and classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>First special class opened in Leicester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>Poor Law School Committee report mentions 'the accumulation of defective and afflicted children in our schools'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children) Act urges Local Authorities to make provision for special instruction; categories of handicap included idiot, imbecile and defective, as well as blind, deaf and epileptic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>First edition of what became a standard work on 'Mental Deficiency'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Mental Deficiency Act. Education Authorities given the duty of ascertaining which children aged 1-16 were defective; 'mental defective' added as a category of handicap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Cyril Burt appointed by LCC as the first local authority psychologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Second Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children) Act required local authorities to make provision for mentally defective children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Education Act enabled local authorities to compel parents of 'certified' children to send them to special schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>First Child Guidance Clinic set up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Wood Committee recommended that 'retarded' children join the educable defective to be educated in 'a helpful variant of the ordinary school'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>17,000 children in state special schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Education Act gave LEAs a duty to ascertain children suffering from 'a disability of body or mind' and provide 'special educational treatment' in special schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Eleven categories of handicap defined, including 'severely subnormal', 'educationally subnormal' and 'maladjusted'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1973  Warnock Committee set up to inquire into the education of handicapped children and young people

1976  Education Act suggested laying a duty on LEAs to provide special education in normal schools when it is practicable. This section was never implemented.

1978  Warnock Committee report recommended that statutory categories of handicap be abolished in favour of assessment of 'special educational needs'. The ESN category to be merged with remedial children to become children with learning difficulties

1979  180,000 children in state special schools, and 15,774 in private ones

1981  Education Act states that a child has 'special educational needs' if s/he has a difficulty which calls for special educational provision.

The Invalid Children’s Aid Association referred to in the above table later published what was long regarded as a standard work on dyslexia (Franklin and Naidoo 1970). Tomlinson points to the similarity between the 1889 Report of the Egerton Commission on 'the blind, the deaf, the dumb and other of the United Kingdom' (HMSO 1889), which held that it was better for the state to provide such people with basic education and make them employable than to 'support them through life in idleness', and the Warnock Report which spoke of those with special needs being 'able to hold down a job' (Warnock 1978:163). According to Tomlinson (1982), this is a matter of 'normality' as opposed to 'deviance'. Indeed, from Becker's (1963) perspective those in need of special education deviate from the kind of performance necessary for acceptance within mainstream education.

20th century responses: up to 1970

The essentialist perspective implies 'the belief that a characteristic or deficit is inherent within an individual and is likely to have biological rather than social causes' (Riddell 1996:84). In terms of special educational needs, this view continued to hold sway in the first half of the twentieth century. 'Defective' children were removed from main-stream schools, although in the years leading to the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act there was some tension between medical and educational authorities as to who should assess the children (Tomlinson 1982).

Categorisation remained a central activity (see the above table). However, it was not only the Medical Branch of the Board of Education which had powers in this respect; the psychology profession was becoming increasingly prominent, and none more so than Cyril Burt, the first psychologist to be employed by a County
Council. (He joined the LCC in 1913.) Burt devised tests of intelligence and attainment (Burt 1921), and later had a powerful influence on government policy on the selection of children for schools for the ‘educationally subnormal’ (Burt 1937).

The essentialist view of the primacy of within-child, biological variables thus involved, in terms of education policy, the identification of ‘special’ children by medical and psychological authority figures, and their subsequent segregation. Solity and Raybould (1988) comment that between 1900 and 1944, the numbers of children who were so segregated increased greatly, and most of them were working class; special education had low status within the education system. The 1944 Education Act increased from four to eleven the number of categories of children requiring special education, the fastest-growing category being the ESN. (Throughout the twentieth century, overall numbers of children identified as having first ‘defects’, then ‘handicaps’ and now ‘special needs’ increased steadily.) Tomlinson portrays the 1944 Act as

\[ a \text{ major effort by educationalists (sic) to move as many ‘defective’ } \]
\[ \text{children as possible out of medical domination and place then firmly } \]
\[ \text{under an educational aegis (Tomlinson 1982:49-50).} \]

This was part of the development of general, compulsory primary and secondary education in England and Wales; it was not surprising that, in spite of the egalitarian atmosphere after the second world war, teachers did not want to have to deal with children who were time-consumingly different. The number of children in ESN schools doubled between 1947 and 1955, and this remained the largest category of handicapped children during the 1960s (Tomlinson 1982). To sum up: until the 1944 Education Act, medical terminology (such as ‘defect’) predominated, but defect was then redefined as ‘handicap’.

According to Fairclough, such discourse is manifestly ideological:

\[ (..) \text{ discursive practices are ideologically invested in so far as they } \]
\[ \text{incorporate significations which contribute to sustaining or } \]
\[ \text{restructuring power relations (Fairclough 1992a:91).} \]

Withers and Lee (1988) take this view in relation to assessment for special educational needs. I will quote them at length because these issues arise significantly in my data:
Assessment (...) is claimed to be scientific, including the use of special instruments such as tests (...). A process which alters the future treatment and life chances of children, and which is sometimes the means by which pupils are selected for special provision, is somehow presented as contemplative and advisory, as if the judgement were made elsewhere, independently of the practices of the assessor (Withers and Lee 1988:175).
Appendix III: Models of literacy development

1. Literacy as social practice
Some theorists claim that literacy is not a unitary phenomenon, but a set of socially constructed practices. Barton (1994) uses the plural expression 'literacy practices', holding that:

*Where these different practices cluster into coherent groups it is very useful to talk in terms of them as being different literacies. A literacy is a stable, coherent, identifiable configuration of practices such as legal literacy, or the literacy of specific workplaces.* (Barton 1994:38), original emphasis.

Barton and Hamilton also adopt this view of literacy:

*Within a given culture, there are different literacies associated with different domains of life. Contemporary life can be analysed in a simple way into domains of activity, such as home, school, workplace.* (Barton and Hamilton 1998:9).

Barton and Hamilton are thus in accord with Street (1984), who distinguishes between ‘autonomous’ and ‘ideological’ models of literacy. The autonomous model, according to Street, is ‘based on the ‘essay-text’ form of literacy’ and ‘generalise(s) broadly from what is in fact a narrow, culture-specific literacy practice’:

*The model assumes a single direction in which literacy development can be traced (...) It isolates literacy as an independent variable (...)*(Street 1984:2).

The ideological model, on the other hand, ‘assumes that the meaning of literacy depends upon the social institutions in which it is embedded’ and cannot be separated from its political and ideological significance (ibid.:8). This view, of literacy as a social practice, is also promoted by Barton and Ivanic (1991), who argue that literacy is embedded in the activities of ordinary living – a basic component of everyday life. Ivanic and Moss (1991:194) propose that:

*There is some writing for which the style and range of allowable content is laid down for us by social institutions (...), and there is some writing that stems from our own needs, interests, and purposes, in which we are free to adopt our own content and styles.*
They identify themselves with ‘critical educators’, who question the difference in status between different types of language; they quote Street’s term ‘the pedagogization of literacy’; and they introduce the expression ‘schooled literacy’ as ‘the means by which people are assessed and gain access to jobs and qualifications’ (ibid.:198).

The students who form the subjects of the present study spoke a great deal in their interviews about their struggles with literacy in education: the literacy practices promoted and modelled by their schools and Universities. Street (1994:140) points out that ‘literacy practices are constitutive of identity and of personhood’, proposing that different identities may be associated with different literacy practices. Benson et al. (1994), in a case study of three students, compare the subjects’ previous uses of writing with their experiences of learning to write in the academic community. This work supports the view of literacy as a social practice; the students were already ‘literate’ when they arrived at University, but they became aware of literacies they did not possess. Like Ivanic and Moss, Hamilton et al. (1994) refer to ‘schooled literacy’, the type of practice given recognition in schools, which today is increasingly defined in terms of the acquisition of skills (DfEE 1998). Benson et al.’s students felt that they had to be initiated into membership of the academy:

One of the conditions of membership is being able to operate in the world of academic literacy. To be a member at all requires ‘qualifications’ which include being able to conform to the conventions of academic writing by adopting an impersonal formal language and substantiating all viewpoints and ideas by academic reference (Benson et al. 1994:64).

They remembered emphasis on the rules of language at their primary schools, and that the way to gain marks was ‘giving teachers what they want – neatness, correct syntax and spelling’ (ibid.:64).
2 Literacy as skills
This moves us on from the social practice view of literacy development to the skills perspective. The National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998) is heavily influenced by Goswami and Bryant (1990), whose book ‘Phonological skills and learning to read’ introduced the concepts of onset and rime. The notion of perceptual skills is not however a new one; Hughes lists auditory discrimination, visual discrimination and left/right orientation (Hughes 1972;1973;1975). Downing and Thackray (1972) add hand-eye co-ordination, visual memory and visual tracking; all of these are held by proponents of the skills perspective as pre-requisites for success in learning to read.

More recent work has focused on a more refined view of phonological awareness than ‘auditory discrimination’ - for example, awareness of individual phonemes (Lindamood, Bell et al. 1997). Writing is after all a code which represents speech sounds, or at least the fundamentals (i.e. consonant sounds, vowel sounds and vocabulary) if not the tone of voice. The Dyslexia Institute’s main teaching programme is called ‘Units of Sound’ (Bramley 2000); there is a great deal of research which proposes phonemic awareness as the key to successful literacy development (Perin 1983; Iversen and Tunmer 1993; Hatcher 1994; Snowling 1995; Demont 1996).

There are however other ways of looking at this. It may be that skills such as phonemic awareness are acquired as a result of learning to read and write (Morais, Cary et al. 1979). On the other hand, some researchers posit a difference in brain development as the reason for poor phonemic and other phonological awareness (Snowling and Nation 1997; Frith 1999).

3 The cognitive perspective
This leads us to a third perspective on literacy development: the cognitive. Children have to understand that written and printed words have meaning. Achieving this involves abstraction: it means realising not only that symbols on the page stand for speech sounds, but also that these symbols can represent sounds consistently, wherever they come in a word (and also that sometimes they behave inconsistently), and that both decoding and encoding of speech is possible (McGuinness 1998).
Hannon (2000) suggests that programmes for teaching reading which use the 'look and say' approach (for example, practising recognition of whole words by means of flash-cards) are fundamentally behaviourist, involving as they do straightforward stimulus-response bonds.

Another cognitive approach to literacy development is the 'miscue analysis' school, founded by Goodman (1969). According to this, errors in reading are indicative of the underlying strategies of the reader. This approach was adopted by Margaret Neale in her reading test, the 'Neale Analysis of Reading Ability' (Neale 1966;1989), which breaks a child’s errors down into mispronunciations, reversals, omissions, additions, substitutions and refusals. Miscue analysis is also used by Klein with adults (Klein 1993).

4 Stage theories of literacy development

A fourth perspective on literacy development is provided by stage theories. Since the work of Freud and later Erikson, some theorists of human development have held that human beings pass through definable stages of psycho-social development (Freud 1953-74; Erikson 1950). Piaget (1955) believed that the child as a learner (and hence some of the time as a literacy learner) is actively trying to make sense of what s/he discovers (such as the printed word) rather than behaving passively.

Frith (1980) applies the stage theory approach to literacy development, proposing three stages:

- The 'logographic' stage, at which children recognise words as wholes
- The 'alphabetic' stage, where parts of words are related to speech sounds
- The 'orthographic' stage, when spelling 'rules' are known and words can be fluently analysed into syllables, roots, prefixes and so on.

However, as Hannon points out:

> Literacy is essentially cultural and literacy development is therefore bound to reflect the cultural arrangements made for inducting new members of a group into the group’s literacy practices (Hannon 2000:53).
In other words, literacy development does not automatically parallel biological development (although that kind of view is still being put forward, for example by Oakhill (1993:69), who states that ‘reading ability seems to progress through a series of stages that reflect children’s developing cognitive abilities’. Nor is it necessarily a linear process (as in Erikson’s (1950) model, for example, where the ‘developmental tasks’ of each life stage build on those completed in the previous one). Goswami and Bryant (1990) hold that, rather than passing through discrete stages in reading development, children gradually get better at using the strategies they used when they started.

5 Critical language awareness
There is however a fifth perspective on literacy development, which might be described as ‘critical language awareness’ (CLA) (Fairclough 1989). This takes a social view of language: language as a means of expressing social identity. I have referred above to Street’s (1984) distinction between ‘autonomous’ and ‘ideological’ models of literacy; critical language work developed from this kind of stand-point. Lankshear (1997) sets the scene:

Notions of reading and writing as specific (cognitive) abilities or sets of skills based on an identifiable technology (...) held sway within educational theory and practice, almost to the point of having a monopoly, until the 1970s. Since then greater theoretical space has been usurped by conceptions of reading and writing which stress their inherently social character and embeddedness in larger social practices (Lankshear 1997:2) original emphasis.

Lankshear characterises a ‘whole language’ approach as ‘progressive’, and critical language approaches as ‘post-progressivist’ (op. cit.:3). Fairclough (1992a) is in agreement, pointing out that while the notion of language awareness has been seen as an important part of education, it has not to date been sufficiently critical. ‘A critical view of education and schooling, and a critical approach to language study’, says Fairclough, are ‘presuppositions of CLA’ (ibid.:7).

CLA has a dimension of consciousness-raising:

In educational settings C.L.A. aims to show learners how language positions them: how their language choices are shaped by conventions and construct their identities (Ivanic 1998:117).
This fifth perspective on literacy development, then, has a key emancipatory aspect. Writing of an HE context, Clark (1992:124) makes this explicit:

CLA should empower language users in terms of developing their awareness (knowledge) but should also help them on the way to emancipation by giving them the chance to challenge existing conventions and the right to offer alternatives in order to help shape new conventions (action). (original emphasis)

Janks and Ivanic (1992:308) relate this to Althusser’s concept of interpellation: a person may be named (or labelled) by another (i.e. appellation), but ‘interpellation occurs when we recognise the appellation, when we accept it, when we are subjugated by it’. This is a very real issue for those to whom the label dyslexic is applied. While some may seek the label (for the grants and special arrangements it potentially offers), they are often wary of the way it positions them within the University, as ‘different’ and by implication ‘of lower status’. For example, informant Robert said that the separate room used by students who were receiving extra time for exams was known as the ‘incontinence room’. Informant Jeremy was disinclined to write ‘I am a dyslexic student’ at the top of his work, as he was asked to do.
Appendix IV: neurological investigation and unifying theories

Brain anatomy

Modern technology is allowing researchers to explore the claims regarding brain function of early writers on dyslexia such as Orton, using brain scanning and imaging techniques. Paulesu et al. (1996) used positron emission tomography (PET) to observe a group of dyslexic graduates, and a control group, carrying out phonological tasks such as deciding whether two sounds rhymed or not. The control group used brain areas associated with speech production, speech perception and phonological storage in a concerted way; the dyslexic group not only did not, but failed to activate the speech repetition area at all, even though they had compensated for their dyslexia sufficiently to graduate. Their brains did not fully co-ordinate all the areas of the language and speech system. At the cognitive level, they were unable to recall whether a certain letter had been present in a previously displayed series (for which silent or ‘inner speech’ of the letter names is required) (Paulesu et al.1996). This kind of phonological deficit leads to difficulties such as poor naming speed (Denckla and Rudel 1976) and poor phoneme awareness.

Others (Hynd and Hiemenz 1997) have used magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to study such aspects as the relative symmetry between the cerebral hemispheres of dyslexic people. People with no language difficulties typically have the planum temporale of the left hemisphere larger than the right-hemisphere equivalent, as language functions are lateralised. Some dyslexic people have been found by MRI to have relatively symmetrical hemispheres.

Cellular pathways

The work of a number of researchers has been summarised by Hogben (1997), who sets out the belief that there are two parallel neural pathways from the retina to the visual cortex. The magnocellular system, known as the transient system, favours the transmission of information of low spatial but high temporal frequency; the parvocellular, or sustained, system responds more slowly. Weakness in the magnocellular system destabilises the eye fixation necessary for
reading. Stein (2000) expands this, adding that as well as a visual magnocellular system, the brain has auditory magnocellular pathways also; this concept was first suggested by Tallal (1984), and pursued by Galaburda using rats and mice (Galaburda 1999; Stein 2000). Stein suggests that dyslexia is caused by impaired development of magnocellular neurones, which are specialised for tracking visual and auditory transients; visual magnocellular weakness, Stein proposes, causes letter position confusions, leading to indistinct orthographic representations’ (i.e. uncertainty as to spelling) (ibid. page 5). Stein’s GUT (or Grand Unifying Theory) is that a genetically-caused vulnerability weakens the immune system during pregnancy, which causes poor development of the part of the brain where magnocellular pathways converge – the lateral geniculate nucleus. Furthermore, he claims that this is the reason why many dyslexic people have a history of otitis media, because that has a high auto-immune component; in fact Stein believes that there is a correlation between eczema, allergies, asthma, dyslexia, magnocellular deficiency and immunological weakness – in other words, his GUT implies that dyslexia is akin to a disease after all, in spite of his stated preference for describing it as a ‘difference’ (Stein 2000).

Convergence between models

Frith’s unifying model (Frith 1997, 1999) sets out the route from genetic factors to reading, agreeing with Stein’s proposal of a link between genetic factors, poor magnocellular functioning and visual difficulties, and also including the phonological ‘deficit’ outlined in section 2.2 above. Frith also refers to the work of Nicolson and Fawcett, who in 1989 began what became a ten-year research programme investigating the causes of dyslexia. This began by focusing on skill acquisition and automatisation (Nicolson and Fawcett 1990), moved on to a wider spectrum of cognitive and physical processes including phonology, processing speed, balance and motor skill (Nicolson and Fawcett 1994, 1995), and finally focused on the cerebellum, quoting a PET study which proved its involvement in the process by which motor tasks become automatic (Nicolson, Fawcett et al. 1999; Nicolson and Fawcett 1999). These latter studies support the hypothesis of Frith in the third elaboration of her GUT (Frith 1999).

In 1999, Frith expanded the third stage of her model by adding a component at the cognitive level, namely ‘timing/sequence deficit’ as the first result of
cerebellar abnormality, which in turn leads to phonological and motor control problems (Frith 1999:206). Using anatomical terms, Frith refers to the biological level of analysis as ‘the distal causes of dyslexia’ and then to ‘the proximal cognitive cause’ (ibid.:207), believing the latter to be a phonological deficit. This theory is widely supported (Grauberg 1986; Goswami and Bryant 1990; Iversen and Tunmer 1993; Felton 1993; Hatcher 1994; Snowling 1995; Demont 1996; Snowling, Nation et al. 1997). But Nicolson and Fawcett support the ‘timing/sequence deficit’ concept, quoting research which shows that ‘the cerebellum can ‘scaffold’ the development of a cognitive skill by using its in-built timing and error analysis machinery (Nicolson and Fawcett 1999:168). Stein (2000) adds his weight to this point of view, adding that the cerebellum consists of magnocellular neurones. The two GUTs may thus be said to converge.

It is useful to quote Frith at length, as she speaks for a considerable body of currently influential opinion in the dyslexia field and sums up its present position:

Defining dyslexia at a single level of explanation – biological, cognitive or behavioural – will always lead to paradoxes. For a full understanding of dyslexia we need to link together the three levels and consider the impact of cultural factors which can aggravate or ameliorate the condition. The consensus is emerging that dyslexia is a neuro-developmental disorder with a biological origin, which impacts on speech processing with a range of clinical manifestations. There is evidence for a genetic basis and there is evidence for a brain basis, and it is clear that the behavioural signs extend well beyond written language (Frith 1999:211).
Appendix V: IQ/attainment discrepancy theory

It is important to acknowledge that the literature on dyslexia includes much which seeks to cast doubt on the established definitions such as that of the World Federation of Neurology. Prof. Stanovich’s beliefs are perhaps most succinctly put in his 1996 article, ‘Towards a more inclusive definition of dyslexia’ (Stanovich 1996). He begins by saying, and this seems incontrovertible if one adopts a medical viewpoint, that

*a well-defined syndrome should satisfy three central criteria: it should have distinct phenotypic (performance) patterns; distinct heritability patterns; and distinct neuroanatomical characteristics* (Stanovich 1996:154).

However, on any of these three criteria, a key part of Stanovich’s case is that dyslexia equals reading/IQ discrepancy. He complains that in stating that the difficulties of dyslexic people are not attributable to low intelligence, an assumption has been made that *‘poor readers of high and low intelligence need different explanations for their reading difficulties’* (Stanovich 1996:154). He calls this ‘intellectual sleight-of-hand’, and proposes that all poor readers should be called dyslexic. Yet he is also practising sleight-of-hand, by declaring a narrow definition of dyslexia before knocking it down. Stanovich may be called an *‘anti-discrepancist’.*

It has been stated in Chapter 2 that some discrepancy between aptitude and achievement is a defining characteristic of dyslexia. By looking at word recognition and phonological coding and segmentation skills, Stanovich and others have found no difference between those said to have such aptitude and those who have not. He lists various such studies in his 1994 article entitled ‘Annotation: does dyslexia exist?’ (Stanovich 1994). However, all this proves is that intelligence appears not to be an important factor in distinguishing between the reading performance of different groups of poor readers; it muddles research into the cause of poor reading with research into the cause of dyslexia; it confuses phonological deficit as a cause of dyslexia with this area as an *indicator* of it; and it conflates inquiry into the *cause* of dyslexia with research into its *identification.* This case is persuasively put by Nicolson (1996:191). He believes:
Dyslexia is not just a difficulty in learning to read (though this is the most important educational symptom). Dyslexia is present from birth, involves neurophysiological and neuroanatomical abnormalities, and has strong genetic components.

Many adults with ‘difficulties with words’ prefer the word ‘indicator’ to ‘symptom’, which is a medical term and hence pathologising for the person concerned. It is also important to note that while learning to read is obviously a key factor for children, it looms much less large for undergraduates such as those in the present study. The Singleton report points out:

In fact, although people with dyslexia typically do have some problems with reading, the condition is much broader than this, and for students with dyslexia, reading may be the least of their troubles. (Singleton ed., 1999:25)

Singleton goes on to refer to ‘limitations in memory and anomalies in processing certain types of language-related information’, of which more below.

There is another problem with the use of the terms IQ and intelligence: what precisely do they mean? Most EPs and dyslexia researchers in effect take intelligence to mean ‘that which is measured by the Wechsler Intelligence Scales’. That is because the American psychologist David Wechsler’s tests (the first of which, for adults, was published in 1939) have been used in many parts of the world and have been seen as the standard intelligence tests for some 50 years. They claim to offer a summary measure of global ability (i.e. an intelligence quotient), in terms of both verbal and non-verbal thinking. A common assumption is that such figures amount to a measure of potential (and are therefore usable to demonstrate a discrepancy with academic performance), whereas there are in fact four problems with them: firstly, they are ‘gross measures of current cognitive functioning’ (Stanovich 1991:127); secondly, in common with all normative tests, they tell us about performance in the activities they include, on that particular day and with that particular tester; thirdly, the tests are culturally relative; and fourthly, there are other types of intelligence which they do not cover. These problems militate against conventional IQ as a measure of potential. Howard Gardner’s (1987, 1993) ‘theory of multiple intelligences’ proposes that there are seven types of intelligence, and that standard IQ tests investigate only two: what he calls ‘linguistic’ and
‘logical/mathematical’ intelligence. He suggests that the reason for this is the high status accorded by contemporary society to those abilities. Gardner adds musical intelligence, spatial (as used by architects and artists), bodily kinaesthetic (as used by athletes and dancers), interpersonal (used by politicians and teachers) and intrapersonal intelligence, the knowledge of the self. He bases this theory on his definition of an intelligence:

*An intelligence is an ability to solve a problem or to fashion a product which is valued in one or more cultural settings* (Gardner 1987:25).

Gardner’s doubts about the concept of global IQ are supported by various British findings. Congdon (1989:5) examined the Wechsler IQ tests of 160 dyslexic people; 115 of them did not reach the superior level in their total scores, but 36 recorded scores on three or more sub-tests which were equivalent to superior scores. He concluded that ‘attention should be given primarily to the nature of each subject’s profile rather than to global IQ scores’. Thomson (1982) looked at the performance of dyslexic children in the subtests of the British Ability Scales (a British equivalent of the Wechsler scales: Elliott et al. 1979). He found that they were weak at speed of information processing, immediate and delayed visual recall, recall of digits and arithmetic, but consistently above average at formal operational thinking, similarities, matrices, block design and word definitions. Miles (1996) points out that special procedures have been devised for measuring the ‘intelligence’ of deaf and blind people, because deafness and blindness does not constitute part of ‘intelligence’, but a dyslexic person may do badly in an IQ sub-test ‘not through lack of understanding but because he has difficulty in dealing with symbolic material at speed (or) because he has failed to remember the instructions’ (Miles 1996:176). Are these latter abilities essential characteristics of an ‘intelligent’ person?

To say that the nature of dyslexia is not easy to define precisely is an understatement. Nicolson (1996) points out that children with moderate learning difficulties and those in whom there is no discrepancy between IQ and reading also show phonological problems. Is IQ therefore irrelevant to the definition of dyslexia after all? One answer is ‘not entirely, but it depends on how you define it and how you use it’. Turner (1997) describes the ‘clinician’ or learning support
teacher/tutor, for whom 'there are home truths no absence of data can undermine'. He or she would hold that 'every dyslexic individual’s position can be mapped in relation to the centre of a circle – the classic dyslexic' (Turner 1997:30), although the edges of the circle are blurred. Many practitioners or working support tutors would agree with Turner when he states that 'the contrast principle is the cornerstone of the individual cognitive assessment'. But discrepancy, or what Miles refers to as 'unexpectedness', is descriptive rather than definitional. Discrepancies of various kinds indicate underachievement; they do not themselves constitute dyslexia. Frequent changes of school, long illnesses or emotional problems may contribute to underachievement (which is why initial screening interviews at many institutions, including De Montfort University, include questions about such factors). The respondents in the present study fit this description by Turner (1997:30-31):

*The compensated or remediated dyslexic continues to show clear symptomatology (poor everyday memory, deterioration of skill under stress, phonological confusions) but may no longer show literacy levels at variance with other abilities.*

As a final comment on the thorny issue of discrepancy, it is salutory to note that the three authors of McLoughlin et al. (1994) on 'Adult Dyslexia' clearly did not agree. Chapter One states that 'the focus on literacy skills and the preoccupation with discrepancy definitions are both misguided' (McLoughlin, Fitzgibbon et al. 1994:4), and adds that 'a more useful approach has been to focus on the underlying cognitive processes and describe the characteristics of dyslexic people' (ibid. page 5). Yet one sentence into Chapter Two, we read:

*Many definitions of dyslexia focus on the discrepancy between a person’s literacy skills and their apparent intelligence. Although such definitions fail to focus on the true nature of the condition, they do describe what is frequently a salient feature of dyslexia* (McLoughlin, Fitzgibbon et al. 1994:19).

In terms of discourses of dyslexia which are current in the literature and in the media, and which may have been adopted by students such as my informants: the issue of 'contrast', 'discrepancy', or at least 'unexpectedness', remains prevalent. The 'discrepancist' view has a long pedigree.
Appendix VI: The definition of dyslexia

The first formal definition of dyslexia to be drawn up by a professional body was the following:

*A disorder manifested by difficulty in learning to read despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence and socio-cultural opportunity. It depends on fundamental cognitive disabilities which are frequently of constitutional origin* (World Federation of Neurology, 1968).

This might be called an exclusionary definition. Miles (1994b:104) does not like this:

*There is (...) something very unsatisfactory about 'definition by exclusion'. It is difficult to think of any other diagnostic category either in medicine or education where membership is determined not by what signs are present but by what signs are absent.*

An exclusionary definition not only fails to clarify the concept, but implies that dyslexia cannot be identified in a person with an unconventional background; in this era of inclusivity, we have many students at University who arrived there via non-traditional routes such as Access courses. Reid Lyon (1995:5) appeals for an inclusionary definition, with *the goal of identifying and defining a specific domain of difficulty*. He believes that such a definition should be based on a theoretical framework, supported by research, based on constructs that can be measured objectively and capable of providing indications as to identification and support. (Literature on all these aspects will be discussed below.) This lengthy 'wish list' led the Orton Dyslexia Society (now the International Dyslexia Association) to draw up its four-sentence 1994 'working definition:'

*Dyslexia is one of several distinct learning disabilities. It is a specific language-based disorder of constitutional origin characterised by difficulties in single word decoding, usually reflecting insufficient phonological processing. These difficulties in single word decoding are often unexpected in relation to age and other cognitive and*
academic abilities; they are not the result of generalized developmental disability or sensory impairment. Dyslexia is manifest by variable difficulty with different forms of language, often including, in addition to problems with reading, a conspicuous problem with acquiring proficiency in writing and spelling (Orton Dyslexia Society 1994:5)

It will be seen that the first area of difficulty mentioned in this definition is reading-related, although other areas come in at the end; in 1998, the International Dyslexia Association revised its definition to refer to ‘problems in expressive or receptive, oral or written language’. However, by then the text had swelled to fifteen sentences, and had taken back in some of the exclusionary language (‘dyslexia is not the result of low intelligence’) which Reid Lyon deplores; as has been noted above, even the ‘working definition’ contains the words ‘not the result of generalised developmental disability or sensory impairment’, i.e. some degree of exclusion seems unavoidable. The increasing length of the I.D.A. text, an increase which is paralleled in the definitions of other bodies such as the Dyslexia Institute in Britain, is in part a sign of the complexity of the issues and the need to answer critics of the concept of dyslexia:

The word dyslexia is derived from the Greek "dys" (meaning poor or inadequate) and "lexis" (words or language). Dyslexia is a learning disability characterised by problems in expressive or receptive, oral or written language. Problems may emerge in reading, spelling, writing, speaking, or listening. Dyslexia is not a disease; it has no cure. Dyslexia describes a different kind of mind, often gifted and productive, that learns differently. Dyslexia is not the result of low intelligence. Intelligence is not the problem. An unexpected gap exists between learning aptitude and achievement in school. The problem is not behavioural, psychological, motivational, or social. It is not a problem of vision; people with dyslexia do not "see backward." Dyslexia results from differences in the structure and function of the brain. People with dyslexia are unique; each having individual strengths and weaknesses. Many dyslexics are creative and have unusual talent in areas such as art, athletics, architecture, graphics, electronics, mechanics, drama, music, or engineering. Dyslexics often show special talent in areas that require visual, spatial, and motor integration. Their
problems in language processing distinguish them as a group. This means that
the dyslexic has problems translating language to thought (as in listening or
reading) or thought to language (as in writing or speaking) (International
Dyslexia Association 1998).

The justification for the retention of ‘exclusionary’ language lies in the sentence
above referring to ‘an unexpected gap’ between learning aptitude and
achievement. This view is supported by Miles (1993:13), who states:

(....) the difficulties of the dyslexic person are incongruous; in other
words they are at variance with what one might expect in view of his
age and other skills which he possesses.

The following further quotations indicate a range of ways in which various individuals
and bodies have struggled with the problems of defining dyslexia in recent years. It
will be noted that the contrasts between some of these call to mind John Godfrey
Saxe’s verse entitled ‘The blind men and the elephant’ (Saxe 1963):

1. We define dyslexia as a specific difficulty in learning, constitutional in origin, in one
or more 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 (alphabetic, numerical and musical notation) although often affecting
oral language to some degree (British Dyslexia Association 1989).

2. The student with dyslexia or specific learning difficulties shows some learning skills
developed to an above average or average standard, but shows organising or
learning difficulties impairing: motor skills, organisation in laterality, information
skills, organisation in working memory, so limiting the development of curriculum
skills in some or all of: speech, reading, spelling, writing, numeracy and behaviour
(Chasty 1991).

3. A common procedure among researchers has been to equate dyslexia with
‘reading disability’ and then to make use of ‘exclusionary’ and ‘discrepancy’
criteria. Excluded are those whose poor reading is due to lack of intelligence or
lack of opportunity, along with those who have significant sensory defects or
severe problems of personal adjustment. The ‘dyslexics’ are those among the
remainder whose reading, despite adequate opportunity, is less than would be expected in view of their intelligence level (Miles 1994b:101).

4. Now if we reflect on what are the requirements for a good definition of dyslexia it would seem that two conditions in particular need to be satisfied. The first is that the outcome must be a classification which has firm foundations in research. The second is that the criteria specified must lead to the picking out of those whom practitioners know to be dyslexic – people, that is to say, who are dyslexic in the commonly accepted sense of the word (Miles 1994b:102).

5. There is (...) something very unsatisfactory about ‘definition by exclusion’. It is difficult to think of any other diagnostic category whether in medicine or education where membership is determined not by what signs are present but by what signs are absent (Miles 1994b:104)

6. .....enduring controversy in the literature, with a schism between the ‘lumpers’ (who argue that there is a single underlying cause, although it may be manifested in different ways) and the ‘splitters’ (who argue that it is better to treat dyslexia as a collection of subtypes) (Nicolson & Fawcett 1995:29).

7. While there is much variability in the behavioural signs, and presumed variability in the biological basis of dyslexia, the underlying cognitive deficit appears to be circumscribed, specific, persistent and universal (Frith 1997: 17).

8. ‘A genetically based defect of rapid signal processing is the fundamental cause of dyslexic problems’ (Stein, in Fawcett & Nicolson 1994:153).

9. Clinical experience and research suggest that the most significant and pervasive problem dyslexics experience is in dealing with tasks that place demands upon working memory. Specifically, dyslexics have a reduced capability to deal with meaningful speech sounds in working memory, i.e. the deficit appears to be located in the phonological memory store (McLoughlin et al. 1994:17).

10. Defining dyslexia at a single level of explanation: biological, cognitive or behavioural – will always lead to paradoxes. For a full understanding of dyslexia
we need to link together the three levels and consider the impact of cultural factors which can aggravate or ameliorate the condition. The consensus is emerging that dyslexia is a neuro-developmental disorder with a biological origin, which impacts on speech processing with a range of clinical manifestations. There is evidence for a genetic basis and there is evidence for a brain basis, and it is clear that the behavioural signs extend well beyond written language (Frith 1999:211).

11. Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that hinders the learning of literacy skills. This problem with managing verbal codes in memory is neurologically based and tends to run in families. Other symbolic systems, such as mathematics and musical notation, can also be affected. Dyslexia can occur at any level of intellectual ability. It can accompany, but is not a result of, lack of motivation, emotional disturbance, sensory impairment or meagre opportunities. The effects of dyslexia can be alleviated by skilled specialist teaching and committed learning. Moreover many dyslexic people have visual and spatial abilities that enable them to be successful in a wide range of careers (Dyslexia Institute 1996).

12. Dyslexia is a specific difficulty with processing language, memory and organisation. It affects the learning of one or more of: reading, writing, spelling, number work and music (British Dyslexia Association website 1998).

13. Dyslexia is a complex neurological condition that occurs in approximately 4% of the population, and which primarily affects acquisition and use of written language, memory and organisational skills. It is a legally recognised disability, and there is strong evidence that supports a genetic causation of the condition (Singleton 1999).

14. The term is used to describe a constitutional developmental pattern of learning which does not favour an easy acquisition of fluency in symbolic material (such as our own alphabetical system) (...) It is not a defect, but an individual difference in cognitive style. Its effect is to delay the power and speed of written language acquisition (Language Development Research Group, Dept of Applied Psychology, University of Aston in Birmingham, mid 1970s).
Finally, a longer extract, this time from the Arts Dyslexia Trust, which demonstrates a very different view:

There has been much interesting research on dyslexia reported over recent months. In each case the results are usually claimed to be an over-all complete "cure" or "solution" for dyslexia but dyslexia presents a huge range of variable symptoms, and although new remedial systems can, and often do, produce extremely helpful insights and benefits for many dyslexics, there are always some dyslexics for whom the particular new system does not work. All these "cures", we maintain, must be seen in context, the context of the whole human mind.

Dyslexia is not a disease, we believe, the sort of thing that can be cured with a pill or a course of treatment, like 'flu, but a whole kind of mind-set that thinks differently to the kind of mind that thinks primarily in words. It effects many faculties in varying degrees according to each individual's genetic make-up and personal experience. Of course, some of the effects make difficulties - difficulties that are very obvious in our word-dominated culture and are most painfully obvious at secondary school age. But the dyslexic mind also has its beneficial side. It often produces extra ability to think visually or, to use the jargon, has above average visual-spatial cognitive ability. That is why so many successful artists, designers, architects, engineers, computer buffs, scientists and others working in a field that requires visual-spatial thinking skills, are dyslexic. It can even be an advantage to poets and prose-writers because they too need to draw on visual and sensual awareness in order to produce their best work.

These advantages are valuable. They benefit us all. One should not, and cannot, "cure" people of dyslexia type minds, any more than one can "cure" people of a sense of humour, or an ear for music. Such characteristics can't be neatly extracted like a tooth.

Obviously, any human characteristic can be an obstacle, unpleasant or inappropriate socially, in certain circumstances. We don't expect the humorist to crack his best jokes in the middle of our wedding service. Nor do we want the musician to practice his trumpet playing at the Cenotaph during a Remembrance Day 2 minute silence. We all have to learn, and may need help to learn, how to
overcome difficult or unwelcome mental tendencies of one sort or another. People who are extremely dyslexic may desperately need help with learning to read a train timetable, for instance, or writing down an address. Such skills happen to be very necessary in our present word-oriented culture. There must be no let-up in the stalwart efforts of those organisations dedicated to providing that help. But the world is changing fast, the talents of a dyslexic cast of mind may become increasingly necessary and important as we move into a more visually based information-sharing mode. As Thomas West says in his remarkably far-sighted book "In the Mind's Eye":

"For some four hundred or five hundred years we have had our schools teaching basically the skills of the medieval clerk --- reading, writing, counting, and memorising texts. Now it seems that we might be on the verge of a new era, when we will wish to, and be required to, emphasise a very different set of skills -- those of a Renaissance man such as Leonardo da Vinci. With such a change, traits that are considered desirable today might very well be obsolete and unwanted tomorrow. In place of the qualities desired in a well-trained clerk, we might, instead, find preferable a habit of innovation in many diverse fields, the perspective of the global generalist rather than the narrowly focused specialist, and an emphasis on visual content and analysis over parallel verbal modes."

Whatever happens, when dealing with the human brain/mind, the labelling and analysis of one particular feature will only make sense when viewed in the context of the whole, and above all, when pinning down a so-called "deficit", we must be ever careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water (Alexander-Passe 2000).
Appendix VII : Brief ‘life maps’ of each informant

Arnold (American, on ‘year abroad’ programme) Age at interview: 20
Disliked school from the start.
Placed in ‘special ed’ class in first and second grade.
Suspended from school in sixth grade for failure to hand in work.
Labelled ‘learning disabled’ in seventh grade after first EP’s assessment.
Tension with parents over homework.
Bullied at school and got into fights, and confrontations with teachers.
Had regular sessions with an educational therapist.
Saw himself as defective all through compulsory education.
Did not read a book with independent enjoyment until aged 14.
Kept back a year at 14.
Parents could not understand why he cried in the evenings.
Success in athletics, art and science practicals.
Discovered ability in creative writing, through visualisation.
Learning support teacher showed him concept mapping.
Did poorly in SATs but accepted by a University which welcomed dyslexic students.
Tape recorded lectures and listened to books on tape.
Disliked linearity of academic writing.
Taught English as a second language.
Considering becoming a kindergarten teacher.
Returned to USA and graduated in Political Anthropology; currently (2001) involved in political activism for disabled people. Published an autobiographical chapter in a book about the life histories of ‘people with learning disabilities’ (Rodis 2001), in which he identified himself with ‘the disabled classes’ but proposed a re-conceptualisation of the term.

Charles Age at interview: 44
Went to a convent school at 5.
Struggled with reading, writing and multiplication tables; preferred ‘mechanical objects’ from the start.
Feigned sickness to avoid spelling tests.
Contrasted with more able cousin of the same age.
Kept back a year and passed 11 plus.
Caned several times at secondary school, for bad work.
Started truanting.
Moved to a different town at 14 and was happier at a Grammar School, but continued to believe himself to be unintelligent.
Enjoyed woodwork and began to read for pleasure, albeit slowly.
Kept back a year again.
Began to fear making mistakes and to dislike examinations.
Became aware of a contrast between his difficulties with words and ability to visualise in three dimensions. Achieved success in Art.
Failed all his O Levels, and again in re-sits.
Took a building course at a Technical College.
Became a salesman for a mechanical engineering firm.
Enrolled for part-time Building Surveying degree at age 40.
Wrote essays in pencil and his mother typed them out.
Suffered from examination phobia.
Learning support tutor suggested he might be dyslexic. Assessed for dyslexia for the first time at age 43; not keen on the label because he saw it as meaning he was defective. Graduated with a 2:2 and would have liked to start an MSc, but returned to self-employment as a surveyor. In 2001, Charles was still living with his parents at the age of 51. He said that he still found dyslexia ‘very frustrating’ in that he could not write well by hand, but had to rely on his computer. He felt that dyslexia had prevented him from fulfills his childhood dream of becoming an architect, even though he felt he had talents in terms of spatial awareness. Charles’ discourse of dyslexia seemed to have moved from ‘patient’ to ‘student’; he said he was open with people about dyslexia, and described it to them as ‘problems with spelling but an IQ of over 120’.

Jeremy  Age at interview: 19
Good at Maths and Science, so thought to be ‘lazy’ at English. Could not remember content when reading fiction, so gave it up. Achieved A Levels, but struggled with ‘wordy’ examination questions. Self-referred at University for dyslexia assessment at instigation of girlfriend. Anxious to avoid using dyslexia as an excuse for bad work. Self-conscious about inclusion of dyslexia in employment references. Graduated with a 2:1 in Biochemistry. Failed the ‘verbal analysis’ element in psychometric tests for a post with a pharmaceutical company. Offered a job by a chemical company before he graduated, as a technical advisor. Then became a salesman for the same company. Promoted to Account Manager for a large area in 2000, and bought a flat in London. Ceased to regard dyslexia as a defect or an obstacle.

Chuck   Age at interview: 34
Went to Steiner School. Assessed by a range of experts and psychologists. Said to have most of the main difficulties associated with dyslexia to a severe degree. Saw dyslexia issues as similar to those faced by the physically handicapped and victims of racial prejudice. Worked as a builder until enrolling for foundation course in mechanical and manufacturing engineering (after taking GCSEs in Maths and Physics at a Tertiary College). Unwilling to seek special examination arrangements, in order to be on equal terms with other students. He repeated the foundation year while following an additional Maths course and an Open University computing course. Unclear as to whether he completed the degree, as he moved house and did not keep in touch.

Ann   Age at interview: 21
Described herself as ‘wilful’ at Primary School. Disliked writing from the start. Invented story of books by using the illustrations. Did very well in Maths. Placed in ‘remedial’ spelling group at 11. Failed English Language and Literature GCSEs.
Mother asked for her to be assessed for dyslexia, but was refused. Chose science A Levels (at a College of Technology) because she wanted to go into medicine. Zoology teacher referred her for dyslexia screening, which was negative. Assessed by EP before A Levels and given 25% extra time. IQ 135 (but her sister’s was 145 and she still felt a failure). Enjoyed watching operations during medical foundation course. Gave up biochemistry because of the burden of learning formulae; changed to Zoology. Would have liked to be a Doctor, but believed that dyslexia would prevent her from passing the examinations. Enjoyed dissection and drawing, because it involved three-dimensional structure. Enjoyed using her computer, particularly the spell-checker, but continued to feel stupid because of her oral word-finding difficulty. Left with a 2:1 and took a PGCE in secondary science, for which she wrote a dissertation on ‘specific learning difficulties’.

Enid  Age at interview: 20
Went to 5 different primary schools in Africa, China and England. Reached China at 10 and managed Maths for the first time because of the rote learning approach. Labelled ‘lazy’ at all her schools before China. Her parents were both graduates and teachers, who tried to have her assessed. Returned to England at 13 unable to spell. Successful at Art; passed 9 GCSEs. A Level Art, English and History. Enjoyed oral discussion and choral singing. Chose Archaeology as a degree: practical history. Did not indicate dyslexia on UCAS form; still not formally assessed. Started being penalized for spelling, so referred herself for dyslexia assessment. Wrote essays out by hand four times before typing. Graduated with a 2:1 and went on to a PhD in archaeology. She wrote: ‘Finally I have the freedom to express myself through the type of writing that I am best at, no exams getting in the way. It is also visual based research. I am analyzing archaeological artifacts and this requires you to notice things rather than spend all my time reading other people’s work’. In 2001, Enid had a small child and was still working on her PhD. She did not talk about dyslexia to anyone; she felt it affected her ‘in a day-to-day way’ but not academically.

Fenella  Age at interview: 44
Mother French; moved to England when she was six and had to speak and read English for the first time. Physically frail and treated as unintelligent; felt that her parents had no academic aspirations for her. Took five O Levels; failed Maths, English language and literature but ‘sailed through’ Art and French. Gave up A Level Art and became a window-dresser. Then worked in a GPO telephone exchange. Got married; did temporary work as a telephonist via an agency, but could only manage switchboards of the type she had been trained on. Had two children; divorced and lived with the children.
Enjoyed reading to them. Did voluntary work in a school with special needs children, and took cleaning jobs.
Her friends had degrees; felt that there was 'something enormous lacking' in her life, educationally.
Went to adult literacy classes; passed English GCSE.
Then passed City & Guilds Community Care course.
Joined Access course and discussed her language difficulties with the tutor. Fellow student assumed she was dyslexic.
Screened by learning support tutor. Shocked by the expression 'specific learning difficulties'.
Graduated with a 2:1. In 2001, she was working as a dental receptionist/administrator. She was avoiding mentioning dyslexia in case she was blamed for wrongly filed papers. Fenella felt that dyslexia was 'still a major part of (her) identity' and that she still had poor self-esteem because of it, which affected her personal relationships.

Victoria  Age at interview: 49
Misbehaved in class because of her poor memory for spoken language and slow written output, but remembered her reading and spelling as good.
Teachers said she would not concentrate, although she was bright.
Did well in English, Drama, Domestic Science and Scripture.
Parents sent her to a Convent at 10 to avoid the 11 Plus.
Then went to several different secondary schools (including Convents), because her parents moved.
Passed five O Levels. Tried a short-hand and typing course and failed.
Became a nurse; passed the training with weak written tests, 'because her practical work was very good'.
Married and had five children.
Ran a successful bed and breakfast business.
Saw Susan Hampshire on television, but did not associate dyslexia with herself until she struggled with a Scottish dancing class and a friend suggested she might be dyslexic.
Friends encouraged her to go into social work, so took Access course.
Referred herself for EP's assessment.
Offered place on Diploma in social work course through APEL.
Would have liked to work in the broadcast media or music, but felt that dyslexia had 'blocked her life'.
On completion of the Diploma, Victoria found a job in the social work department at her local general hospital.

Peggy  Age at interview: 38
Started school in Edinburgh.
Frequently told she was stupid, particularly re Maths. Failed 11 Plus.
Mother married a soldier, so went to live in Germany at 12.
Went to an Army boarding school in Germany which was the equivalent of a Secondary Modern. Large classes.
Succeeded at sport, art and oral German. Passed five CSEs.
Returned to UK (England) and worked for a solicitor as a clerk.
Frequently lost files because of problems with the reference numbers.
Then worked for a demolition contractor and enjoyed co-ordinating the firm’s activities.
Became an auxiliary in a hospital; wanted a qualification, but the Maths in the entrance test for SEN training looked too difficult.
Worked as an unqualified nursing auxiliary for 15 years.
Wanting a new beginning, took an Access course as a possible ‘opening to further employment’, but realized that she could go to University.
Access tutor suggested she might be dyslexic, but declined to be screened.
Started degree in Geography, found essay writing very hard, and referred herself for dyslexia assessment.
EP explained the process well, and her personal tutor was very supportive.
Went on to take an MSc.

Lisa Age at interview: 50
Went to an independent primary school, and independent boarding secondary school after failing the 11 Plus.
Struggled with reading and spelling but did well in Art. Wanted to be an architect, but realized that A Levels would be too hard for her; also parental pressure to marry young and be a housewife.
Parents decided she should go into floristry, but take a secretarial course first.
Liked shorthand because of its logic, but did not complete the course.
After she taken floristry training in London, her parents bought her a flower shop (at age 19).
Saw Susan Hampshire talking about being dyslexic on television.
Married at 23 and had two daughters. Could not read to them.
Recognised herself in difficulties her daughter was having at school, and again when the girl was assessed for dyslexia and eye tracking problems.
Divorced at 46. Took O Levels, including English, then a Joint Matriculation examination for Universities and Polytechnics.
Enrolled for Social and Environmental Studies degree.
Referred herself for dyslexia assessment after difficulty with examinations.
Graduated with a 2:2, and obtained part-time work with a property company.
In 2001, she was directing her own property company part-time, and planning to retire at 60. She felt the degree had given her ‘a lot of confidence,’ and she was reading more than she used to. Her view of dyslexia seemed to have moved to a more ‘hemispherist’ discourse: ‘My brain is different – it’s a physiological difference, not a defect’. At school, they ‘carried on teaching me the same way, even though it wasn’t working’.

Jemima Age at interview: 20
Went to private primary school for girls. Labelled stupid and lazy. Her speech was somewhat unintelligible until she was six.
Assessed as dyslexic at 9. Wore an eye patch for reading.
Parents found her a private tutor for English.
Transferred to private secondary school; withdrawn from class for extra English.
Enjoyed cookery, textiles, biology practicals (and woodwork at home).
Started to read about biology because of her interest. Parents read with her every night, and paid for another private tutor to see her at school (using the Dyslexia Institute method).
Passed 10 GCSEs (with extra time), although the school had told her parents she would fail them all.
Moved to private dyslexia special school for sixth form. Dyslexia assessment updated.

A Level CDT and Textiles, and 'Diploma of Vocational Education' in Health Care. Keen on occupational therapy (partly because her parents were a nurse and a doctor). Moved to a ‘crammer’ at 18 and took three A Levels in year: Sociology at Work, Pure Sociology and Biology (the latter with individual teaching). Enrolled for occupational therapy degree. No classes specified, but she was told hers was ‘the equivalent of a 2:1’. Worked at Rampton for a few months, then became a locum occupational therapist from her parents’ home. Subsequently went away ‘travelling’, with the intention to be away for 20 months.

Phoebe  Age at interview: 21
Born in Tanzania. Taught by a friend of her parents until she was 7, then sent to boarding school in England. Remained at the same school for 11 years. Suffered from migraines and clashes with class teacher. School had Phoebe assessed for dyslexia at 8. Particular difficulty with Maths. Believed herself to be unintelligent. Began to read at 10. Enjoyed Classics e.g. mythology. At 15, her mother told her how being dyslexic had held her (mother) back. Did well in Lacrosse and singing in the choir. Became House Captain. Passed 9 GCSEs, but school advised her not to try A Levels. Phoebe insisted on doing them because she wanted to go to University; took Biology, Geography, Socio-biology and Classics (after an update EP’s assessment). Grades not good enough for the University she was aiming at, so went to a ‘tutorial college’ for a year and re-sat two subjects. Admitted to University to read Classics. Graduated with a 2:1 and embarked on an MA at the same University.

Alice  Age at interview: 37
Stated that both her parents and her three siblings were dyslexic. Struggled with reading and spelling at local primary school, but always felt keen to acquire knowledge and was praised for trying hard. Given extra Maths at comprehensive school. Joined drama group, but could not remember scripts. Passed four CSEs, and O Level English at the third attempt. Tried to take four O Levels and three A Levels in sixth form. Abandoned that and took Business Studies at an FE college; completed OND and HND, including personnel work, with many hours of study. Interviews for personnel jobs; felt humiliated by personality and aptitude tests, particularly Maths. Took short-hand and typing course, and then Institute of Personnel Management two year part-time course. Trying to prove that she was not stupid. Avoided relationships with men because of her poor self-esteem. Became a company personnel manager at 27, but the strain caused her to have a nervous breakdown. After a period in hospital, took City & Guilds 730 followed by a Cert Ed in adult education. Interviewed for an MA in adult education, the course leader suggested that she see an EP for dyslexia assessment. Took what she called an ‘extra year’ to complete her MA dissertation, which ‘only missed a distinction by a fraction’.
Married a dyslexic man and became a freelance personnel and training consultant. She also enrolled on a creative writing course.

**Susan** Age at interview: 45
Described her mother as ‘practically illiterate’.
Oldest of three children, she was ‘weedy and very little’.
Roman Catholic primary school with many nuns on the staff.
Extra reading lessons in the cloakroom – felt ‘different’.
Felt that her parents were not worried about her difficulties at school because she was a girl.
Strong visual memories of her schooldays.
Failed the 11 Plus, although by then she was enjoying reading and wanted to be a writer.
Went to a girls’ secondary modern school; emphasis on ‘house crafts’, but enjoyed algebra and reading Buchan and Dickens.
Passed 6 CSEs. Careers teacher recommended millinery, but Susan opted for gardening and worked in a nursery.
Then became a key punch operator for several years, and tried O Levels at evening classes and failed.
Married at 19 and had two daughters. Took book-keeping and typing classes.
Worked as a secretary at her daughter’s school, but resigned because of her poor spelling. Went to adult literacy class. Passed GCSE English Language at age 38, then English Literature.
Divorced. Tried A Level English but could not cope. Took several more GCSEs, then a pre-Access course at the same College. Expected to be turned down for the Access course, but completed it, and was accepted for a degree in Social Psychology.
Referred herself to Learning Support at the start of her degree course.
EP’s assessment, Access Centre assessment and DSA.
Outcome of degree: 2:1. Immediately began training as a psychiatric nurse, following which she became a staff nurse at a psychogeriatric unit.
In 2001, Susan was working in a mental health day centre. She was open about dyslexia because it was ‘not a problem any more’. Her view of dyslexia had changed, in that it was ‘not the end of the world’. She was taking minutes in work meetings, but felt that her overall self-esteem was still not very good

**Sally** Age at interview: 19
Brought up in Canada. Taught entirely in French when she started school; did not speak, so moved to English instruction.
Younger brother identified as dyslexic, so Sally was also assessed at age 8 or 9.
Best school activity was ice hockey.
Moved to UK at 12 and went to a convent school. Read her first ‘thick book’ at age 13. R.E. teacher used colourful diagrams, which Sally adopted as her own method.
Moved to two different state schools; second one had ‘special dyslexia teachers’. Passed 8 GCSEs without extra time. Wanted to be a vet, but thought she was not good enough at science.
A Level Maths, Economics and History (with extra time, after being taken to Aston University for an updated dyslexia assessment).
Advised not to state dyslexia on UCAS form.
Admitted for degree in Accounting in Computer Science, but changed to Business Economics.
Graduated with a 3rd having ‘really messed up’ one of the final papers. Began work at a stable, with the hope of one day becoming a horse breeder.

**Harry** Age at interview: 27
Brought up in Sheffield. Parents had done no post-compulsory education. Happy at school; enjoyed Maths and sport, but English difficult. ‘Drifted’ on to A Level Maths, Physics, Chemistry and General Studies. Left with two Cs and two Ds and became an accountant. Seconded for a foundation degree course in accountancy. Failed the examinations in spite of repeated attempts. At time of interview, had read only two books. Decided to abandon accountancy and take a degree in Economics. Work returned with a lot of red ink, but grades average. During his first year, a friend was identified as dyslexic and described the indicators; Harry began to wonder about himself. Referred himself for assessment after reading a poster on campus about dyslexia. Internal psychologist’s reported included standard deviations from the ‘norm’ which worried him, but appreciated extra time in examinations, extended library loans and computer via the DSA. Asked his housemates to check his English. Outcome of degree: 2:1.

**Gary** Age at interview: 20
Brought up in Sheffield. Stayed with the same primary school teacher for several years. Referred by her for dyslexia assessment at age 7. Given intensive extra teaching hours. Did not read for pleasure until he was 17. ETH continued at secondary school, but he began to dislike worksheets, the extra work and frequent testing being dyslexic involved him in, and the fact that much of the curriculum was ‘taught on paper’. Re-assessed before GCSEs and given extra time. Did well in sciences and Maths; passed all the 9 he took. A Level Maths, Physics and Computing. Wanted to do them without help from learning support staff. Disliked the whole experience, but was determined to go to University. Grades were not very good (apart from Computing) but offered a place at University; he believed that his being dyslexic caused the University to be flexible. Enrolled for Computer Science.

**Alison** Age at interview: 20
Disliked school from the start, particularly spelling. Parents took her and her younger sister to a private tutor. Began to enjoy Maths and practical activities, but nothing involving spelling. Received ‘special needs’ spelling support at secondary school, but moved to another town after one year. Not identified as needing extra help until fourth year. Given more spelling rule work. Teacher whose daughter had been identified as dyslexic ‘noticed the signs’ in Alison. Assessed by EP Passed 5 GCSEs with extra time. Undertook a re-sit year, in order to be admitted to a sixth form which demanded ‘5 Cs and above’.

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Enrolled for A Level History (partly because a teacher had advised her not to), Art with Art History and Computing. Anxious about coping with the work, but her parents were keen for her to go to University. Passed them all, with low grades. Enrolled for degree in Computing.

Charlotte  Age at interview: 21
Attended a small village primary school until 10. Her parents separated during that period, but she recalled no problems at school, except that she was 'never a great reader'. Dreaded reading aloud at secondary school, but shone at Drama and Art. Good relationships with teachers generally. Took GCSE French and German; enjoyed the 'pictorial' teaching style. Deputy Head told her she would never get into University. Parents found her a private tutor for Maths. Then BTEC National Diploma in Business and Finance. Started A Level French as well, but dropped out. Assaulted by a man at age 17. This changed her career plan from business to joining the Police or going into social work. Looked for degree courses in Social Policy. Difficult interview at Spenceton, but accepted. Suffered from eczema in first semester. Written work given low grades. Course administrator suggested she might be dyslexic. Referred herself for assessment. Appreciated support from two dyslexic women in the learning support unit. Graduated with a 2:2. Worked in the student union shop, and later at the Rural Community Council in the county town where she lived.

Bruce  Age at interview: 24
Went to a small primary school in Scotland. Given speech therapy. Moved to Hong Kong from ages 6 to 8. On return to Scotland, given 'remedial' spelling and handwriting sessions at school. Excelled in Art and Sciences at secondary school, but always showed a contrast between his oral ability and written work. Assessed by EP at 16 and given extra time in examinations. Became interested in psychology through this and his sister's work as a psychiatric nurse. Took first degree in Psychology; course included some Biology and Chemistry. Chose an increasing number of biology options, and became focused on parasitology. Referred himself for re-assessment for dyslexia in final year and received extra time for his finals. Accepted for a full-time PhD in parasitology. Graduated and remained at the research institute.

Will  Age at interview: 18
Went to a small primary school in Wales. Liked Maths, but struggled with spelling and writing. Labelled as lazy. Mother pressed for him to be assessed for dyslexia. Seen by EP, but not identified. Mother pressed again at secondary school; identified at 15. Joined a private support group for dyslexic students. Had to take French and Welsh examinations. GCSEs all C and above except these and English. Moved on to Maths, Physics and Chemistry A Level. Grades B, D and E. Admitted to Burtonforth to study Geology after some negotiation. Obtained a powerful PC via the DSA.
Made friends with international students because ‘they’re learning the language’. Had extra time for examinations. Graduated with a 2:2 and decided to ‘travel’.

Eliza  
Age at interview: 22
Canadian. Enjoyed kindergarten, but struggled at school as soon as reading and writing began. Teachers expressed concern about the contrast between her ‘brightness’ and her reading/writing. Taken by parents for a physical check-up. Developed school phobia. Taken to psychologist by parents and identified as dyslexic. Private tutor employed, every week for about 3 years. Moved to a special school for dyslexic children for 2 years. Accepted by a mainstream boarding school at age 15; met two other dyslexic students there. Enjoyed singing, drama and pottery. Failed preliminary SATs. Predicted grade point average very low, so did not apply to University. Enrolled for a cookery course in the UK. Then found that her grades were good, so applied for Hotel Management degrees (also in UK, because of belief that British Universities were better for dyslexic students). Graduated in Hotel and Catering Management and obtained a job in London.

Rachel  
Age at interview: 20
Good at Maths at primary school (in Lancashire), but struggled with reading and spelling. Did well at sport. Father was dyslexic; Rachel thought that they were both unintelligent. At secondary school, did well at public speaking competitions. Also good at Sciences; began to think she was intelligent after all. Dyslexia suggested by a teacher in her fourth year, but not assessed. Passed six GCSEs. Interested in nursing, but went to a sixth form college to do BTEC Science. Teacher there referred her to an EP. Identified as dyslexic at 16. Did work experience at a hospital and liked the role of the occupational therapist. Applied to University Occupational Therapy course.

Stephen  
Age at interview: 22
Started life in Buckinghamshire, but lived in Australia for a year when he was 7. Given extra reading and writing lessons in Australia. On return to UK, taken to Dyslexia Institute for assessment. Received individual support there for three years. Sent to a small private secondary school. Passed several GCSEs with no extra time. Took Maths, Physics and Geography A Levels at the local Grammar School. Put ‘on report’ for lack of effort. Parents found him a Maths tutor. Re-assessed by the DI and had extra time for A Level examinations. Applied to Universities for Engineering because it was his father’s subject. Ticked dyslexia box on UCAS form. Admitted to foundation year in Civil Engineering, but struggled with the Maths. Transferred to Geology. Socially withdrawn. Graduated with a 2:1. After 6 months on a research project investigating windmills in Germany, he took an MRes course at a University in London. He also volunteered to take part in dyslexia research at the Institute of Neurology, which involved having his brain scanned. In 1999, Stephen was working for the Environment Agency in Reading and taking a computer programming course in his spare time. By 2001, he had taken on a peripatetic role as a ‘stack emission
analyst'. He had become somewhat less of a 'loner,' and said he no longer thought about being dyslexic.

**Adrian**  
Age at interview: 25  
Went to several different primary schools in London and Essex.  
Placed in special classes. Unstable home life after his mother left his father and struggled to support her two sons.  
Passed several CSEs. Enrolled for A Level Biology and History, but failed them.  
Worked as a computer technician. Tried an ONC course in computing.  
Married; son born.  
Enrolled at Belleville for a foundation course in electrical engineering.  
Referred himself to learning support unit, and was assessed by an EP.  
At time of interview, was taking a ‘year out’ doing telephone sales in the day and self-employed computer construction in the evenings.

**Betty**  
Age at interview: 49  
Went to a ‘pretty strict’ Church of England girls’ primary school in North London.  
Given extra reading with the Headteacher.  
Failed the 11 plus. Moved to Welwyn Garden City and went to a mixed secondary modern school there. Left school at 15 with no examination passes. Worked for a pharmaceutical company which offered her day release for a shorthand and typing course.  
After 3 years, wanted to do something more rewarding and sat entrance test for nursing training. Became an SRN.  
Married during the training and had a child. Eventually worked as a nurse after the children were older. Went to local college to take GCSEs. Then Open University short courses in sociology and psychology.  
Daughters assessed for dyslexia; recognized her own processes in the reports.  
Had herself assessed by the same (DI) EP.  
Enrolled for DipHE in Midwifery, but found it too hard. At time of interview, she was on a DipHE in Community Care, Health Visiting strand.

**Robert**  
Age at interview: 31  
Did not read ‘properly’ until aged 8.  
Socially successful and good at sport all through his school career.  
Believed himself to be unintelligent, but placed in top bands at high school ‘through verbal ability’.  
Told not to attend French and Maths classes in fourth year.  
Reports called him ‘exceptionally lazy’.  
Failed all CSEs except English. Could not take Technical Drawing or Art because of the school’s time-tabling policy.  
Went to art college and took City & Guilds photography.  
Worked for an architect’s practice as a technician, seconded for BTEC in Building Studies. Interested in related law and regulations.  
Dropped out of the course because of the Maths and Physics elements, but moved to another similar job and pretended he had passed it.  
Discovered he had a talent for painting architectural perspectives, so became a free-lance specialising in these.  
Tired of chasing creditors. Decided to pursue a Law degree.  
Enrolled on Access course. Tutor suggested seeking a dyslexia assessment via his GP. GP said he could not be dyslexic. Tutor told him more about indicators of dyslexia, and said he have extra time in examinations if identified.
Parents paid for him to be assessed. Report was full of jargon which he could not understand.
Contacted University to confirm that he would be admitted to Law as a dyslexic.
Obtained a laptop and voice recognition software via the DSA.
Graduated with a 2:2. Worked for British Aerospace’s building design division.
Then enrolled for a Bar Vocational Course and became a barrister.

Ron  Age at interview: 41
Found primary school frustrating. Given extra lessons in reading.
Very successful at sport all through his school career, but became a ‘deviant’ at secondary school (having failed the 11 Plus) – tried to avoid all written work.
Passed 7 CSEs and one O Level (Science).
Became an electrical apprentice with day-release training. Good at visualizing wiring diagrams.
Worked as an electrician for 13 years, moving on to being a service engineer (which involved further training).
Joined St John Ambulance ‘as a hobby’.
Took City & Guilds 730 course (in adult teaching), with the aim of becoming a first aid trainer at work. Met a dyslexic student.
Studying learning styles made him aware of his own.
Inquired about nursing training; worked for GCSEs at evening classes for two years in order to do this.
Struggled with essay-writing and referred himself for dyslexia assessment; given extra time for GCSE examinations.
Enrolled for an Access course. Given weekly learning support tutorial.
Admitted to degree course in Adult Nursing.

Mel  Age at interview: 32
Went to a small private day school in Staffordshire.
Reports mentioned paying attention and copying from boards.
Read a magazine article about dyslexia when she was 9 and identified herself with it. Reading was not a problem; enjoyed Arthur Ransome and the like.
Transferred to a Roman Catholic secondary school.
Took English and History A Levels there, and Geography at a local college.
History teacher suggested she might be dyslexic.
Began to doubt her own intelligence, so took the ‘Mensa’ entrance test and passed. Decided she probably was dyslexic, and went for assessment to the University of Aston.
Passed English and History A levels without extra time.
Went to London for a City & Guilds computing course.
Looked for a ‘practical’ higher level computing course; took HND in computer studies over two years. Also tried British Computer Society examinations, but only passed one paper out of three.
Went to the USA to work for a year as a programmer.
Worked for an engineering company back in the UK for three years, meanwhile taking GCSE Psychology.
Enrolled for degree in Educational Studies and Intelligent Systems, with the aim of working in adult dyslexia support.
Following this, Mel did some part-time and sessional learning support at Axbridge University, supplementing this with contract programming. She also took part in dyslexia research by taking evening primrose oil capsules.
Patrick  Age at interview: 25
Had a private tutor for six years, up to O Levels.
Enjoyed art and craft at primary school; also singing, and history radio
programmes.
Given extra English at secondary school.
Made friends with ‘the undesirables’.
Passed four O Levels and some CSEs.
Moved to a sixth form college and enrolled for O Level English resit, OND in
computer studies and A Level computer science. Given more extra English
lessons.
English teacher suggested he might be dyslexic.
Passed HND in computer programming.
Enrolled for degree in Business Information Management, but disliked economics
and statistics and struggled with essay writing, so transferred to Computer
Studies. Lecturer advised him to seek dyslexia assessment. Hoped this would
lead to a viva after his finals, but it did not, although he disputed his examination
marks and his final project.
Left with a 2:1 and enrolled for an MSc in Data Engineering.

Lance  Age at interview: 24
Brought up in Liverpool.
Bullied for his stammer and accent at primary school.
Assessed for dyslexia at age 10 and saw a private tutor for two years.
Placed in high sets for most subjects at comprehensive school, but taken out of
French and placed in a remedial English group.
Passed four GCSEs but failed English several times.
Took A Levels; failed Maths and Physics, but passed Economics and General
Studies.
Enrolled for an HND in manufacturing management; passed minimally. Was
involved in the student union as a ‘student affairs officer’. Decided that he liked
Set up a student Dyslexia Society.
Planned to take a PGCE and try to become a learning support teacher.

Aarti  Age at interview: 22
From a British Asian family. Second language was Punjabi.
Brought up in London. Described her primary school as ‘a complete nightmare
from beginning to end’, partly because there were hardly any other Asian
children. Enjoyed secondary school because it was more racially mixed. Passed all
her GCSEs with grades A to C, but believed this was the result of her hard work,
not the school’s input.
Moved to a sixth form college for A Level Law, Economics-and Maths. Failed them
all. Obtained past papers and prepared draft answers. Passed re-sits.
Angered by suggestions that her difficulties with English were caused by its being
her second language, because it was her first language.
Went to University to take Media Studies and Drama. Spent the first year thinking
that she was not intelligent enough to be there. New head of year suggested that
she be assessed for dyslexia.
Obtained the DSA and felt that the computer was a great help, but still angry
about the level of dyslexia awareness at her University.
Appendix VIII : An unedited letter from informant Lisa

Dear David

Thanks for the green paper. What a long script! Suppose it is because I’m so old. I was surprised by the number of repeats too. It was difficult to decide how much to edit and so I decided as little as possible. To address your requests:

a) All the terms and I have left because I felt it was more natural and I didn’t want to turn it into a play. If you wish to do all the obvious deletions I am happy for you to do so.

b) New thoughts and extras are added to the script, you could put them in as footnotes?

c) Reading it produced several feelings:
   1. pleasant memories of our meeting, you are the first person to take an interest in a problem I have buried for a lifetime. I don’t mean to demean _____, who does wonderful work, or Dr _____, but they were a means to an end rather than a personal interest.
   2. you made me aware, for the first time, what a lonely childhood I had. This still seems ridiculous because I had a happy and fortunate upbringing, but now I realize I had a secret that I was never able to share. (That’s just brought tears to my eyes and I want to cry).
   3. I can’t believe no one ever asked me what I’d like to do, also that I never stood up and said “Well actually I’d like to...... eg. go to art college” This experience (with you) has made me realize this; I really was a little lamb.
   4. I wonder if the children of today are getting the help I never had, I suspect only a few. Are we wasting a lot of potential talent? Not to mention the tru-or-mer of not fulfilling one’s potential. (Sorry, the spell check can’t help; ‘cos you understand my plight I haven’t changed the word as I would normally - coping strategy.) There’s no self-esteem if you don’t feel fulfilled.

As far as my own case is concerned I feel that only the surface has been scratched, eg. Dr _____ only tested single words, this does not measure the ability to read a page of words which I find much more difficult. I feel there is a lot more to discover, whether or not I will I don’t know. At present I just want a rest/change, but hope to pick up in a year or two, especially with all the technical aids you talked of. I did an adult reading teaching course (City & Guilds), pre uni, to do voluntary work helping non-readers, (no one there knew I was dyslexic!) perhaps I could do something more specialized to help dyslexics.
I have enclosed some copies of documents that may be relevant, including _____’s report because I think I have the same problem, and would be happy for you to use same if required.

Finally but most importantly - GOOD LUCK for your preliminary paper. It will be difficult to convey the problem to those who have not experienced it. It’s like divorce, until it happens to you, one can’t understand; I think you’re the exception.

Thank you for what you have done for, you’ve helped a lot.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa ________
Appendix IX: Record form and interview schedule used in the study

INTERVIEW RECORD

Date of interview	 Batch	 Number
Place

Name

Address

Phone

Age

Ethnicity

Course

University

Academic background

Other notes (appearance, behaviour)

Report/s seen (y/n)
Copies obtained

Date of transcription
Preferred font/colour
Disk required (y/n)
Date sent
Reply date
# INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where brought up</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Primary school memories:**
- Teachers
- Parents
- Other children
- Best subjects
- Worst subjects
- Dyslexia assessment
- Learning support
- Self-esteem
- Any explanation of dyslexia offered

**Secondary school memories (as above plus):**
- Exams
- Cognitive style
- Personal organization
- Oral ability
- What to do next

**FE experiences**

**University:**
- Choice of subject
- Approach to admission
- Admission interview
- Teaching & Learning approach of University
- Relationships with tutors
- Dyslexia assessment
- Learning support
- Exam arrangements
- Academic assessment experiences
- Other dyslexic students
- Self-esteem
- Relationships with peers
- Work placements
- References
-Career aspirations
- Suggestions for the University re dyslexia

**Health aspects**
- visual problems
- hearing problems
- counselling
Appendix X : Descriptions of the Universities where informants were studying

Spenceton

Spenceton was founded in the early 1960s. It has a campus which was designed by a famous architect and built on a virgin site, and from the start was structured by schools of study rather than by faculty. For many years it was a highly fashionable place to study.

At the time when the data for the present study were generated, Spenceton had just been ranked 10th nationally in the Research Assessment Exercise. It had approximately 8,000 students with a strong percentage of internationals, and continued to present its courses as innovative and cross-disciplinary, even though recruitment to some was falling.

Academic writing was portrayed as a skill. A leaflet inviting students to offer their services (in return for a small fee) as ‘mentors’ for their peers asked for applications from second-year, third-year and graduate students to undertake ‘Instruction of peers, to help them develop their writing skills’. A four-session training course was offered, to prepare mentors for this role. During the academic year 1995/96, 65 students had been supported in this way. The annual report of the scheme stated that:

The scheme has attracted students known to have Specific Learning Difficulties (dyslexia), and this is an important development as regards the continuing recognition and integration of students with special needs within the ordinary culture of the University.

In spite of the latter statement, in another way Spenceton was very clear about the medical model of dyslexia it presented to students (see section 8.2.4). The Learning Support Unit was situated within the Counselling and Psychotherapy department, which was housed in the Health Centre.
Belleville

Belleville is a post-1992 ‘new University’. At the time when the data for the present study were generated, it had 15,000 students. Its best-known courses were in architecture, art and design, visual culture and health and community studies. Its buildings included some modern blocks in a town centre, a 1960s former college of education campus outside the town, and a former college of PE in a neighbouring town.

Belleville had just commissioned one of its part-time learning support tutors to write a ‘Dyslexia Handbook’ for students (see section 8.2.4). This aimed to convey a welcoming attitude, and included an IQ/attainment discrepancy definition of dyslexia. At the time, support arrangements for dyslexic students were co-ordinated by the Welfare Service staff. Applicants declaring a disability (Belleville’s ‘access and admission statement’ used the term ‘disability and/or special need’) were invited to a pre-course meeting with someone from the Welfare Service ‘to discuss study and day-to-day requirements’.

Dyslexia was clearly grouped with disabilities by such policy. An officer called the Special Needs Coordinator managed a small team of sessional learning support tutors, who saw dyslexic students on University premises. A leaflet for staff entitled ‘Support for Dyslexic Students at Belleville University’ stated that such sessions would offer ‘specialist language support and tuition’. In addition an EP had been seconded from the LEA Psychological Services to provide dyslexia assessment, a screening day ‘for self-referred first year students to identify the extent of their dyslexia so that further action can be taken,’ and:

*Training for academic staff in the range of learning difficulties experienced by students and how those students can be helped to gain access to the curriculum and avoid failure.*

The latter statement placed the ‘problem’ firmly within the student; it also carried the sub-text that student retention might improve if staff attended such ‘training’.

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Axbridge

Axbridge is also a ‘new University,’ with former Polytechnic buildings in a city centre and a large out-of-town campus centred on a former stately home. Its Vice Chancellor claimed (at the time of the research for the present study) that it was ‘the leading new University’ and ‘one of the best places in the country to study for a degree’. The Times Good University Guide had given it first place among the new Universities because of its teaching quality.

Axbridge’s courses (grouped under Academic Schools) laid emphasis on links with industry and employability. Business and Automotive Engineering courses were prominent in this regard. Other successful courses included Modern Languages and Architecture.

27% of Axbridge’s students were ‘mature,’ and the University was ‘committed to broadening access for people from all social groups which are currently under-represented in higher education,’ as its Annual Report stated.

In terms of support for dyslexic students, Axbridge’s approach was very similar to that of Belleville. It did however offer a credit-bearing Level One module for dyslexic students, open exclusively to those had been formally identified by an EP, and covering learning styles and theory of dyslexia, as well as study approaches. Drop-in individual support was available, but a list of independent tutors was not maintained.

Axbridge was unique among HEIs at the time in having a document for staff which offered advice on teaching and learning methods beneficial to dyslexic students. Espousing an IQ/attainment discrepancy model of dyslexia, this also strongly included aspects of ‘different brain’ or ‘hemispheric’ discourse.
Burtonforth

Founded in the mid 19th century, Burtonforth was one of the first ‘civic’ Universities. At the time of the research for the present study, it had 22,000 students, working in a large group of Victorian and later buildings in an area of the city known as the University precinct. It had a large number of particularly successful Faculties and Departments, including Engineering, Medicine and related subjects, Physics, Mathematics, Music and Hispanic Studies.

Informants for the present study had been assisted in claiming the DSA by an officer known as a Welfare and Accommodation Advisor, who had just obtained the services of a self-employed learning support tutor. As stated in section 8.2.4, the University had published a booklet for students covering ‘Disabilities, Dyslexia and Special Needs’ which included a list of nine ‘symptoms’ of dyslexia.

Burtonforth was however in the process of setting up a ‘Student Services Centre’ to include a ‘Centre for Academic Practice’ which would teach study skills. This was being planned as meeting the needs of employers and the development of ‘graduate skills’. The Welfare and Accommodation Advisor, who had taken on the role of helping the dyslexic students because there had been no one else to do so, retired shortly afterwards.
Appendix XI: Letters to informants

1. Initial approach

Dear fellow student,

I am doing an independent DPhil research project at Sussex University on dyslexic students in higher education.

My aim is not to test people, or give them questionnaires, but to interview dyslexic students about their learning life histories.

I will then write about what University is like from the students’ point of view.

Would you be willing to be interviewed? I hope several of you will agree; if so, I will come and stay in _______ later this term and see people there.

You need to know these points:

- interviews will be tape recorded, but my thesis will not mention anyone’s real name
- interview material will be confidential to the extent that only I, my typist and my supervisor will see the transcripts
- you will be sent a copy of the transcript for you to check
- I will contact you again, for you to edit things or add more.

___________ has a tape of me talking about this, if you would like to hear more before you decide.

Please contact me by phone or email if you would like to take part in this project.

2. Example of a letter enclosing the transcript (these were individualized with extra paragraphs)

Dear ,

Here is the text of our interview about your learning history. I am also enclosing a copy of the tape, as you said it would help. I know this is a long task, but I hope you will find the time to go through it.

I've put (...) where I couldn’t work out what was said, and (words in brackets) where I was not sure. If you spot any places where I’ve transcribed it wrongly, please let me know.

What I would also be most grateful for, if you have time, is:

a) anything you want to change, re-word or edit in any way
b) anything new you think of as you read it or listen to it
c) how it felt to read it or hear it
d) any other comments on the process.

I am also enclosing a short blank tape, for you to record your comments if you prefer.
Many thanks for your help. Good luck with next academic year.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

3. Letter written in mid-1999 to inform them of my progress and update my record of their contact details

Dear ,

**Learning life histories of university students identified as dyslexic**

As the academic year comes towards its end, I thought it was time I let you know how my work is getting on.

I have been a lecturer at De Montfort University for 18 months now, and the time has passed very quickly. We have completed the first year of teaching on our M.A. in Dyslexia Studies, and I have been appointed Programme Leader from the autumn. Meanwhile, I have been providing learning support for lots of dyslexic students, and driving around Lincolnshire doing assessments of people on training schemes who might be dyslexic.

But my PhD work has not stopped! I have a new supervisor at Lancaster University, and last month I spent a week there on an advanced qualitative analysis course which gave me plenty of ideas. Their Professor of Women's History gave a lecture which prompted me to look through my interviews for ways in which people seemed to have accepted common images of dyslexia ("it's all to do with neurology," "it's just a difference of learning style" and so on). I have written quite a lot about that, and I am also looking through the interviews for things people said which are different from the usual or expected ideas about dyslexia.

The reason for focusing on common images of dyslexia is that I am interested in how dyslexia comes in to people's feelings about their identity, and the effect of that on coping with University life and work. I hope to finish the analysis work this year.

The papers from the conference at Dartington which I spoke at in autumn 96 only come out last November: "Dyslexia in Higher Education: Learning along the continuum," published by University of Plymouth, 1998. ISBN 1-84102-017-6.

I have also had an article (with my colleague Mary Pillai) in "Assessment Matters" (the national Journal of vocational assessment) called 'Practical approaches to dyslexia' (Issue 8, autumn 1998, published by Lifetime Careers Wiltshire Ltd). Mary and I also ran workshops last month at a conference of the Adult Dyslexia Organisation in London; we looked at inclusive learning": ways of supporting people from non-traditionally academic backgrounds who are dyslexic.

At the end of July, I am moving to Leicester. My address will be:

*********** Telephone *** ****
My home e-mail is still the same: dpollak@**********

How are you? I plan to write a Chapter called 'Where are they now?' so I would like to know how you are getting on. It is quite striking how many of the people I interviewed went on to do post-graduate degrees. Whatever you are doing, I hope you can find the time to contact me and give me a bit of news. It would be very interesting to me if you wanted to add anything to your interview about how you see dyslexia now. If I've got your e-mail address, I'm sending this electronically as well. Once again, if I have used an out-of-date address or e-mail for you, please be so kind as to give me your new one.

I hope you are having a pleasant summer.

David
Appendix XII: Interviewer’s relationships with informants

A research interview is unlike any other conversation. Superficially, it may resemble a counselling session: a ‘professional’ and a student (in the case of the present study) are seated in easy chairs, and the focus is on issues connected with the student. However, the researcher probably has a clip-board, which most counsellors do not, and s/he guides the conversation quite firmly, which again many counsellors (depending on their theoretical orientation) do not.

The interview is a conversation to the extent that the participants speak alternately, but in a spontaneous exchange both participants have equal status; in an interview, the researcher’s agenda is tacitly agreed as paramount. The extent to which the researcher allows the informant to follow her own themes is his decision, not the informant’s.

The primacy of the interviewer’s agenda resembles an employment interview; on the other hand, in a research interview the interviewee is not ostensibly trying to persuade the interviewer of anything.

The fact that most of the interviews for the present study took place at Universities where the informants were students contributed to the status of the researcher as akin to a tutor – in other words, exchanges were also unlike a normal conversation because of the participants’ unequal status. The significance of this factor varied from one interview to another, partly as a result of the informants’ age and personality. The following extract from the interview with Victoria, who was 50 and unabashed (I was 47 at the time), is an example of a relaxed relationship:

D: Yeah, and you’ve just told me all - you detailed the assignments very fluently. You told me what the subjects were, without any hesitation or -

V: That’s interesting you see, because -

D: ‘I’ll have to go and get the piece of paper, I can’t remember’.

V: - no, I can do that, but you see, it’s strange, because I’ll tell you why: I’m totally relaxed at this interview. But if I go into um a tutorial, and I’m asked a question: (claps hands).
Yeah.

That’s very interesting, that; I noticed that as I was saying it. It’s because I’m totally relaxed with you. When I’m not, it shows; there’s just a piece of concrete up here.

(There is a longer extract from Victoria’s interview in Appendix XV)

In order to facilitate them to speak freely, I was aiming to help informants to relax and feel at ease with me. I will now give some examples of interventions of mine which facilitated informants in developing their themes.

1) Statements of fact, or paraphrasing

Robert was talking about spelling:

R: It just doesn’t occur to you, no matter how many times you do it; if you’re just writing it down, it does not occur to you that it looks wrong or is wrong. Doesn’t matter how many times you do it.

D: Words just don’t look wrong to you.

R: No.

D: Because you don’t have that sort of memory. But what’s it like imagining a whole building in your mind?

R: Oh I can see it; I can walk through it and I can picture colours, and I know exactly what it’s going to look like.

D: Yes.

R: I can even see the finishes, where the lights are, and everything. No problems with that.

In Appendix XV, my second intervention in the extract from Peggy’s interview is a clear example of paraphrasing. As in counselling, this helps the client/informant to feel ‘heard’ or understood; in a counselling context, this aims to further the therapeutic process, and in research, it seeks to encourage the informant to speak increasingly openly about the area under investigation. (Furthermore, from an ethical point of view, it may make the interview rewarding for the informant as well as providing rich data for the researcher.)
2) Focus on feelings
Lisa: I had to stop reading (to her daughter, when the books became too difficult). I made her read to me instead.
D: 'Good for you to practice reading'. How did she react to that?
L: Well she did it and she tried, but she obviously wasn't enjoying it as much as if somebody read to her, so I just let it drop at that point....
D: That's a very upsetting memory for you, isn't it, still after all these years.
L: Yes. I would have liked to have been able to read to her. I was failing as a person, and I was failing to care for my daughter, and I was embarrassed that she saw it.
D: Hmm. (pause) Was there in that then, was there a sort of 'oh I must do something about this'?
L: No. I just was sad that I couldn't do what I wanted to do, and I thought 'well, that's it, I've just got to accept it'. I didn't think for a moment that I could do anything about it.

3) Focus on beliefs
Susan: I was told I wasn't dyslexic, there. So then I decided to discount that that was a problem - it was just 'thick'. But I did go on to try Geography and failed.
D: Why did you want to do those things?
S: I really really wanted to carry on learning. It sounds daft but I did, I didn't want to stop learning, just because I had left school.
D: No. So, although the school had given you this feeling that you were thick, there was a level at which you hadn't accepted it.
S: Well, I was chewed up by being called a late developer. I think they meant there was a possibility I might have got somewhere. Even though I was sort of in flat shoes and grey mac I was quite aware of the fact that I could do something with myself personally, even at that age. So I went to this literacy evening class.....
Eliza: I knew I was intelligent. My parents told me that when I was like in Grade 3 and they found out I was dyslexic.
D: Right. And you were OK about that? You didn’t think they were kind of –
E: Conning me? (laughs) No, I believed them, I think because it was a wonderful thing to believe. But I still believed that no matter how intelligent I was, I was never gonna be as good as the other students, really.

4) Insights

Alison: We got a nice sheet for this company, and how appalling their keeping track of records and serving customers was, and I got a B+ for the project. I think I could have got an A if I hadn’t run out of time.
D: Because it had the human side.
A: Yeah, it had the human side, and I enjoyed analysing what they needed.....

Alice: .... 'I think I’m dyslexic,’ and he said ‘oh don’t be ridiculous, there’s no way you can be dyslexic’.
D: ‘Look, you’ve done all these courses’.
A: (laughs) You’ve done all these courses! And I said: ‘I think I do have a problem,’ ..........

By contrast with the above, there were times when my interventions unfortunately "closed down" the informant’s theme:

Fenella: This was English Language. And the thing is, I actually got to the end of that exam. That was the major turning point for me.
D: Hmm. How old were you then?
F: I actually got to the end.
D: Yes.
F: I’m talking about a few years ago. I would have to look in my diary.....
Alice: (...) like this MA – it – I mean my parents are just so proud that I’m doing it, although –

D: What’s it called? What’s the –

Alice: MA in Education.

All of these moments, of both successful and unsuccessful interventions by me, are examples of the way in which an interview of this kind is a human encounter. I was trying not to overtly objectify my informants by taking them through a formal questionnaire or setting them tests. Although I had a list of areas which I hoped the interviews would cover, and although fundamentally the informants were there as the objects of research, nevertheless being a teacher and support tutor I wanted the interviews to be a positive experience.

Silverman (1986:167) states that "a basic sequence of actions in a recognisable interview is a series of questions and answers". Many of my interventions were indeed questions, such as "What was it like at that school?" or "Did you say you were dyslexic when you applied?" However, I often prompted the informant to return to a theme ("So you went to see your tutor...") or reflected the affective content of what she had been saying: "But you were still feeling very upset about it."

In section 5.5, I refer to the way in which at times, both I and the informant were constructing our identities in the course of the interview process. Table 6.1 sets out ways in which informants may have perceived me. In addition to being aware of those possible perceptions, I was aiming to establish a connection with each informant, not only in order to facilitate relaxed and open responses but also on a level of human warmth; part of my identity is that I am an intuitive, empathetic person. If an informant (such as Phoebe) talked about life at a girls' boarding school, I mentioned having taught at such a school. When interviewing Alice, I said that I found the content of the interviews moving, in that most informants were telling me about situations which they had found very difficult and the determination they had shown. Enid talked about the way her social life was centred on the choir she belonged to, and I told her that the same applied to me.
I was also confirming my identity as a learning support tutor, while simultaneously behaving in an ethical manner by giving informants information which they needed. On three occasions, I stopped the tape in order to tell an informant about the nature of Meares-Irlen syndrome and sources of coloured overlays to alleviate it. (This overlapped with my identity as an ‘expert’ on dyslexia.)

Although selected in order to communicate a sense of each informant, the extracts from interviews in Appendix XV provide more extended illustrations of my relationship with them. The two excerpts from 44 year-old Fenella’s interview demonstrate two points: it is possible that our exchanges were more like a normal conversation than a formal interview because we were in her kitchen, and also it will be observed that many of my interventions were of the neutral ‘hmm’ type, aiming to communicate engagement but not to interrupt. This may be contrasted with the subsequent two extracts in Appendix XV: Enid was 20, we were at her University, and I can be seen to have asked many more direct questions.

In the case of six informants (Arnold, Charles, Chuck, Peggy, Charlotte and Susan), I had been working with them as their learning support tutor. This meant that I was not a stranger; they were able to assume that I was aware of at least some of the dyslexia-related issues in their lives. Of these informants, only Chuck (my first interviewee of all) was interviewed on University premises (and then, not in a teaching room). Charles and Susan normally came to my house for their support sessions, so interviewing them there did not seem unfamiliar in terms of the setting. Similarly, I usually visited Charlotte at home for her support session; we moved from the dining room (where the table was used for studying) to the living room for the interview. Only Arnold was on unfamiliar territory; he came to my house to be interviewed, whereas we normally met at his University. As was clearly the case with all the interviews, the tape recorder was present, and this made the occasion different; in the absence of direct questions to informants about their reaction to being interviewed, any assumptions as regards their degree of relaxation are of course speculation.
Taken as a whole, Appendix XV provides a sense of the richness of the data which these interviews produced. I would like to repeat my grateful acknowledgement of the candid way in which my informants spoke to me.
Appendix XIII: Complete list of factual and interpretive nodes and examples of ways in which they were grouped

(1) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES
(1 1) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ nursery
(1 2) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary
(1 2 1) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/reading (merged with 1 3 3)
(1 2 2) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/spelling (merged with 1 3 2 1)
(1 2 3) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/writing (merged with 1 3 2 2)
(1 2 3 3) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/writing/handwriting (to 1 3 2 5)
(1 2 4) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/maths (merged with 1 3 20)
(1 2 5) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/games (merged with 1 3 22)
(1 2 6) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/art+craft, practical skills, creativity (merged with 1 3 24)
(1 2 7) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/self-esteem (merged with 1 3 17)
(1 2 8) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/teachers (merged with 1 3 5)
(1 2 9) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/parents (merged with 1 3 13)
(1 2 10) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/other children (merged with 1 3 7)
(1 2 11) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/assessment (merged with 1 3 6)
(1 2 12) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/11+
(1 2 13) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/other tests
(1 2 14) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/I T (merged with 1 3 12)
(1 2 15) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/learning support, speech and language therapy (including lack of help) (merged with 1 3 11)
(1 2 16) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/STM
(1 2 17) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/stress
(1 2 18) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/dictionary
(1 2 19) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/oral ability (merged with 1 3 14)
(1 2 20) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/best subjects (merged with 1 3 8)
(1 2 21) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/vision problems
(1 2 22) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/laziness issue (to 1 3 15)
(1 2 23) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/siblings (merged with 1 3 7)
(1 2 24) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/first difficulties
(1 2 25) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/ Primary/cognitive style (to 1 3 11)

(1 3) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary
(1 3 1) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary/study skills
(1 3 2) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary/english
(1 3 2 1) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary/english/spelling
(1 3 2 2) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary/english/composition
(1 3 2 3) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary/english/grammar
(1 3 2 4) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary/english/exams
(1 3 2 5) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary/english/handwriting
(1 3 3) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary/reading
(1 3 4) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary/exams
(1 3 4 1) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary/exams/GCSE
(1 3 4 2) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary/exams/A Level
(1 3 5) /SCHOOL EXPERIENCES/secondary/teachers
(4) /University
(4 1) /University/Entrance issues + interviews (incl. Access gen.)
(4 1 1) /University/Entrance issues + interviews /determination to go
(4 1 2) /University/Entrance issues + interviews /choice of subject
(4 2) /University/changing subject
(4 3) /University/study strategies
(4 3 1) /University/study strategies/library skills
(4 3 2) /University/study strategies/reading
(4 3 3) /University/study strategies/writing
(4 3 4) /University/study strategies/note taking
(4 3 5) /University/study strategies/spelling
(4 3 6) /University/study strategies/presentations
(4 3 7) /University/study strategies/time management
(4 4) /University/teaching, asst style
(4 4 1) /University/teaching, asst style/suggestions for Uni + exam boards
(4 4 2) /University/teaching, asst style/preferred output style
(4 5) /University/learning support
(4 6) /University/helpful staff
(4 7) /University/unhelpful staff
(4 8) /University/other dyslexics
(4 8 1) /University/other dyslexics/support groups
(4 9) /University/academic assessment
(4 9 1) /University/academic assessment/feedback on work
(4 9 2) /University/academic assessment/exams
(4 9 3) /University/academic assessment/flagging work as dyslexic
(4 10) /University/LEA (incl DSA issues)
(4 11) /University/I.T. + access centre assessment
(4 12) /University/spell-checking
(4 13) /University/self-esteem
(4 13 1) /University/self-esteem/social life
(4 13 2) /University/self-esteem/academic
(4 14) /University/plans for future
(4 15) /University/plans for future/job applications
(4 15 1) /University/job applications/work placement issues
(4 16) /University/excuse issue
(4 17) /University/dyslexia assessment (incl value of asst report)
(4 18) /University/parents
(4 19) /University/counselling
(4 20) /University/stress
(4 20 1) /University/stress/hours of work
(4 21) /University/benefits of going
(4 21 1) /University/benefits of going/enjoying course content
(4 22) /University/repeating courses or years
(4 23) /University/higher degrees

(5) Documentary evidence
(5 1) Docs/discrepancy
(5 2) Docs/pattern of difficulties
(5 3) Docs/exclusion of other factors
(5 4) Docs/neurological factors
(5 5) Docs/ ‘specific learning difficulties’
(5 6) Docs/ ‘dyslexia’
(5 7) Docs/ 'developmental dyslexia'
(5 8) Docs/other synonyms for dyslexia
(5 9) Docs/unexplained technical terms
(5 10) Docs/recommendations
(T) //Text Searches
(T 1) //Text Searches/counselling
(T 2) //Text Searches/emotion
(T 3) //Text Searches/feeling
(T 4) //Text Searches/angry
(T 5) //Text Searches/depressed
(T 6) //Text Searches/frustrated
(T 7) //Text Searches/lazy
(T 8) //Text Searches/thick
(T 9) //Text Searches/stupid
(T 10) //Text Searches/support
(T 11) //Text Searches/French
(T 12) //Text Searches/German
(T 13) //Text Searches/myself
(T 14) //Text Searches/write, writer, writes, written, writing
(T 15) //Text Searches/wrote
(T 16) //Text Searches/old
(T 17) //Text Searches/excuse
(T 18) //Text Searches/intelligent
(T 19) //Text Searches/self
(T 20) //Text Searches/help
(T 21) //Text Searches/on my own
(T 22) //Text Searches/by myself
(T 23) //Text Searches/independent
(T 24) //Text Searches/self-sufficient
(T 25) //Text Searches/bright
(T 26) //Text Searches/bullied
(T 27) //Text Searches/problem
(T 28) //Text Searches/difficulty
(T 29) //Text Searches/difficulties
(T 30) //Text Searches/unhappy
(T 31) //Text Searches/sad
(T 32) //Text Searches/pleased
(T 33) //Text Searches/glad
(T 34) //Text Searches/really me
(T 35) //Text Searches/disability
(T 36) //Text Searches/disabled
(T 37) //Text Searches/fight
(T 38) //Text Searches/struggle
(T 39) //Text Searches/battle
(T 40) //Text Searches/strain

Overleaf: an example of a concept map using 'MindManager'.
Factors in University self-esteem

- reading aloud
- note-taking
- memory for discussion
- oral self-expression
- aural comprehension

- asking for help
- confronting
- 'are you better yet?'
- feedback on work
- support groups
- ridicule
- suggesting dyslexia
- individually helpful
- helping others
- pleasure of non-academic activities

- tutors
- relationships

- public behaviour

- private study
- researching a topic
- essay planning
- personal organisation

- around the campus
- navigation
- memory for names
- library searching
Appendix XIV : Comparison between electronic and manual coding of one interview

Between the acceptance of a research proposal and generation of the first data, time inevitably passes. It passes again between the first data and the last, and between the start and finish of analysis. However, the time factor comes into most prominence with regard to the total time a study takes for a part-time researcher.

The relevance of these factors for coding lies in the discovery of new literature. As a lecturer in dyslexia studies, I was keeping abreast of the field as well as working on my research project. This thesis indicates the way in which my thinking, already sceptical about neurological reductionism, developed from a somewhat essentialist discourse towards a sympathy for a social constructionist position.

The primary reason for what I call manual coding (writing on a print-out rather than using the version imported into NUD.IST) was to cross-check the consistency of my electronic coding. However, this (and frequent re-examinations of the electronic coding of all the data) also importantly allowed for the inclusion of concepts derived from literature. In this Appendix, I will use the example of the interview with Robert to illustrate this.

An immediate lesson resulting from re-visiting my coding of the interview with Robert was that I had tended to concentrate on factual codes. For example, on the very first page of the transcript he said:

\textit{I think what prompted me the most to make a huge effort to discover how to read was that I was the only person who couldn't.}

Originally, I coded this simply as "school experiences/ primary/ reading". Next, I had added a node called "school experiences/ primary/ self-esteem". When re-coding the interview (on a fresh paper copy of the text), I marked this passage as both 'struggle' and 'self-image' (Edwards 1994; Riddick 1996).

When Robert made a further comment about his inability to do "something everybody else could," I asked how his teachers had treated him. He replied:
They just let me alone really; just let me get on with it. Having originally coded this as "school experiences/ primary/ teachers," I added "lack of help" under learning support (Osmond 1993).

Robert went on to talk about sitting alone and trying to read, referring to "having terrible problems trying to figure it out." Again, I originally coded this passage simply as "primary/ reading." On subsequent examination, I marked it as "own effort" and "struggle." (This is not intended to imply that a given passage can be coded at only one node.) Now in order to look for common patterns in the life histories of learners identified as dyslexic, factual categories such as "reading" and "teachers" are undoubtedly required, albeit subdivided (i.e. teachers might be "supportive/ unsupportive" or "aware/ unaware of dyslexia" and so on).

However, the overall question of the effect being dyslexic has on the identities of higher education students calls for the kind of coding I was carrying out in the second 'sweep', i.e. looking at the affective aspects from the point of view of the informant (Rawson 1988; Peelo 1994; Miles and Varma 1995).

A second category of coding which I added on re-examination of the interview with Robert was indeed concerned with his identification as a dyslexic person. He had been talking about his parents trying to help him to learn to read; when I asked him whether he had been aware of them being anxious about him, he said:

Yeah, I think there was a bit of anxiety, but I mean I wasn't assessed as dyslexic until two years ago. So I mean I wasn't aware that there was a problem.

At first, I coded this as "primary/ parents" and "dyslexia/ assessment generally, including labelling issue and need for early detection". The latter was soon rejected as containing too many issues for one code (Richards and Richards 1994b). The topic of being labelled as dyslexic, as a question of individual self-image, is quite separate from the possible need for early detection, which is not only a matter of education policy (and not germane to my research questions) but also shows the influence of earlier literature. (The B.D.A. had a booklet entitled 'Early help, better future' which is now out of print.)

Having studied literature which refers to dyslexia assessment as 'identification' rather than 'diagnosis' (Singleton ed. 1999:81), my new coding for the passage
above was "not identified." In terms of consistency, this same category provides an example of my manual re-coding repeating the original. On the page after the above quotation, Richard said:

If this had been picked up years ago, you know, my whole life would have been shaped differently.

Having first coded this at the node defined above ("assessment generally"), I again marked it as "not identified" when re-examining the interview.

Moving on to a further category of new code which I added manually brings me back to the need for sub-division under "teachers". Uniquely within this group of informants, Robert (when in his 4th year at secondary school) had been told by his French and Maths teachers not to attend their classes. Having originally coded this simply as "school experiences/ secondary/ teachers," I added "rejection by teachers."

My manual (and repeated electronic) coding frequently consisted of a refinement of the original in that way. Another example came where Robert was talking about his difficulties with vowel sounds when trying to spell phonetically. Originally, I coded this passage simply as "University/ spelling." Manually, I first noted "spelling/ phonology," and shortly afterwards "note-taking" and "handwriting" (Gilroy and Miles 1996) and "description of own main difficulties" (Riddick et al. 1997). The question of phonology is of interest from a cognitive research point of view as the "phonological core deficit model" is currently one of the leading models of dyslexia (Frith 1997). However, Robert was not at that point expressing a belief in that discourse of dyslexia.

Richard spoke of having worn sunglasses in order to avoid headaches when using an architectural drawing board, describing this as "scoptic (sic) sensitivity". I coded this as "dyslexia/ glasses, overlays, vis. gen." On returning to the text, I marked it as "Meares-Irlen syndrome," subsequent reading having introduced me to this term (which acknowledges the contribution of Olive Meares to research in the field) (Meares 1980; Evans 1997).

That same passage led me to a completely new coding category. Robert said:

What's normal is what you're used to
and

(....) then someone says to you 'well words don't move around like that on the page, they're static'.

Having originally coded this simply as "vis. gen." as above, I now added the category "thought everyone is the same." I later abbreviated this to TEITS because I came to use it many times, as this belief is quite common among dyslexic people.

Another type of new coding, which the manual exercise led me to add in several places, concerned the relationship between Robert and me. There were three aspects to this. Firstly, I noted points where I had departed from my interview schedule to give him information. This first occurred after Robert had talked about his use of three-dimensional visualisation; I told him about Thomas West's book "In the mind's eye" (not as a suggestion that he might read it — he made it clear that he avoided reading -, but in order to show him that he was not alone). Later, I explained briefly about the sub-tests in the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, after he complained that these had never been clarified for him. From an ethical standpoint, there may legitimately be points at which the informant's needs take priority over the researcher's agenda (Yow 1994; Mason 1996). This led to the code "non-educational points/relationship with me," which I then added to the passage referred to above where Robert spoke of visual disturbance, because I gave him some information about the behaviour of the eyes during reading, and recommended him to seek an assessment by a specialist optometrist.

Secondly, when Robert spoke about his work being graded, I mentioned the similar experience I was currently having on a postgraduate diploma in counselling course; manually, I added the sub-section "me as an equal" to "non-educational points/relationship with me". The effect of this intervention on the balance between us was immediately evident, when Robert said:

_English law is common law, which is based on cases......_

I marked the passage which followed "him teaching me," another sub-section of the same code. In terms of interview dialogue analysis, this is a point where there is more 'symmetry of interactional rights' (Silverman 1986:167).
A third kind of new code which I added manually referred to possible future contact with Robert. Early on, he remarked that he would like to look for his school reports for French and Maths, to see whether the teachers (mentioned above) who asked him not to come to their classes had nevertheless written reports on him. I marked this "follow up." Similarly, when talking towards the end of the interview about his degree course, Robert said that studying law was "maybe a bit stupid," and I marked it "more on this" (a code which I used again where he said "knowing what's wrong helps you to address the problems yourself." (These hand-written observations to myself do not appear among my NUDIST categories; I do not rely on computers as diaries or sites for task lists.) By the time I next spoke to Robert on the telephone he had graduated, and our conversation focused on his current experience. It no longer seemed important to return to the school teachers, but he was pleased to explain ways in which he was enjoying his career as a lawyer and overcoming what had earlier seemed to be the difficulties of dyslexia.
Appendix XV: Extracts from interviews which exemplify the way informants described their experiences

These extracts are intended to convey a sense of these informants as people. They have been selected because they are typical of the way each person spoke, and because they give examples of topics which most informants talked about. This includes school experiences, being assessed as dyslexic and experience of teaching and learning at University, but most of all these extracts exemplify aspects of the four discourses of dyslexia set out in this thesis. Informants are therefore grouped according to the discourse which they adopted.

'Patients'

Fenella (1)

D: When did you first, when did anyone suggest you might be dyslexic? Did you discover about the existence of dyslexia?
F: No, I didn't know anything about it really.
D: But when did, when you got to university then?
F: No, no, it was ... Once I'd got safely ensconced on my access course then I went to the group tutor and said, 'I'm a bit worried because I'm quite a slow reader and I do feel that there's something not quite right, you know, because I'm very, very slow'. It's hard because I'd never really told anybody before because it's like the beginning of actually opening up to all this stuff, you know? D: Yes, yes.
F: That I'd been kind of, I'd been keeping to myself for a very long time, thinking that I was abnormal, that there was something drastically not right, but not knowing what it was. I didn't really know about dyslexia.
D: You'd never read about dyslexia in the paper or ...?
F: I had, I think I had but I don't really think I'd ever ... It hadn't got anything to do with me.
D: Oh, of course.
F: It never ever. Actually, I know: a friend assumed I was dyslexic because I was very close friends with her and I told her, you know, she knew that I was a slow reader and this, that and the other. And one day she called me dyslexic. She said, 'oh, because you're dyslexic, aren't you?' and I said, 'I'm not dyslexic!' [laughter]
D: Yes.
F: 'No, no, no. I never said I was dyslexic. No, of course I'm not' You know, I just didn't ... and I was really shocked. It was really funny.
D: So that was the end of that. Did she backtrack then?
F: Yes, she said, 'oh, I'm sorry'. I think then I thought ...
D: You'd pursue that?
Oh, you know, I suppose, you know, maybe, maybe I have got a touch of dyslexia. I don’t know. I said, ‘I don’t know, I don’t know. I’ve never ... no idea’. I’ve never been called dyslexic at school. Nobody ever did anything about my difficulties all the time I was at school. Not a thing.

That conversation with your friend, did that influence you in some way to go and see the course tutor then?

Um, I don’t know. I think ... I can’t remember when that conversation occurred, whether I was already on the Access course or not. No, I think that was before, way before I was doing the Access course. I think possibly just talking about education and stuff and talking about what I’d like to do.

But what was holding me back all the time, that feeling that it’s ridiculous a person like me thinking of doing something like that when I knew there was something wrong with me. Do you know what I mean?

Urnm, right.

But it was when I was, once I was ensconced and I told the tutor - and I think she thought, well, you know, lots of people are slow readers – but she, and she didn’t pick ... and she said, you know, a problem with the projects, the first sort of month or two’s work that we’d done, she couldn’t see anything to suggest that I was but suggested that I go and see someone at studies skills and ... It was my dyslexic friend who knew she was dyslexic, V______, who was also on the access course, who ... just everything I said she could relate to.

I got this report which I found devastating. Absolutely. It knocked me for six, I tell you.

I almost thought, well, I might as well give up now. Indeed, I felt very defeatist. That’s something I remember actually as a child, always being accused of having a defeatist attitude, and I suppose it’s because everything such a struggle that I didn’t believe I could do anything.

I think my daughter was away at the time. I think she’d gone to visit her father or something, and I was on my own and I received this and I found it shocking, really shocking.

I think my daughter was away at the time. I think she’d gone to visit her father or something, and I was on my own and I received this and I found it shocking, really shocking.

She told you that before you left, did she?

Yes, but that she was sending me a full report.
D: Yes, so that was ... the actual live session with her was alright then?
F: Well, it was but there was this bit of me that was saying, 'thank God, I am dyslexic' and then thinking, 'oh shit, I'm dyslexic'.
D: Yes, of course, yes.
F: But there was this kind of relief that, well, you’re not bananas, you know?
D: Yes, yes.
F: There is a reason why you’re like you are, and it kind of, I don’t know, it did sort of ... Even having the test and everything, when she was questioning me and what have you, it did actually, things were beginning to fall into place. I did actually realise that I did have this process. She was asking me about the numbers and everything, going backwards. I was actually ... she was asking me to repeat numbers backwards. I’d have to visualise them on the blank wall.
D: Right, and did you look up at the ...?
F: I wasn’t aware I was doing it until she was saying, that’s amazing, the way you did that, the fact that you can recall those. And I sort of had to analyse how I was doing it. I analysed how I was doing it. There I was, trying to get the best marks in anything that she was testing me on. Do you know what I mean?
D: Hm, hm. Yes. So the shocking thing about this report was the spelling age and reading age, was it, mainly?
F: I think, yeah. I think the comprehension and stuff, yeah. It was horrific to see those ages down and I was reading about this person who was me, an adult, you know?
D: Hm, hm, hm.
F: How old was I? Thirty-nine, forty?
D: Forty-two, yeah.
F: Urn, it’s just shocking. I already felt that a fish out of water at university and here I am in a grown-up world, a world that I never thought I’d get to because although I wanted to, it’s really all beyond me, and who the hell do I think I am, you know, sort of doing this, and to see those ages, it just threw me back into that frightening world that I was in as a child. It’s like I’d put myself in that situation in a way again that I’d so wanted to escape at sixteen.

Enid (1)

D: What image of dyslexia did you have?
E: Urn, I didn’t know any other dyslexic people. Urn, I just knew I - the reason why I had difficulty spelling was because I was dyslexic. I’m not seriously dyslexic; it was just -
D: Right. Your parents explained it to you, then -
E: Yes.
D: What I was. And how did they put it across to you?-
E: Um, well my father is also dyslexic, and so is my grandmother. The thing is, my grandmother has never admitted she’s dyslexic, so she wasn’t in the picture at all. My father said he’d always had difficulty spelling, and he said the only thing you can do is to start memorising it, writing out five times, and -
D: Yes. And does that work for you, writing -
E: Yes, it does.
D: Right. So he passed on to you some of his strategies?
E: Yeah. And of course my mother was an English teacher, English as a foreign language, and so she basically - by this stage, my parents were divorced, so what was happening is I was getting one and then the other.
D: Right. But were the two different kinds of input that you got from them, were they complementary?
E: My mother was - my father wasn't so strict. (laughs)
D: Yes, what, she made you work at set times, and -
E: Yeah, I found - well she made me work at er French more than English. Um I would get fed up and bored with having to learn how to spell and things like that, so I wouldn't bother. So I would have - I've always had bad spelling on my report (laughs).
D: Yes, er OK. But they presumably explained to you that it wasn't to do with intelligence?
E: Yeah, they made that very very clear.
D: Right. So, when you were starting up on GCSE, your image of dyslexia was that it was a memory difficulty, but it wasn't to do with intelligence?
E: Yeah.

Enid (2)

D: So how do you define dyslexia, then?
E: Um, as a memory problem. Well actually as - not necessarily a memory problem but as actually seeing it - as getting the information into your head, sort of thing.
D: Yes. Um what are you like with essay structuring?
E: Er, I have to be very very careful with it. It's the essay structure, rather than actually writing the essay, which takes me longer.
D: How do you get round that?
E: Um, I set it out very very clearly. You know, I'll do my plan first, and I will do a very very detailed plan, even in my exams.
D: How have you learnt to do that? Have you taught yourself to do it?
E: Well I started off learning how to do a brainstorm and a spider diagram, but I don't use that as much any more. Like it depends what the essay's on. If it's a complicated subject, I will brainstorm.
D: Was that from Learning Support here?
E: Uh uh, no, that was from our English teacher at GCSE; she taught us all to do that.
D: Great. Have you had any learning support here?
E: No. I don't need it (laughs).
D: No, you've got all the strategies already.
E: Yeah. I think my marks are good enough to not require it. Nowadays, I don't need to brainstorm any more; usually I've got a pretty good idea about the subject, if I do enough reading. Um so you don't need to brainstorm.
D: OK. Um, but the memory aspects are still a problem.
E: Um, yeah; well, memory in everyday-life terms, I've learnt to write myself notes; and now I'm actually better than most people (laughs), because I combat it. Um -
D: Where to be at a certain time?
E: Yeah. The memory doesn't cause me problems. I know it could cause me problems but it doesn't cause me problems because I've figured out ways of combating it. It's things like er, I've just done a course on statistics, and I had to get everyone else to check my calculations because I can do something like, with 292 I'll write it out 929 or tap it into the computer wrong. Um, or I'll miss something out. So my calculations always took twice the time everyone else took it, but I always came out with a better result, because I was more careful.
D: Yes. You have to spend longer than many students on everything, presumably.
E: Um, my essays, I told you I wrote them out 4 times; I couldn't hand an essay in that I hadn't written out several times.
D: You still do that now?
E: Yeah. Because er trying to get my English in an understandable method, sort of get my paragraphs short and concise sort of thing -
D: But this is you working on this alone still, then, isn’t it?
E: Yeah.
D: You can look at a sentence or a paragraph and think ‘this isn’t right’, and -
E: I read it out loud to myself first.
D: Do you think when you have your own computer you won’t write things out so often?
E: Um, I don’t like the computer for writing essays, because I prefer being able to write something, then read it out, and a computer that types it all the same, it looks like it’s a final draft. Um, I just don’t feel comfortable with it, and also I can’t type, but I’m getting better. But, it’s just -
D: Oh yeah.
E: It’s on the screen; I hate that screen (laughs). If it came out as handwriting, it’d be fine (laughs).

Victoria

V: I mean, I have trouble - I don't know what everybody else feels, thinks of here (points to head), but I - I don't know, I haven't - my thinking process are bizarre. Do you understand what I'm trying to say? I don't know what you, what you see up here in your own head. Getting very deep, this, isn't it?
D: No it’s very interesting, because it’s the whole crux here, really.
V: I don’t know what - I mean I’ve said this to G_____; I said ‘what do other people think and feel up here?’ She looked at me as if I’d completely gone out I think. But I don’t know - I have trouble focusing, up here; I don’t mean visually. Does that make sense to you?
D: Go on, please, yes.
V: I can’t get things into order. There’s no order up here; it’s like spaghetti junction.
D: Right. But sometimes it does click.
V: Sometimes it clicks.
D: What does it feel like when it clicks? What’s the difference?
V: I know why I can see where I’m going. I can see the road ahead. Instead of loads of blind turns everywhere, suddenly I can see the road ahead, there’s signs telling me where to go. Does that make sense? With-an essay at the end of the day, I might eventually know exactly what I’m going for. But I can’t - that doesn’t happen until I’ve got through God knows how many pads of A4, and tears, and books have been slung. But that’s the frustration that comes with this affliction, if you like.
D: Yes.
V: I mean the frustration is horrendous; I don’t know whether anybody else has mentioned this on tape, but the frustration of it!
D: And the hours, the extra hours that -
V: The extra hours, and sometimes at the end of the extra hours you’ve got nothing from it. That is what’s so soul-destroying. That’s why you give up.
Yes. Er, so, you've got your essay topic, and you've done some reading -

- and you've been to some lectures, and you've read the title and lots of ideas come into your head -

No ideas come at all. Ideas don't come until I start writing.

OK. You look at the essay title -

And I think, 'God what do I do with this?', yes.

Panic! I mean I do mean sheer panic. Panic. Put it away, have a wobbly, um, get the wretched thing out again the next day, have another wobbly, um, and then very slowly it can all start to sink in, bit by bit. 'Ah' I think when I'm busy with something else, 'I recall that I read that in so-and-so, and that relates back to so-and-so'; and I think, 'why the dickens couldn't I have done that two weeks ago?'

So the ideas about the title, or whatever it is, have to mature in your head -

- without you even being aware of it?

Yes.

Things are going on?

Yes. But I haven't realised, but that is actually right.

Right, so you just have to think for a bit about the title, and then leave it -

Yes.

-and your processes will eventually -

Yes.

Now, when the thoughts do come to you, what are you doing at the time?

Well, anything could be happening really. I could even be reading something in the paper, and I think 'ah, interesting!'

Yeah. So what do you do then, when these ideas begin to suddenly come to you? Do you write them down?

I write them down, and promptly lose the piece of paper, yes.

Right. But you write them - what form do you write then in?

Longhand. Is that what you mean?

Yeah, and do you write them sort of one line under the other?

Yes.

Do you write them in blocks, or -

No. One line under the other.

- not diagonally along.

Or really if I've got any sense, I brainstorm them of course, but I haven't got any sense when I do things in a hurry.

Right. And, yeah, so you've got your essay, you've got some thoughts to do with the essay - do you find that once that process has begun, and you start to understand the question more and more -

No, I might forget everything I've thought about. That's another dreadful probability.

Which does happen, actually, and that's when the frustration sets in, and the anger.

You knew you had an idea -
V: Yeah, and it's gone. And I can look it up, and I think 'God, what the hell have I written here?' And often what you've written, you can't (a) remember having written it, or (b) what it relates to.
D: Yeah.
V: And you think, 'God, what essay was that to do with?' You know. And this has happened, because we were given four assignments in one week. It was a nightmare. It was a nightmare! I didn't know what was what, and in the end I just had to have a folder for each, and a pad of A4 for each essay, that was the only way I could do it.
D: To keep them separate.
V: Keep everything separate.
D: Yeah.
V: I even put them on my computer, and that was a disaster; they all ran into each other. You can't do things in a hurry, that's another great problem. And one thing at a time, I'm afraid.

Peggy

D: How would you describe dyslexia? It is very different for different people, isn't it, but for you then, what are the main aspects of it?
P: Um, well in being asked, one of the first things I would say is it's different for other people, all I can do is describe my own, I mean that's, if someone was asking me, yeah, that's - I would. Um, I would say that I do what most people do: I misread things, um, I get sentences sort of with various tenses of things - not so much er I do it in speaking, but I do it much more in writing. And, I really do mis-spell the most obvious words and I can't recognise that it's mis-spelt, even if there's sort of you know two words next to each other, the same word spelt differently, somehow I don't see it. My eye seems to run over it so quickly, it just doesn't (feel) it. Memory is a dreadful problem, and that's part of it, that's part of mis-reading and mis-writing things, because my memory's bad. Um, I think everybody has that, but it's worse, it's worse. It's very frustrating, it's constant - you don't just have bad moments at it - it's all the time (slight laugh). Everybody has bad days, where they've sort of written a load of garbage, or you know have read something and gone off on a tangent because they haven't read it right, haven't understood it because they've again just haven't read it correctly. Everyone does that, but when you do it all the time, like every time you pick up a book you're ready to do it, as it were, wait for it, and you've got to sort of actually work round it; it's a lot of work just to do the slightest thing. Like it doesn't come naturally to just read, or write a letter. I've actually got to try and put all those faults aside, actually concentrate on the faults, to not do them, to write or read something, and that's a constant effort, it's not the same process that I think other people go through by just automatically reading or writing something; it's all an effort, therefore it constantly comes out all wrong (laughs).
D: So, it sounds as though you're saying that for you, dyslexia is mainly a question of difficulties with reading and writing......
P: Well I think that's how it manifests itself...
D: Yes. If you were not doing a degree course, how would being dyslexic affect your life?
P: Um... well basic everyday things that you sort of need your memory for, like going shopping; I can't have a list (in my head), I've got to write it down. If I've got two or three calls to make in town, I've got to write down the places I'm
going to, or I shall go right by them. Um, you know, I mean people can usually remember that they're going to go to the post office, then they've got to call at the butcher's, then they're going to go to the library. I can set off and I'll miss the library, or miss the post office. I just walk right by because I don't remember even in actions step by step things that I'm doing.

D: Have you been like that all your life?
P: Yeah. So I've had to get very organised to know what I'm doing, stay very calm, concentrate on one thing at a time. But.... I can cope with that, and I think everyone's a bit like that. But um, I do feel it's worse. So my sort of dyslexia is just this memory problem.

D: Yes. And yet, are you aware of ways in which your thinking style is stronger than other people's?
P: Um.... yes, I think I'm better than most people at seeing how to do it, broader, more far-reaching concepts, I can see a whole pattern in um, can't think of an example...For example, if I go back to when I actually ran a company, I can see how it all works out, how it integrates, how one depends on the other, what all the mechanisms are, what all the relationships are, how things actually work, in that sort of way, but I'm asked to look at the phone book - you know, it's the little things. I mean I think I'm probably better at applying like a lateral thought, is one way of putting it, as I'm trying to describe it, you know which is more than just the 'ah, but what if?' question, it's the 'ah, but what if', but in saying that, actually seeing things from um, it's so hard to describe, I can just see the sort of the broader concepts of things, whatever it is you give to me, yeah? But don't ask me to write it down (laughs).

D: So, how do you feel about people or articles and books that present dyslexia as some kind of a medical problem, not exactly a disease, but a weakness?
P: I mean again that's getting onto people's ideas, the sort of stigma which um...I mean I can remember (EP) explaining to me that really what I have, probably physiologically, is a smaller clip-board than anyone else, which I think is a nice way of putting it, and I think yes, I can accept that, um, yes and it probably is a physiological thing, yes?

D: Yes, that does seem to be one of the theories, yes.
P: Um, that is one way of putting it and one way of thinking of it, and once you know and accept that, why get any more upset about it than if you take five or size seven shoes? I mean, to me...

D: Yes. So, to continue wit the computer analogy then, you may have a smaller clip-board than some people, but what other soft-ware have you got, or hard-ware even?
P: (Laughing) Um.....I think a lot more sort of, I can apply myself to problems and work them out. I can go into a complete unknown program and work it out, take time, and with very little information and trial and error and think about it and work things out - actually working a problem out - then I will arrive with information and knowledge that I'll never ever forget and I can go on and use further. But if you just pin something on my clipboard, like I read a Chapter, it's not going to stay there, I know it's not! (Laughs) That's the difference, and I think if I actually work with knowledge, I do something with it... So now what I do, is any work I do do, I try and do something with it, to make it stay as it were, to actually feed it in, to make a program out of it rather than just pin it on a board, which is how I find most learning happens - you're just continually just lodging stuff on a clip-board that at some point will get filed somewhere - but with me it doesn't, it falls off (laughs), yeah, whereas if I don't put it on that
clipboard, if I actually do something with it.....Now I find that is an asset that other people don't have, because they get given information and they don't know what to do with it, they just know how to put it on a clip-board and hold it. So I would say that is an asset, a very subtle one, but very good.

D: Yeah. So, dyslexia is an individual difference of style, isn't it? Like as you say, different size shoes. And yet, when it's heard of at all, it tends to be presented as a disability. It is classed with disabilities, isn't it? Um, what would you say to a University lecturer who claimed that dyslexic people were not entitled to do a degree?

P: Um, I would say that if I knew enough about him I would find a reason for him not to do a degree (laughs). There's always a reason; everybody is good or bad at something. He may have what I may call something of a disability, i.e. not getting on with people, or... It's rude enough to say that somebody suffering dyslexia should not do a degree, when somebody like that should not do a degree. You know, it's um...

D: And yet, given the way Universities are run at the moment, you have to prove what you know by doing exams, writing essays or dissertations, in other words doing lots of things that dyslexics are not good at.

P: And I suppose really the answer would be, go and do some vocational degree, or some ..., but then that academically is sort of considered sort of less, less of an attainment, which is very unfair.

D: If you had a free choice of how to present your knowledge, how would you like to do it - to prove that you had understood all the stuff you'd done in your degree?

P: I think, um, it's very restricting just written work, it's very restricting. I think that's one skill and only one, and everything seems to be channelled into that, er... There are far more ways of expressing yourself, of putting over ideas, of learning, you know, giving or receiving education than writing and reading. I don't think you can do without them, but I think other things should be able to back it up. I think you know more should be made of verbal communication, because at the end of the day you know, you do your degree, you go to get a job, what's one of the first things you do? You go to an interview, and yet there's very little put on communication skills and verbal skills.

Chuck

C: I think dyslexia should be described as suffering, as in that it's er- the physical manifestations are bad, basically are bad wiring of parts of the brain, and subsequently it can be connected to a physical disability. And it's a good way of explaining to someone who doesn't know, to describe dyslexia as a bad, or a badly wired part of the brain, and using the language of computers, they find it easier to understand.

D: Do you find that explanation personally acceptable? Can you accept that?

C: I think it's- it can explain, at basic level it can explain a, fairly simply to someone who understands; if they have any idea of computers, they can understand that a badly wired computer doesn't work properly.

D: Yeah, OK.

C: On a higher level, if you get a badly written piece of software, or memory, parts of a computer that, say, a more intellectual person can understand, then if the everyday or short-term memory of the computer is wrong, the program doesn't work; so again, they can understand, you know, if they've had experience of computers going wrong as a result of different parts of...
the program or the software not working; so I think it's a good analogy for people who understand computers.

D: But what about, um, how do you feel that relates to your own basic intelligence, if there is such a thing - how do you see your own brain power?

C: Um, well, I mean, the IQ test etc. they talk about, when they fragment the subjects and you can score, I scored very highly in some subjects and very low in others, and um I don't know how that relates, but I feel that I'm intelligent - I'm not stupid, I can see things clearly. I also feel that I tend to understand, um, the underlying principles of a particular point or the ramifications of - I mean, er, the implications of particular points, I feel that I can pick up quicker than most people.

Ann

A: First of all I went and saw the Special Needs person and she said my main problem was I couldn't hear sounds, so when you said a word and I tried to write it down I couldn't get the fundamental letters together, I couldn't hear the sound, as you said the 'mm' for mouse and that lot I just couldn't hear it at all. Erm, and then about half a year later she said, you know, 'I got you this appointment with this guy'. But he kept missing his appointments so she'd left when I'd finally got my appointment in the next year when I had this new teacher.

D: And this was an EP?

A: This was an EP and he did an IQ test on me, and a reading test, and a spelling test, er, analyzed the results and said 'Right, you can have 25% extra time'. Which was the main reason; we weren't really doing it for anything else, you know, we just went for it for extra time for my exams.

D: Mmm.

A: Er, also with the taking notes in the lectures I sat next to girl in Zoology that wrote beautiful writing so teacher'd dictate and I would copy her. Erm, Chemistry fortunately, the spelling of the chemistry teacher wasn't wonderful so she'd go slow enough for me to write it down and Maths there's no writing in it. Whereas here I have a terrible problem trying to get notes, so, it's a bit of a pain.

D: Mmm.

A: She put me, she said, 'Right, I want you to sit next to Jo 'cos she's got neat writing'. So they were quite good in that sense.

D: They were weren't they, yes. Erm, so you still didn't regard yourself as dyslexic, then?

A: Erm, not until I got the test. I knew my spelling was bad, but as, you see, you don't know how anybody else thinks, or anything like that, I forget everything and I can't spell. Well, that's just a problem trait, you know, everybody's got their things they're not very good at.

D: Yes. Absolutely, yes.

A: It's not until recently, you know, that you realise how bad you actually are. Now you know that there's some reason for it. You don't realise how bad you actually are until everybody, (or else you), you know, especially if you don't have, you know, that little tight-knit group of friends that you used to have, you've got a wide range of friends that don't know all your problems and ins and outs -

D: Yeah.
A: - and they, yeah, they're a bit miffed as, if you liked, or they just count you as being unintelligent because when you are speaking a sentence you can't remember that word that you want to fit in. I think that's my main problem, is remembering words and how they sound. Because you are trying to picture them in your mind so that you can speak them out loud, but you just can't get that damn word. I think that's main problem is getting words as opposed to writing backwards and forwards.

Jeremy

D: What about reading?
J: I never read. I mean that's -
D: You still weren't reading.
J: I, I used to, I wanted to try; actually when I, my Dad joined this, buy five books and you get so many, one of those things. And I actually asked them to get me a few books, because I was always very paranoid, everyone was talking about - when it's like filling in your UCAS form, if they say like 'if you put reading you state that you've got some books', or whatever, and I've never read. It was never seen as - I mean my parents never really pointed it out to me. I just never read; so I tried to read um - what was it? - 'Silence of the Lambs' was the first book I tried to read. I'd seen the film, so I figured if I've seen the film, at least I know what's going on, so I can't get lost in the book'. Because I used to lose concentration; but I got probably as far as Chapter 5, and then I just - it wasn't following through, it wasn't like I was getting into it; it was just another page and another - I was reading for the sake of reading.
D: Yeah. What book was that?
J: That was 'Silence of the Lambs'.
D: Oh yes, right. Do you find when you've read a page that you can't remember what was on it?
J: Um, it was getting that - it was getting to say half-way through a Chapter, and I was thinking of the story, what had happened two pages back; I wouldn't - there was no - I couldn't take it into my mind, I couldn't follow the story, although I'd seen the story, seen the film, that was the whole - that's the reason why I did it. That was my first, because I was the movie when it came out, on video. And I read the book, but I still couldn't follow the book; I couldn't understand what was going on. So I could read the pages, I could read the whole page, no problem.
D: So was that - that must have been a bit of a shock to you, then.
J: Um, it was a shock, but it was expected, because I'd always had that trouble when I was - I expected it, not like, I mean - I expected it. My mother - I can't remember actually telling my parents, I never said 'I'm not going to read this book any more', going up in my room. And it was, it wasn't a overall shock to me that I couldn't follow it, because I never - I wanted to, I really actually wanted to read the book. Just to say I'd read a book; I mean, when I was younger, I used to read the little 10-page books which - that's not a problem, I mean it's not a book, is it? But I couldn't do that. And then I actually moved book to another story, which was called 'Rush', the book was; that book was about Police officers and drugs, drug agency. But again, that, I mean I just didn't get any-, I read a few Chapters, skipping a few pages just to, because I wanted to read a book, that was my ultimate goal. But then I thought 'I'm just reading it page after page, I can't, you can't, no-one can ask, if anyone asked me a question, I've got absolutely no idea what I've just read'. So I said that was that.
for books. But I did try; it was actually, I knew I hadn’t read it, because everyone was, everyone at the school was, if they had free time to spare, some, they’d just get a book out, or they’d read a book, or people would just be going through novel after novel. And I, I never did; I couldn’t read - I mean I could read it, but - I never really had trouble with the words, reading it, but it never went into my head, so I never followed the story. So I just kicked it on the head, sort of thing.

Charles

D: So the word dyslexia was mentioned to you then?
C: It has been mentioned ...
D: Before you got to Belleville University?
C: Yes.
D: But you always thought it didn’t apply to you, did you, or ...?
C: Well, I wouldn’t ... People have said to me, ‘oh, word blindness’.
D: Yeah, that was one of the words, one of the expressions for it.
C: And, um, it’s something ... and then you dismiss it. You just, you know?
D: Yeah.
C: It’s just, you know, it’s just something that ... Unless you actually need that type of thing that often, it’s not something that you actually turn around and say, well yes, it does apply to me.
D: No. So how did you feel when J____ (learning support tutor) started suggesting it then?
C: Well, I was a bit, not surprised but there was something, something clicked, and I actually said something to her and she said, ‘well of course, you will now actually look back and you will be able to put a lot of what happened into a certain amount of perspective, knowing that you are’.
D: Hm.
C: It’s, it’s, um, again it’s a very difficult thing, and I’m always very, very loath to actually say ‘yes, I am dyslexic’ because there is a certain amount of dyslexia, er, there is a certain amount of word blindness, there is a certain amount of when I actually write I can’t spell. There are times when I write and for some unknown reason I will write an ‘a’ when I’m thinking about a ‘z’ or something else, and I don’t know why.
D: Oh, hm.
C: I think I told you about my famous one where I wanted to write Croydon and I actually wrote Groydon because the Y and the G, for some unknown reason, got mixed up inside my mind. Why they did it I haven’t a clue. And I sat there and eventually you turn around and say, ‘what a prat’. The amount of times I write an envelope and have to throw it away because I’ve made a mistake.
D: Hm.
C: This is the beauty of the computer. You make a mistake, you can actually delete it and alter it. And again, that’s why I like the pencil. You can actually rub it out and change it.
D: Yes, yeah, sure. So to some extent then what J____ was suggesting is true then, that you have looked back and thought, ‘oh yes, that experience fits the pattern’? Have you? Maybe not.
C: Well, I haven’t actually looked at a pattern because I haven’t read any books about dyslexia.
D: Oh yeah, yes, of course.
C: I haven't... In a way I purposefully haven't done so. Well, I haven't had time, let's put it that way to actually read. And because I haven't had that I don't actually... I don't know an awful lot about dyslexia. All I know is that when I've actually spoken to you about certain things, you've said, 'oh yeah, that does have a little bit of a concept of... it fits the situation of what we know'. Well, what I... because I'm... it's again my inbuilt scepticism, like I was just saying when we were talking about other people's research. People manipulate the situation to suit themselves, you know?

D: Hm.

C: Everybody tells a tale to suit themselves. So I've always been a little bit sceptical of that and, because of that scepticism, I haven't really wanted to actually say, or read up and say, 'oh yes, I fall into this pattern'. It's when I actually talk to people like yourself and I say, 'this is what has happened to me' and you say to me, 'ah, yeah, that is something that seems to be reasonably similar to people who have that', then I'm quite happy to work with that.

D: Hm yeah.

C: But I purposely don't want to have that preconceived idea. Do you know what I mean?

D: Yes, sure, yes of course.

C: Because I am the person who I am. It doesn't... because I have a label that people put on me that I am dyslexic... The one positive thing about it was this IQ thing, to know that I came across as reasonably intelligent, and that is rather nice. That bolstered my inner sense.

D: Yes, of course, of course. So you went to see ______, the EP, at the suggestion of the Learning Support Unit, did you? To help you get the DSA.

C: Um, well, ______ reckons that there seemed to be some form of dyslexia there but I had overcome some of it. As she suggested that I actually went and looked outside of the university to actually be quantified because she's... because... at that point I was in quite a desperate state, you know?

D: Yes.

C: Mentally I was drained and, you know. It really was quite an unpleasant experience.

D: So you weren't really... You weren't feeling strong enough to be told what your spelling and reading age were, really?

C: That didn't worry me. That didn't worry me at all. It was just nice to actually, for somebody to turn around and say... I said to her, 'this is what I'm feeling, this is what I'm going through', and by being tested it actually came back that 'this is why you're feeling that way', which was rather nice, you know?

D: Yeah.

C: It's like having permanent headaches and you actually say to yourself, 'why am I getting these permanent headaches? It either is because you need glasses or because I had this learning difficulty I was under a considerable amount of stress.

D: Yes.

C: And, as you know, I was very stressed out at times.

D: Yes. But did you feel that ______ (EP) handled you alright then?

C: I got on very well with ______. I like ______, yes.

D: Hm, that's good.

C: It was nice actually, because there she was, a lady of, let's say, indeterminate age but a very confident, very warm personality who you could actually... I found it was very easy to communicate with her. There was no,
there was no ... It was very difficult just to appear outside somebody's front door and say, you know, 'test me', but she made it very comfortable and very easy to be able to do that and to be able to communicate with her.

D: Yeah, yeah, good.
C: Some people you can't communicate with. It doesn't matter how hard you try, you just can't seem to get anywhere with them.
D: What did you think of her reading test material in terms of its suitability to you as an adult?
C: Ah, again, I don't actually remember too much about it. It was really just the situation. I went to see her, she actually presented stuff to me and I actually went through it. I didn't actually analyse it within myself.
D: Oh, OK.
C: I think what it was because of the situation, the state I was in, I don't think I was in a position to analyse it, and the pressures that I was under anyway with the degree.
D: Yes, yes. You were pleased with the IQ result anyway? That was -
C: Yes, yes. In actual fact, I think if I took it again now, cold, without having done it in the past, you know, because it's very difficult, because again, if you like doing IQ tests you like doing them.
D: Yes, yes -
C: I think I would score higher now than I did then because of the mental state that I was in.

Arnold

A: When I was a sophomore at high school, about 15, it started to really bring me down. I was always frustrated, I was always returning things late, I was always having trouble with writing and math and things and I was always ... because what you produce, if you are not at a certain level of like proper production, you're put into a lower track. It's what I guess the American education is, tracking.
D: Hm, yeah, yes.
A: I remember there were these series of dinners where I would just sit there after dinner. They'd ask me how school was going. We'd talk and suddenly I would just start crying because I was so ... I was getting so angry. I was feeling so trapped within what my ... within something that had been created.
D: Yeah.
A: Going back, I know it wasn't me. It wasn't, but I remember it was how I was feeling about myself and just like ... I used to use the expression, I felt I got trapped in a bubble. I felt like I ... I would just cry. It was just like, what is going on? I don't know what is - I don't know what was going on. I would sit there and my parents were, my parents would get upset because they didn't know what to say, you know? To me them it was a mystery, what to do, you know, and I was, I was put into more of a learning, a learning, a learning centre. That's was it was called, the learning centre.
D: Right. So you arrived at high school with a file on you already -
A: Right.
D: And the modifications and all that?
A: Yeah. The modifications, the individual education plan, my plan.
D: Were you the only one?
A: No, there was, again there was an extensive network of students.
D: Right.
A: There were two classrooms in the high school, one for ... which, looking back, for more accelerated learning disabled students, the other one for very remedial, and basically the one for the remedial was kind of a place for them to feel even more worthless.

D: Oh, yes.

A: Even though it helped them out. And there was another room that just let them go wild and really didn't help anyone. But the one I was in, we got help when we wanted it and the aim was for us to like be very, to advocate for ourselves things but I remember the feeling was that it was not ... I needed help in how to craft my ideas, the paper, how do I ... and that didn't come until my senior, my last year of Coll- , my last year of high school.

D: But at that point, though, when you first went to high school ...

A: Yeah.

D: You knew that you were intelligent then, that you’d been put in this -

A: Well, I don't know .... no, because, again, because ... I guess I didn't start to claim ... My reaction to feeling so depressed about it was to react, was to like, I don't know, to create a positive image, to like nationalise myself or something like ... somehow ... except that what I'm going to create isn't better than anything, you know, it's - yeah, other people have done this but they haven't ... I've ... they've never done it like me, you know?

D: Hm.

A: But I wasn't very forthright up until last year. It was like I didn't view my own fate, I didn't view my own ability as significant because I was always trapped, I guess, in a very self-defeating cycle because I wouldn't turn things in.

D: Hm.

A: I wouldn't be able to do math, I wouldn't be able to do something, I'd always get lower grades. I was realising that I was in a lower track of schooling and I was becoming frustrating because I wanted to be in higher tracks with other people because I felt ... I just was ... I was embarrassed about being where I was, and that just built up and built up until, I think, you know, and then it would just ... I wasn't getting help, you know?

D: Yeah, yeah. So you had these dinners with your parents when you were frustrated: were they able to tune in to what was happening for you?

A: Um, it's interesting: My father, whenever he would see me get down, he being himself, I don't know what caused it but he was always wanting to give advice and my mother was always one to identify with. She would create comfort for me by helping to, you know, identifying her problems with mine.

D: Hm.

A: My father would always be, like, you know, 'we've always told you, you've just got to believe in yourself', which is comp- it doesn't make any sense until you can actually be at a stage where you can be like, you know, where I can be up on stage and you can do it.

D: Hm.

A: And, and, yeah, and part of the other thing was that because I wasn't finishing things and because I wasn't able to, you know, I was pass in a paper light and I would get like, 'oh, it could have been an A but it's a D' and so it's like ...

D: Yeah.

A: My father really described it really well that I had been ... because of what I was producing and how it was being produced and the time it was taking, I was creating more and more like a negative self-image. This is my own idea. Just because I was, the feedback I was getting with all these negative ...
'Students'

Alison (1)

D: So your mum said to the school, 'my daughters', or you anyway, 'may be dyslexic', and they said 'no, no, there's no such thing'.
A: Yeah. I think she definitely suggested it, but it came out later; it was mentioned later, or - for some reason it came up, and I think it was discussions while I was doing my GCSEs, because it was then suggested by a teacher who - I was in the same year as her daughter. Her daughter had been diagnosed as dyslexic, and she noticed the signs in me.
D: Ah.
A: And because she knew, and she was quite - I suppose she was good friends with the, in the school, with lots of the teachers, and she actually pushed to get me tested for dyslexia before my exams, so that I could get extra time.
D: So she was, this woman was actually teaching at the school -
A: Yes, teaching at the school; she did art, and she had taught me for art, and her daughter was the same age as me and in the same form as myself.
D: But when you started secondary school, did you think you were dyslexic, or had you any mental picture of what that meant?
A: I didn't - no, I hadn't. I'd heard of dyslexia, and it wasn't until later that I had any idea what it was, but I knew that it was a reason for having bad English skills, yet still remaining quite bright at the same time. Um, but it was - the word had floated around for a while; I think teachers had mentioned it in front of me and stuff, but um there's always stuff in the media about it at different times. I'd heard, but it didn't twig that it was, that was what I'd got, though I did suspect. And when they said 'we want you to have a test to see if you're dyslexic', it seemed quite natural to me that it was going to come up and say I was dyslexic. There didn't seem any reason why it shouldn't.

Alison (2)

D: So, we've established that you don't see dyslexia as coming under the heading of disability.
A: No, I don't.
D: So what is it to you? If someone who's never heard of it said 'what do you mean by dyslexia?', what would you say?
A: I'd say that it means that I have problems with spelling and reading, er and really things like it extends to me for things like co-ordination. Um, but I am as intelligent as anybody else on my course. But it's very much a case of high intelligence but low reading abilities, and it's short- and it - when they say 'short-term memory is a problem', boy, do I know it! Short-term memory is a huge problem for me. The amount of times I've been told off for forgetting to turn a radiator off, just before, my Dad told me two minutes before to turn it off before I left the room; or take the dogs round for a pee whilst they're out doing the shopping, poor dogs, or feed them, even! (Laughs) I forget things like the moment they're said to me - the other day, somebody told me about some nice cough mixture or something, that's very cheap and really good for clearing throats, and I went downstairs repeating the name of this thing, and I got into the staff room five minutes later: I couldn't remember the name. I forget people's names. Less - I remember names by association with someone that I
know with the same name. Otherwise, particularly new ones, particularly new pronunciations I've never heard before, I forget the pronunciation, very quickly. Always walking up the stairs, getting to the top of the stairs, and think: 'now why was I going up the stairs?' Always.
D: I know what that's like, yes. So, it spreads out into - the short-term memory thing affects general everyday life, doesn't it?
A: Oh yeah, mmm.
D: Yeah.
A: It affects my work as well; if I don't get down that moment a point that I've just thought of, I forget it, it's gone until maybe some time later I'll suddenly think 'ah yes, I meant to do that, I meant to write this'. I have to get it out straight away, otherwise it goes.
D: You do use a tape recorder, do you?
A: Er, I did do, but it's getting round to listening back to it, and I hate the sound of my own voice. I tried it once, doing it for an essay, and my mark actually went down, because I very quickly verbally get off my explanation but it wasn't actually good enough for a written essay.
D: Hmm. What about tape recording lectures?
A: Er, I tried it at one time, and I actually managed to um listen back, and I did it particularly in History. But it's actually then finding the time and the inclination to listen back to it.
D: It's a chore, isn't it?
A: Yeah. If I could be relaxing at that point, or something - no, do a piece of coursework! (Laughs) Not an easy thing to do, specially seeing as the tape will be two hours long, you know.
D: Have you tried having a notebook in your handbag? For example, if someone says about a cough mixture or something.
A: Yeah, I have my diary I carry all the time. It's got note bits at the back, and I always write things down. And that day, I didn't have my diary on me, or I didn't get it out I think. And I always - I generally speaking write as much down as - take notes, get things, write it down, like 'don't go away, let me write that number down'.
D: Yes. So you get through a lot of - is this a kind of Filofax diary?
A: It's a, it's just an ordinary quite big diary. It's about that big, spiral bound. It's really brilliant, it's got notes bits at the back. I'm really not looking forward to losing it. It was a Christmas present last year, and I've got to make sure I get another one, otherwise I won't be able to live without it.
D: Have you got your timetable in there, and your -
A: Um, my timetable I carry around for about the first two weeks, and then I remember all of it. I remember that quite quickly, my timetable, so I don't need to carry that. But, if it's appointments, unless I write it down I get myself double-booked. Always do that one. Er, I have to have my diary to check against appointments because I don't relate - say, someone will say, 'right, next Thursday', I won't relate that to a date, so I have to have my diary for that reason.
D: Yeah, I do as well, yes. Um, do you use your diary to plan your academic life? Like, 'I've got such-and-such a thing to give in here'?
A: Yes, yeah. I put the course - if I can get all the course-work deadlines in, it's really helpful.
Will

D: You thought, 'Why am I good at maths and science and I can't do this?'

L: Yeah. I mean I thought that up until - well, up until I was fifteen. I mean
my Mum pressed the school to keep checking, 'check if he's dyslexic', whatever,
but the school didn't act on that.

D: Ah. So your Mum had heard of dyslexia?

L: Yeah. Erm, my Mum...my Mum's...one of my Mum's best friends is, erm,
works...my Mum works in a special school and my Mum's...but she was only a
nursery nurse in the sort of special school so - but her...one of the women she
works with, her son was dyslexic and he was diagnosed whilst he was in the
infants, so she'd heard of it.

D: Ah, right. So, your Mum thought it was probably - it applied to you?

L: I was actually tested in the juniors as well, but - and they said 'Well, we
know he's good at science, we know he's good at maths, we know he's good at
visual coordination, but he can't write properly'. And they said, 'We'll check him
in the high school'. But they didn't check in the high school either, properly.

D: Ah-huh. Who was this person who tested you in the juniors?

L: Erm, it was some, I think, EP.

D: Yeah. And with the whole...it was a long session?

L: Yeah, well, it seemed a long time - it was probably about half an hour.

D: Yeah, it does seem a little bit like that. But it wasn't a whole, sort of,
intelligence test thing like you must have had later?

L: No, I don't think so.

D: Right. So you'd heard of dyslexia when you were, what, eight or nine?

L: Well, maybe not when I was eight or nine, I think when I was about twelve
or thirteen, I started thinking, 'Well, there has got to be something'.

D: Right. Your mother had heard of it before that -

L: Yeah.

D: But she didn't discuss it with you?

L: Erm, well, I mean, they used to ask me why I wasn't very good and things
like that -

D: Yeah, yeah.

L: - but, I don't know. I mean a lot...most of the teachers used to just say
'He's lazy, can't be bothered doing the work'.

D: Yes. How did you feel about that?

L: It made me pretty mad.

D: Yes. Yeah. You didn't believe it; you didn't come to believe that you were
actually not bothering?

L: No, I mean I always felt that I was trying.

D: Yeah.

L: And I knew that, I knew what I was trying to do, sort of thing, but every
time I started writing garbage came out, the wrong to what I thought it should
come out.

D: So, how did your feelings come out? I mean, did you used to
play up in class or -

L: Erm, I never used to... I think I'd just start daydreaming or something like
that, my attention would just disappear from the subject as soon as the teacher
said, 'Why aren't you working? Why aren't you working?'

D: Yes, yes.

L: I mean, after a bit you just like think 'I can't be bothered doing this
because -
D: It's completely beyond me?
L: Yeah.
D: Yes. So it looked like not bothering?
L: Yeah, but the rest of the class had, say, progressed past a certain stage and I would be left behind.
D: Yes.
L: And the teacher would be like pressing the rest of the class and trying to drag me along with them, sort of thing.

Bruce

R: Um, I remember lots of sort of, 'about the universe', books, um er there was, I think probably an American book called um ‘Tell me why?’, and it was like an encyclopaedia. Um there was 'Still more tell me why'. And 'Still more tell me why'. Um, so I had books like this, and I was probably bought a lot of those books. And I would imagine that um - I know that when we were back in um Scotland, um they had a book club, 'The Chip Club', and it was usually something non-fictional, or an Asterix book or something, that would be what I would go for. Um, so until um the last couple of years, I haven't really read for pleasure. I've read non-fiction, and it's I think, I think I just um, in some ways I'd like to think the interest was stimulated by the books I'm reading. Um, but I read them. That's actually another memory: I was having a laugh with someone a couple of days ago, er it was er yes taking me a week to read a commando comic! (Laughs) I read books really slowly.
D: Yes. So when you were a boy, it actually took you a long time to read a commando comic?
R: Yeah, I would have thought it did, actually; I mean I suppose because, you know we'd pitch tents, we'd got lots of space, so you'd pitch tents and things - this was in the good old days when kids went out to play, you know - big cliffs and a raging sea, but yeah you still go out to play. Um, so yeah I guess er I was slow at reading comics and things like that.
D: What the other kids noticed even at that age, I mean they -
R: I probably noticed; or maybe I'd noticed in the past; because I think I guess the way the measure of time is you'd lend them out, and people would want them back (laughs), or they'd give them back before you'd finished them; so I assumed they were reading faster er than me. But whether it actually took me a week, I don't know; maybe I just have a short attention span.
D: Uh huh. Right - another thing. Was that an issue for you at that age?
R: Attention span?
D: Having a short attention span.
R: It seems to be an issue for me just now, because I really need to crack on with my work. I don't know whether that's personality; and that's a discussion really, isn't it, is er, is my attention span um linked to the fact that I get fatigued because I'm putting a lot of effort into my reading and putting sentences together -
D: Yeah.
R: - um and keeping up with it, or is it because I'm in essence a um, a, an extrovert that gets um distracted from a task quicker, and using some sort of personality trait -
D: Yes, chicken and egg, isn't it? Yeah, that's interesting, that.
R: Um, I don't know, I don't know. Um, I wonder, I mean and that's another theme, the having a bit of dyslexia is um, if you're looking for negative
experiences, is after a few negative experiences, I decided to 'sod them; the way I'm going to beat you bastards is by doing better'. I mean not that I probably went and studied and stayed in for years and years, but I thought 'I'll show you'. And that's been my attitude, is to play it down because it's the best way to deal with it, I've decided. Um so I wouldn't, I wouldn't like to get into the mode of making an excuse of the dyslexia, by saying 'I have a short attention span because I actually have to put more effort into reading and having to re-read things, and having to um, you know, look through another process to correct errors'. Um, I'll be quite say it's because I'm lazy. *(laughs)* But er maybe, I don't know.

**Charlotte**

C: So I left for university, arrived on the campus, erm, eczema overtook me; I looked like I'd been in ten rounds with Mike Tyson. I had eczema all over my face and I'm sure you know what it's like if you're going to anywhere new, where you're going to meet new people

D: Yes.

C: - you want to look your best; so when you've got your face which is flaking everywhere, it's not really the best impression you want to give.

D: And it was from the stress and tension of -

C: Yeah, I was petrified.

D: - starting a Degree, yeah, yeah.

C: Yeah. So, erm, everything seemed to be going okay. It was my School course which actually pointed out the dyslexia. What actually happened was, I handed in my very very first essay.

D: Mmm.

C: Now the School course was called 'Are We Returning to Morality in the 1990's?' We were talking about spirituality and the teaching of religious education in schools. Erm, we did a Chapter from Folk Devils and - Folk Devils and Moral Panics perhaps - it was something like that and the whole thing just went over my head and I just thought 'Oh my God, I'm drowning!'

D: Yeah.

C: First essay came back and I've never seen so much red pen in my whole life.

D: Mmm.

C: Erm, she just said 'This is not the standard that we expect at university', erm, 'I don't know what this is here', erm, 'Do something about it'.

D: Mmm, mmm.

C: So I went to my personal tutor; my personal tutor just said 'I don't know what to do about it, Charlotte'. And, so that was at the beginning of October. Erm, more essays came back, erm, and they were just, well they didn't go down too well. Erm, spelling was picked up on terribly; grammar I was just slaughtered for. Erm, I didn't know what was going on until one day I walked into the school office and P____ just turned around and said to me 'Have you ever thought you could be dyslexic?'

D: Mmm.

C: And I just thought that was the biggest joke out and because also, but it was also like, 'Well, maybe'. Because it was, like, 'At least I know I am not stupid'. Because I just thought, I thought 'Oh my God, what's going on?' Erm, I felt really bad. I was just like you know 'I can see it now, I'm going to be chucked out', -
D: Yeah.
C: -'going to be sent home'. You know, the whole fame of going to university, especially with my circle of friends would have been, well I would have gone back with my tail between my legs feeling very very sorry for myself.
D: Mmm, mmm.
C: So, I went to the Counselling and Psychotherapy Unit and, and said 'I need a Dyslexia Test. I've been told to come here, you're the people to talk to'.
D: Yeah.
C: And the day before my nineteen -, the day after nineteenth birthday, so this was the 22nd of November, erm, I had a Dyslexia Test with M____.
D: M____ did it?
C: Yeah.
D: Oh he did the Bangor test did he?
C: Yeah. But before I had a session, like there was a previous session when I thought I was having the dyslexia test
D: Mmm.
C: - that's before my birthday, erm, but we basically just went through my, my history, my personal history with the attack and things like that and other things -
D: Yeah.
C: - which, you know.
D: Yeah.
C: Erm, and so we went through that and then I had this dyslexia test and I was sitting in this room, I thought this was piss easy. I was just like, erm, he was asking me these questions and I was having major problems with the Maths, I always remember having major problems with the Maths questions, but with the, er, Bangor test, number sequences and left and right, 'You point with your right hand to my left knee'.
D: All that, yeah.
C: I thought were just the easiest things since sliced bread.
D: Yeah.
C: Er, I literally thought he was having a joke. So when he said 'I'm pleased to tell you that you're dyslexic', it was very odd to hear 'I'm pleased to tell you', 'You've turned out positive and you are dyslexic'. It was just like, half of me was quite chuffed, cos I thought 'Right, well, I'm dyslexic; there's something wrong, but I am not stupid and thick and dumb, and I'm sure there's some miracle cure somewhere out there'.

Gary (1)

D: Did you ask about Learning Support?
A: Oh, I didn't. I didn't even go to see - in fact, it was only - the University contacted me, that I was dyslexic. 
D: Because you'd put it on the UCAS form?
A: Yeah, and they'd also had the report sent on.
D: Right. OK.
A: What have you; so it was only the fact that they knew; I would not have even mentioned it. In fact there's a, um a society, a Dyslexia Society, which I get letters from from time to time, which I didn't sign up for and which I have no intention of going to. But I still get letters from it, because the University's put my name and my address down for me. But I mean I have simply no intention of going to (...) I see no point in going along and there's a group of dyslexic people
there. I mean, what does it matter really? I make my friends because they’re my friends, and if they’re dyslexic or if they’re not dyslexic, it’s just not something that I consider; and I don’t really see the need for going along to some society about something which is a mere inconvenience to my life! (Laughs)

Gary (2)

D: What got you going on reading?
A: Um, I liked fantasy adventure things, and um, and my Dad reads all the time, as does my Mum actually - but he tends to read loads of fantasy adventure things like that - and I, I suppose first, I just liked - he gave me a description of one of the stories, and what it was like. And it was part of a trilogy er by Douglas Adams.

D: Oh yes, yes. Didn’t he write ‘Hitch-hiker’s guide to the galaxy’?
A: Yeah, yeah, and what-have-you. And um I really liked it - I didn’t actually read those books, but I really liked what he was telling me, and I watched a couple of films. And then there was these other books by David Eddings, that um, that had always been on my bookshelves for quite some time, and um the ten books all in along row, and it was all very nice books, with all nice covers and what-have-you. And um, so I asked him about those, and he described the story of those, and I would really like them, so I decided to have a go. And I picked one, up and um, and I read the prologue; and it was a pain, and I put it down for three months. And then I picked it up again, and I carried on going through it, and I thought ‘give it a bit more of a shot’. And um so I tried a bit more; and er I read the first Chapter, I think; and it took me about two hours, but I enjoyed it, it was a nice good story, and I was ‘Oh, that’s quite good’. And so the next night I read another Chapter; and um I started to get into the story. And um, the story grabbed me, which is quite lucky, because it might not have done, and if it hadn’t have done I probably wouldn’t have read on. But it grabbed me very quickly; and then I started reading more and more of this book. And like, I’d read in the daytime; if I was at home, I could read like three Chapters. And I would read more, because I was dying to get onto the next bit of the story; it was really irritating that I was holding back, and I would read more and more. But then I’d get a headache, because I’d read for three Chapters, which was the surest thing in the world that would give me a headache; there just wasn’t the ability to stop it. And um, but I would still have a go, and think ‘perhaps I can just squeeze a little bit more before it starts to hurt’. (Laughs)

D: Did you get blurring of the print?
A: No, never.

D: Er, or glare: does the, do the lines seem to flash against the white paper?
A: No.

D: You just get the headache from -
A: I would think it’s from the concentration.

D: - staring at it, yeah. Ever move a ruler down the page?
A: I sometimes move the bookmark down the page, um, actually I do that quite often as I’m reading down it; sometimes I don’t, but sometimes I do. I’m used to sitting in front of a computer as well all day, and so I’m used to looking at text everywhere.

D: Um, yeah.
A: It’s quite easy to stare at a page of text and not read a word of it; that is so simple just to - you’re looking at a page of text, and all it is, is a jumble of
letters, and you think 'right, I've got to start from the beginning', and you go
away, look at the first word and off you go.
D: Do you sometimes read to the bottom of a page, and realise you haven't
taken any of it in?
A: Oh, all the time. If I reach the end of a line - by the time I've got to the
end of a line, I've forgotten the start of it.

Harry

A: The only other thing was, I was keen to get my grant cheque. It
was the end of the first year, and there was a little sign on the wall saying 'if you
can read this, maybe you should consider, or think about dyslexia' or something.
And I read it, and I thought 'well, I can read it'. I read it loads of times, and
thought 'well what's wrong with it?' And I realised 'you' was spelt the other way
round; it was 'YUO'. And there was another little spelling mistake. And er it
wasn't till I'd read it four or five times, I thought 'oh there's spelling mistakes in
it, just switched round'. That's it. I get the message.
D: I've never seen that poster. OK, so you thought 'oh yes'.
A: And er I just like talked to my friend. And think when I'm curious - so
maybe I am'.
D: Yes. So you could face the thought of being assessed, anyway.
A: Yeah.
D: So you came here and did you see - you saw C then?
A: Yeah, initially, and um I was referred to Dr R who did the
test.
D: Right. And that's quite gruelling, isn't it?
A: Um yeah. Well it was OK. I think it just comes down to the fact that I kind
of - the spelling test meant thinking, you know these are tricky words, and you
know 'is it double I here' and - the rest of the test was OK. The spelling test was
the worst.
D: The spelling was the only thing that was really bad?
A: Well not the only thing that was bad; it was just when you actually sit the
test, you participate in all the various little bits, and it all seems OK. And then he
brings the spelling test and you think 'I don't like these words'.
D: So did he see you in just one long session, or two?
A: It was two one-hour sessions.
D: Two sessions, yeah. And then, at the end of the second session, did you
say to him 'am I dyslexic or not?' or did you just wait for him to write -
A: No, at the end of the, I think the end of the first session, he said he was a
bit, he was not sure, he'd have to go and look at them. But he said it wasn't a
bad case of dyslexia. It was after the second - I think it was after he'd looked at
the first set of tests and after the second er hour's session, he said that um my
spellings were certainly below what you'd expect an undergraduate to be at, with
all the kind of education you'd had before. Um I think he described it as
'developmental dyslexia' in the report.
D: Yes. That's opposed to 'acquired', which would be the result of a blow to
the head or something. Er, yeah; so how did the report strike you? Did it seem
fair?
A: Um, yeah, it was - mainly the report er mentioned the tests, and
mentioned the standard deviations away from the normal um results. And they
were - although it was, they were quite scary because they were like four
standard deviations away from the norm in the spelling test and the test on the
phonemes. I was quite worried, although the margin of variance wasn’t that big, four standard deviations that was quite a lot. But other parts of the test was quite, been OK really. So I thought it was fair.

D: Yes. What has being achieved - being assessed achieved for you?
A: Um, well, it was a little bit of relief I suppose; like there is some kind of problem. But um you’ve still got to get down and do the work. I think it’s one where there’s no kind of ‘cure’; you’re no different; it’s just ‘oh you are dyslexic’, and you come out and you think ‘well, it can’t all be bad’, so you’ve still got to carry on exactly the same.

Sally

D: So, did you feel that he (EP) understood you?
S: Erm, yeah. I think so. I was actually quite surprised, I mean, with the reading, I was just, always slow at it, and then when he did the test with, er, where you have to read, like, a page and then put it down. Like you have to read it aloud and he’ll ask you questions, and I was just sitting there going, ‘Oh, come on, you’ve just read this page, how can you not remember?’ I couldn’t for the life of me remember what I’d just read and I thought, ‘Well, that’s why in multiple choice I have to read it three or four times’, and for other things as well.

D: Yes.
S: It made things a lot more clear in the end.
D: Yes. Erm, did you agree with what he wrote in this report?
S: Er, yeah. Actually, I haven’t read it for quite a long time, I don’t think I ever thought -
D: But, did he tell you at the time, did he talk to you about what he thought, or did he say 'You'll have to wait until I think about it and present my report to you'?
S: No, he, erm, well, he said for the reading especially, he said that he probably would recommend extra time and, er, he outlined what he thought, briefly, what I had difficulties with, and then he said ‘I’ll follow it up with a report. Send it on to you’.

D: Right, okay. Erm, it says here that he put revision technique notes in with it.
S: Yeah.
D: Was that any use to you?
S: Er, -
D: Or was that stuff you were doing already?
S: I don't know. I can't remember if I read it, to be quite honest with you.
D: Okay. Right but this report served the purpose of getting you the extra time anyway?
S: Yeah.
D: For the A-Levels. Erm, and it confirmed to you your high I.Q. because you knew anyway, didn’t you?
S: Well, I didn’t before this test, no.
D: Ah, OK.
S: I think my mum had told me, but, you know how it is, you don’t think, you just think ‘You’re just saying that because you’re my mum’, sort of thing. She always says ‘You’re very intelligent’. and you’re like ‘You’ve got to say that’.
D: Yes. Yeah. So -
S: So I was, er wasn’t really surprised at that.
D: Yes. So, you got the extra time and you've got bearable grades in your A-Levels, but did you feel they reflected your real ability?
S: Well, I got a B in Maths, erm, that was a lot to do with, 50% of it, the actual mark, was small tests and coursework. So, that helped a lot.
D: Yes.
S: Erm, so, but then I got a D in History and Economics and I, History I thought 'Okay, fair enough, there is so much to learn for that, so many facts' I mean, I loved History, I still do, but, it's just, it wasn't really the subject that I should have taken. But I don't regret taking it, because I did enjoy it, it was a good two years. But, when it came down to learning everything and remembering everything it was a very hard subject to take.
D: Yes.
S: Very hard.
D: Were there any teachers that stand out in the sixth form, as being good or bad?
S: Er, in the sixth form, (pause) I don't know. I think they were pretty average. Erm, Mr F, he was my History teacher, and he did realise that, my mum had told him I was dyslexic, and he used to, he did circle my spellings but he used to write the correct one on top of it, rather than just say, 'That's wrong, that's wrong', and he never used to penalise me for them, and he always used to, erm, sort of help me plan the essays and so he was good, he did try and help a lot. Erm, but, I don't know. Economics, she was, Miss W was aware that I was dyslexic but I don't think she really understood it. Because I'd try and explain. She'd say that she could never understand why I couldn't do well in my essays, in comparison to when I talked in class, or whatever. And I would be 'Well, that's because of my dyslexia'. and she'd be, like, 'Oh right', and sort of think 'She's just not revising', sort of thing.

Susan

S: Then I went on to see J (learning support organiser) who was....I shall never forget that day as long as I live, because just speaking to her, erm, she seemed to be so aware of the difficulties I had... and what I was going through, and she said "Do you want to be assessed?" and I said "Well, part of me does and part of me doesn't."
D: Mmm.
S: Because if they say "You have got no problem" how do I account for, for the way I feel? Erm, it would be taking away a sort of crutch I've had... So, er, I felt quite emotional about that and she said "Well, I can ask you some questions and things... and I can sort of assess roughly...whether you are dyslexic or not, would that help?" And I said, "Yeah, it might reassure me." And so she asked me some silly questions like, er, "What colour is Thursday?" and things like that.
D: Ah, yes.
S: And things about balance, erm, because I was doing Yoga at the time and found it very difficult to stand on one foot. I said "No, my balance is not very good." Definitely. I have to lean on a wall to do Yoga and things like that.
D: Yes, yes.
S: And gave me lots of advice about using coloured acetate for photocopying, which cut down on my headaches, and all sorts of helpful things and, and she was saying, "You know, it isn't really a disability, as such, it's just a different way of your brain copes with things. It's because we're forcing it to do something it shouldn't be doing."

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D: Mmm.
S: Just thinking differences really...whatever that word is.
D: Right, yeah.
S: And that was encouraging and I began to feel better about things and not feel so thick.
D: So, yeah, she then wrote you a recommendation for the exam office then, did she?
S: Well, no, I had to go and see a psychologist... Er, her name escapes me, but she was ever so nice... very encouraging.
D: It was J you saw, wasn't it?
S: No, Er...
D: It wasn't?
S: No, the name would, if somebody said it I would remember immediately.
D: P____.
S: That's it. Yes, she was very nice.
D: Right, erm, but, so when you saw P____ you were, er, forty something by then weren't you?
S: Mmm, yes.
D: It was only a couple of years ago...
S: Yes.
D: And you were forty three or something...
S: Yes.
D: Right, and it was the first time you had been formally fully assessed.
S: Yes.
D: Yeah, so you had the whole works didn't you, the Wechsler intelligence scale...
S: Yes, yes.
D: Yeah. Now, that's a pretty exhausting experience isn't it?
S: It was, but she, she was very relaxed. It...I...I didn't feel pressurised, erm, yes, she was very encouraging, you know... I didn't feel I was being tested, I felt I was being helped.
D: Right. And you got a long report on all that...
S: Mmm, yes.
D: And I think what I am most interested in is how the report struck you. Did you recognise yourself in it?
S: Yes, erm, because P____ went over it before I left in some way. Erm, for instance, the...the retaining, erm, numbers and things... She was explaining about all these different things and what it meant and how, how it all worked that when I got it, it, it was roughly what she had said, erm, it did help.
D: Mmm.
S: It made me realise that my problems were not intellectual I suppose is the right word but they were actually practical learning difficulties, things that I'd managed to overcome. Sometimes and other times I couldn't and er, I, I'd already, obviously was very aware that my verbal skills were very good, and that I was quite fluent at reading and so on, so that didn't come as a surprise, erm, but it is nice to know that the manual dexterity, for instance and things like that were also there, that were holding me back.
Alice

D: But out of your whole life, you've put yourself through hundreds of courses, haven't you?
A: I worked it out, and since, post-compulsory education I've done 11 years of additional study, and five of those have been full-time and six part-time. Huh - and I'm now looking at the Doctorate! (Laughs) And I think I shouldn't!
D: Goodness me. Yes.
A: But you see I, I've been doing very well on the MA, I've been getting A grades on my work, written assignment work; and how I got tested: when I had the interview to do the MA at the end of the Cert. Ed, the course tutor interviewed me. He'd taught a module, and he said you know, 'without doubt you can have a place, but do you have any worries?' And I said 'yeah, I'm worried about my reading element, because I can't read very well. And he said um - 'well, I know what - I think I'm dyslexic', and he said 'oh don't be ridiculous, absolutely, there's no way you can be dyslexic'.
D: 'Look, you've done all these courses'.
A: (laughs)You've done all these courses! And I said 'I think I do have a problem', and he said 'OK, I'm going to make it a requirement, as a personal objective, that you get tested, but it's not a requirement to come on the course'. And someone had written 'only an HND' across the top of my form for the entry; and he said 'isn't it strange what one word can do?' And he said 'how do you feel about that?' And of course again it hit everything; it's always been 'only', and not quite enough, you know. And so, I didn't want to go and get tested at all, because I've always avoided it, because I was aware you could go and get these things done; and I had once or twice asked about it privately. And um suddenly here it was; he was saying 'I want you to be', so um - he told me I could ring the Student Services, so I did, and they just went through this very basic check-list. And I said 'oh I need something a bit more scientific than that', and he said 'well we can't do anything, you'll need to see an EP'. So I did, I got in touch, and they wanted something like £189; and of course, working part-time, I don't have that sort of money, particularly for something I didn't want to do. Anyway, so I told him I couldn't afford it, and they said 'well we'll give you a bursary'. I had to suggest how much I would pay, and fill out - there were nine pages of comments about your finances, and -
D: To get the bursary?
A: Yes. And I thought 'oh they won't give it to me anyway, so I'm not going to get it', and I said I'd pay £25 towards it. They wrote back and said they'd do it, and it was all fixed up. So I had - I was just reduced to tears when I did it. It was so emotional for me, because it was bringing back things like you did on the 11+, things that I just, they hurt me to try and do. Um, it was horrid.
D: I know how it is, yeah.
A: So I did that, I got tested in May of last year, yeah, and the guy - I brought the report along if you want to have a look.
D: Yes, please.
A: And the guy said 'on a continuum of 10 being severely dyslexic, you're about 7, but your coping strategies are such that you managed about 5, and you're well compensated', you know. And I think I do, but I do find it very hard, very very hard.
D: What was the name of the person who did it?
A: R____.
D: Oh yes, I've heard of him. Did he relate to you well as a person?
A: Oh yeah, he was excellent, excellent.
D: Only the report is - did you agree with what he’s put in the report?
A: I didn’t understand what he put in the report, to be honest, because it’s quite - he uses technical terms, I think, and things like that - he explained what he was going to say, he explained it, but I think what he didn’t take on board, and I think it’s partly my fault because I don’t always reveal how I really feel about things, I’m very good at masking things, was that I, I always felt that because I hadn’t been well, with these stomach problems, and that once I was well, all the learning difficulties would go away. So here he was, really telling me they would never go away, you know. And so it was suddenly ‘well, even if I get really well, I’m never going to able to read any better, and I’m never going to be able to find my way, and -’ and the impact of that was quite - there was no follow-up with it - it was almost like ‘here you are’, three hours of testing, and then ‘oh yes, you are dyslexic and you are’, you know, and I think he felt that ‘well you’ve achieved so much already, why, you know, it can’t really upset you very much’, in a sense. Do you know what I mean?
D: Yeah, yeah.
A: Whereas it did; it was very upsetting.

Phoebe

F: Um, I don’t really know what (GCSE grades)I thought I was going to get. I always used to, I think I always used to fob it off, saying I hadn’t worked hard enough or something like that. Er, I don’t know, I don’t know what I thought I was going to get.
D: All the time you also regarded yourself as dyslexic presumably, didn’t you, because you talked to your mother about it?
F: Yeah. Yeah, that was always in the back of my mind. But then again, it, it’s a kind of excuse isn’t it, when I don’t think it should be.
D: No, that’s true.
F: Cos if you sit there and feel sorry for yourself, ‘oh I’m dyslexic, I can’t do it’, um I mean, as you know, it’s not directed, you know, to intelligence is it, so -
D: No, not at all.
F: - I don’t think that’s really a feasible excuse.
D: But can you remember talking to your mother about what it was like for her, to be dyslexic?
F: Er, yeah, she had a very difficult time with it, because she was one of the first people to sort of be diagnosed. And of course - so before she was, it was like she was stupid you know kind of thing, and um also the other thing was um she wanted to be a nurse, and she was accepted onto quite a few courses, she was going to go to St Thomas’. They found out she was dyslexic and turned round and said ‘no, you can’t join us’. So, I mean that - she’s, that’s always been a sort of massive stigma to her. But it’s upset her a lot because she’s, that’s what she’s always wanted to do; I think even now, if she could turn back time, I think she’d still want to be a nurse.
D: Yeah. How old were you when she told you those sort of things?
F: Er, probably about 15 or so. So she’s quite negative about it, because nobody’s ever helped her; um, and er I think she’s probably actually worse than me.
D: So she, perhaps she didn’t expect anyone to help you, then?
F: Er, probably not, no. Because I think - what I think is, I think it’s
very difficult for somebody to, who’s not dyslexic to try and teach somebody who is, because they don’t know. I mean - do you know what I mean?
D: Hmm, yeah. It’s a great advantage, isn’t it, to have a teacher who really knows what you’re seeing things like, or, yeah, sure. But can you remember talking to your Mum about how she coped with her problems?
F: She said that she used - she said ‘to survive, we’ve just got to be different; just got to go about things a different way’. Although I don’t think that’s my theory; I like to sort of go with the flow, so to speak. But she’s subsequently, I mean she’d very sort of self-confident now and loud and that kind of thing, whereas I probably tend to be a bit more reserved, serious.

Jemima

D: Your parents got you a tutor?
J: Yeah.
D: And what was that person like?
J: She was lovely - I had, erm, I had two when I was at junior school. I had one who was really lovely, she was a special dyslexic teacher and she was really really good and I learnt a lot with her, she taught me how to, sort of, plan essays and write how I would feel comfortable in writing. And then I changed to another one who wasn’t the special dyslexic one and erm, she just didn’t understand and erm, I don’t think she ever thought I was dyslexic, she just thought I was stupid and that’s how I didn’t gain anything from being with her at all.
D: Right. But by then you knew you weren’t stupid.
J: Yeah. But I don’t think she actually believed in dyslexia, herself, so I don’t think, she just thought that I was a slow learner, or not very intelligent.(laughs)
D: Right. But the first one, you described her as a dyslexia teacher.
J: Yeah, she was -
D: - so you knew about this thing called dyslexia by then?
J: Erm, yeah, cos erm, I had, awful problems seeing when I was younger, I couldn’t see, I had problems with my eyes, I don’t know what it was but I had to have a patch over one eye-
D: Oh yes.
J: - and so, erm, and then it originated from there that I had to go and see different people and that’s when I was diagnosed as dyslexic. I was about nine or something.
D: Ah-huh. Erm, and what were you told that dyslexic meant?
J: Erm, that I had, well I knew it was, I thought it was, like, mainly problems with my eyesight and not being able to read or spell, erm, but nobody actually sat down and explained it to me.
D: Er, did your parents know what it meant, either?
J: Erm, -
D: Had they come across it?
J: Not properly - my mum has, erm, very severe spelling problems though, I think, she has never being diagnosed as dyslexic, but she thinks maybe it’s originated from there.
D: Mmm.
J: Erm, but I don’t think that they’ve, up until, only when I was like diagnosed as being dyslexic did they actually realise that there was, erm, this thing around.
Lisa

L: Well, erm, I took a year out last year for personal reasons. Erm, my mum died and my dad needed extra help and I thought 'Well, I can't cope with everything'. Erm, and then I thought 'Well, I've done really well in the practical assignments, erm, but my exams are letting me down. Erm, I'm not being fair to myself; if I could get diagnosed as dyslexic I could get extra time in exams'. Er, and I think for the first time I actually was bothered about what grade of degree I might get.

D: Mmm. Yes, yeah.

L: I mean...when I first came, the actual degree at the end of the day was irrelevant, it was just the study that I enjoyed and wanted to do.

D: Yeah. But your sights kind of go up and up don't they?

L: Yes, and I thought 'Well, you know, if you are going to do yourself justice and you're entitled to extra time in the exams then why not get it'.

D: Mmm.

L: So I thought for the final year I'd try and get the extra time. So that was when I came to see -

D: Yes. And she sent you to Dr R_____?

L: Yes.

D: Who did the assessment?

L: Yes, he did an assessment.

D: Right. And what did you think of what he wrote?

L: Er (pause) I thought...I was very interested in the tests that he did. I was interested that he said, er, that some things I had scored very highly on and some things I hadn't.

D: Yes.

L: Er, he, he highlighted things which I hadn't sort of recognised in myself that I, er, some of the tests he did...well, there was one test in particular where I was just one off 100%, and he said if I got that I would have been the first person to do it.

D: Yeah. Mmm.

L: But he didn't really pick up on, er, the possible tracking problem or eye-related problem which I think I have got but I still haven't had it diagnosed. Erm, I was just pleased that he'd said yes I was dyslexic.

D: Yes, of course, yeah.

L: And that I was entitled to extra time; I got what I wanted out of it, so -

D: Yes. Sure. Yeah. Mmm.

L: He did also lend me a filter, a coloured filter, er, to put on reading, which I found helpful; trouble is I keep losing it. Er, but I was fascinated the way it lifts words off the page for me.

D: Yes. Well, you do definitely need a specialist eye test, really now.

L: Yes.

D: But he wouldn't have lent that to you unless you'd talked about the visual effects that you get when you are reading. So -

L: Yes.

D: - did he raise that subject or did you do it?

L: Erm, well, I remember telling him about seeing the credits on the television that flashed rather than scrolled.

D: Ah yes. Right, yes.

L: Erm, I might have told him that my daughter had got a tracking problem.
D: Yes, right.
L: Er, I can remember telling him that I felt that there was something that I still wasn't getting to grips with, erm, and I think it...it was very much a last minute idea, was to try these coloured films.

‘Hemispherists’

Stephen

D: What would you like them (University) to be doing that they aren’t doing?
S: I don’t really know, really, because I feel I’m not really that badly affected by dyslexia, that’s my sort of opinion. Because I find I did quite well in the - I’m not doing too badly on the course; I seem to keep up with all the lectures, and so I feel I’m all right in myself about things. But I’d like to - I think the main thing that I would do is educate the staff and other people about it, because like everyone’s, doesn’t really have a clue; they think ‘oh, how’s it going? Are you capable, you know, ‘are you cured yet?’ and stuff like that.

D: Right, OK. So, let’s imagine then that you’ve been asked to speak, that there’s a room full of lecturers who’ve come on a staff development course about dyslexic students, and you’ve been asked to speak about ‘what is dyslexia?’ What would you say to them?
S: I wouldn’t know how to start really. I’d try and like - people asking things - you can’t, I can’t really explain it, because like there’s like reading problems and things like that, but it’s not really that, and they don’t seem to understand like you can’t learn it that way, but you can learn it this way. They don’t seem to be able to see that. So I don’t know how - I just wouldn’t know how to put it into words, really. I don’t know if - maybe the more diagrammatic it is, I find it easier to remember, which is quite good - like as I say, in the Geology Department they’re quite good with the diagrams and flowing into things, the sort of system. And examples probably as well, I always find that helps; but I don’t really know how I’d advise a lecturer or lecturers; I don’t really know what’s best for them. It doesn’t seem too bad, what the Geology lot are doing.

D: Right. Um, so, you said something just now about, something about being taught the way that is best for you, being presented the best way. Um, does that mean that you don’t - you don’t regard it as a kind of illness any more?
S: I’ve never really regarded it as an illness. I thought ‘it’s just like something you’re born with, and you have to adapt round it’.

D: Yeah. Um, have you come across any ideas about different types of brain?
S: I’ve heard of a few things; I haven’t really sort of paid much like - when I was young, my Mum and Dad got quite into all the books and stuff; because I don’t read books at all really, because it takes me too long, I’ve never sort of got into the book concept, I’ve never really looked at it. But I’ve heard theories about, hemispheres are larger, and I don’t know really what’s what and what’s not.

D: Yeah. Does it interest you to look into -
S: Everything, I’d like to sort of find out more. I find, yeah, I find I’ve got definitely more of the - I find I’ve got really good spatial and visual skills; or not everyone that I know is quite as observant as I am - I notice things that a lot of people don’t. But, I find that the education system is just narrowed along one little line. Like all your other skills - I find - I used to quite like art-work and all that stuff; because I didn’t choose that line, it’s gone, it’s blocked out because I
just don’t do it any more. And like I find that it’s very, all a very narrow and one-track system.

Rachel

D: What would you say if you met a young person who was still at school, who said ‘I’m dyslexic and I don’t think I will be able to go to university, cos I’ll never cope’.
R: I’ll probably say bollocks.
D: Yes.
R: No, I would just say, I’d say, ‘Well, it’s natural to think that but you might as well give it a try because you are only young once’. And my sister has always said to me, she said ‘You’ve got to work so long, you might as well go and have a laugh at university for a few years’. And I’ve picked the wrong course. But no, she said, you know ‘You might as well, you’re all entitled to it, they can turn you down. But, you know, go and see, you can always leave, there’s no shame if you leave university, if you can’t cope’. But there’s ways they’ll help you. There is. I’d just say that, that it’s worth a try anything’s worth a try.
D: Yeah.
R: At least you can say you’ve been there, cos you might think for the rest of your life, you might think ‘Ohh, I wished I’d tried’. There’s no need being...you got to...and the thing is the more people that go that are dyslexic the more people are going to recognise it and they’re not going to think you’re stupid. Cos when you say that you’re at university, and something comes up about how you’re dyslexic like it’s one of your mates and you go ‘Oh, my God’.
D: Yeah.
R: But it’s like telling people that it’s OK.
D: Yes, OK. Now, just another sort of hypothetical question: if you were in a pub, say, tonight and the word dyslexic was mentioned and someone you’d met in the pub, some new friend, new acquaintance said ‘Oh I’ve never heard of dyslexia, what is it?’ What would you say to them?
R: What would I say?
D: How would you describe dyslexia?
R: How would I describe it? I could give them the Latin meaning.
D: Yes.
R: I’d probably say, I’d say it just means that you learn in a different way. And that certain, the normal way can make things difficult and it just takes, sometimes, a little bit longer, but there is ways of, you know. I’d just kind of say it doesn't mean there's any different intelligence. I’d probably say ’I'm more superior’. No, I just, I got told it's cos your brain, you just think a different way, you just, you just think differently and you just have problems with spelling and reading, you just, and that's it really, I suppose; and sometimes, we're not all practical I'd probably say.
D: Mmm. Right.
R: It's dead hard to describe it though, cos it just means, dyslexic, it means difficulty doesn't it in, erm, is it reading or writing?
D: Well with the lexicon, yeah, everything, both really. But is it more than that? You were talking about the way you learn, and the way you think.
R: It's sequencing essays though I find, I'm finding problems with sequencing.
D: Yes. But it sounds as though the O.T. Department is doing pretty well. Do you agree with that? You’re pleased with -
R: Yeah. They could change Anatomy. I think they could make Anatomy a bit, cos I have been to see and ask my teacher and said, you know, 'You're going too quick'. And she goes 'Well, if you can't keep up then you shouldn't be on the course'. But she is just a really old lady and she's really sweet, she's my personal tutor and she's a sweetie, she's really lovely but I don't think she realises. It sounds really awful for her to be an O.T. and everything but I don't think she realises, but apart from that everyone else is, they are pretty okay.

D: So, how would you like the Anatomy to be taught, if you could redesign the -

R: Redesign it? The thing is though, she said 'You could go for extra lessons', but if you don't get it in the first place you feel thick when she asks you questions you don't understand. But everybody feels the same. The Anatomy is not taught very well I don't think, it's just so rushed and there's not enough time. Maybe - she draws diagrams but they're 2D and it's done so quickly. Maybe if we did more dissection, cos we go to see it, but it's done that quick, but maybe, if you actually had to dissect the arm yourself and saw the layers, I know it would take a lot longer, but that would be a really good way, cos it's 3D. Or maybe get those models, let us all have a model each, and you learn.

Robert (1)

R: If someone said to me before hand, like 'oh he's dyslexic', I'd have thought like 'is he writing you know just pages and pages of drivel', kind of thing, nonsensical stuff.

D: Yeah. Um, what are you like with spoken information? I mean can you, can you take in someone's phone number and write it down -

R: No, not phone numbers. I mean um when I moved um it took me about, I think about 12 months before I knew my phone number. Because it - it's always an incredibly embarrassing thing. It's very small, but - you'd speak to somebody on the phone, and they'd go 'oh yeah, well give me your phone number and I'll phone you back'. And you go (pause) 'er, no that's OK, I'll phone you'. I just could never remember; and in the end I used to have it written down next to the phone.

D: Yes. That's the sort of strategy that people do, yeah. What about writing cheques, and things where you have to spell numbers?

R: Yeah, I always get - well, quite often get them mixed-up, yes. And you get people you know getting a right cob on with you, and thinking 'what are you trying to do here, pass a bad cheque?' It might be like for, I don't know, £82 or something, and you try and write you know 28 or something. Or 3s, I often write 3s backwards, you know, things like that.

D: Yes; and what do you say when people say 'are you -'

R: I used to just say 'oh I'm really sorry', kind of thing, but now I just say 'I'm sorry, like I'm dyslexic and I do that all the time'. And they go 'oh yeah, weirdo', but it doesn't bother me now.

D: Yeah. It's much easier when you can be just up-front about it.

R: Yeah, I just tell everyone, you know. Because all the lads here take the mickey out of me, because you know I go and sit my exams in a separate room because I get a bit more time; and they call it the incontinence room, because it's where all the people go who freak out

In exams, you know.
Robert (2)

R: I was doing um Politics, Early History, which was renaissance to reformation, and Social Psychology (Access course). And it was during the Social Psychology that the lecturer said to me, 'have you ever been assessed?' blah blah blah. That was the link.

D: Yes, ah; and how did you react when he said that?

R: Um, initially I kind of said you know 'don't be stupid' like; I couldn't have got this far and it wouldn't have been picked up. I just did not think it was possible to get to nearly 30 without someone saying to you somewhere down the line, 'look have you ever, you know, or you may be dyslexic' or whatever. But um, anyway the long and the short of it was, she said 'I think you ought to go and see your doctor and try and get an assessment'. So I went to my doctor, and my doctor said 'don't be bloody stupid, you couldn't have got to this age without -' So I went back and told her, and said 'yeah, I told you, even my doctor says', you know. And she said 'no', she said, 'you must go and be assessed, simply because you will - I know that you'll need the extra time, in exams'. And so I was chatting to my Mum and Dad about it; I didn't have any money at the time; so my Dad said well, if you want, you know, go and - I'll pay for you to go and get assessed. So I was kind of - the more I learnt about it, the more it began to recognise.

D: Ah - so how did this learning about it take place?

R: Er, mainly through the lecturer, who began to explain to me what it was, and what the common symptoms of it were. And she introduced me to a dyslexic student that was there; and when I spoke to her, I suddenly realised that there was many many things that, you know -

D: The pattern of things.

R: Yeah, even to the point of, you know, someone telling you to go left and you turn right, when you're driving down the road and things like that. Um, it was just little things like that really that suddenly began to click, and I thought 'oh shit, maybe I'd better go and get assessed'.

Betty

D: Can you remember when, the occasion when you first heard of it (dyslexia)?

B: Um, I think I'd been reading different articles about it; um, I know I've certainly still got newspaper article cuttings; um, but I would say probably, going back to when my eldest daughter was maybe towards leaving Junior School - so that would be about 15 years ago.

D: 1980.

B: Yes, about that time, I think. But, I'd certainly heard of it before Clare was assessed at the age of 14, as I say that's 10 years ago.

D: So some time in the early 80s you were reading a newspaper, casually-

B: Yes.

D: - and all of a sudden, there was this article saying: 'there's this learning difficulty thing, and it affects people in this and this way, and it's called dyslexia'.

B: I think the article mentioned some books, which I've got at home - you know, I've been reading round it.

D: Yes. So did you quite quickly go and get these books then?

B: Oh yes, yes.
D: Thinking 'oh this is me, this applies to me'?
B: In some ways, yes. Um, I suppose I was more concerned for my children than actually applying it to myself at that stage. It wasn't until after both - you know, my oldest daughter had been assessed, and I'd started to go back to studying with the Open University - that I thought 'gosh, no way am I going to get through all this, I need help'. And the University were very good, with er you know disabilities of any kind, and they sent me information too.
D: Yeah, Yes, they are good, aren't they. So the Chelmsford woman (EP) said that both your daughters were dyslexic.
B: Yes. Yes my eldest daughter was assessed in Watford, but she was later re-assessed in Chelmsford, because she needed er another, a later assessment for her degree I think it was.
D: Yeah, yeah, um, and what was your image of dyslexia then? What did you see it as, mainly?
B: I suppose then, I used to think, well, it didn't apply to me, because I imagined that people would get things, would write things back to front, and it would be very extreme, that um they'd have difficulty with maybe pronouncing words, and I used to think, 'well, I know there are many words I can't pronounce properly, and probably would get, would probably choose not to say them', but on the whole I didn't think that I had a, I had a problem, and it wasn't until as I say I started to actually study at Higher Education level, and had to get my thoughts down on paper, that I realised what problem I really do have. Um, but no I thought it was more jumbled letters, bs round the wrong way, and ds, and syll-, you know, sections of words actually you know missing, and this kind of thing.
D: Yes. That's the sort of stuff you get described in um standard newspaper articles, isn't it, that sort of thing, yeah. Um, were you associating it with intelligence in any way?
B: I did think that maybe it was hereditary, that, yes - up until, before I had started reading around the subject, yes, I thought that maybe, my mother's not, um finds it difficult to put pen to paper - really looking back, maybe she - maybe there is - I think from what I've read, there is a degree of hereditary attached to it. Um, and I know my mother's side, I would say they all had problems with spelling, writing, um and even talking, to a degree. Certainly reading, certainly reading; I think my mother still never reads forms or anything, she'll leave that for me to do. On my father's side I would say it's very different. Um, so I do - I suppose I just think maybe I take after my mother, and I just wasn't very intelligent.
D: Yes. Do you assume that if you're dyslexic, any dyslexic person, is less intelligent?
B: I don't now, no, I don't now. I think before, before I knew of dyslexia, I thought it was just to do with intelligence, that maybe that was it, and that you couldn't hope to achieve, that maybe you would always find it difficult to learn. Um, it wasn't as I say until I got older, until I'd achieved something like my nursing qualification, that I realised that yes, I was capable, that my brain wasn't quite maybe as inactive as I thought it was.
Ron

R: (on Access course) I didn’t like the essay; I hated writing it, I had a hell of a problem with it. And deadlines came up, and I had one - this was - we had exams in June, and this was May, and in the end I just said ‘sod it’ and put this piece of work in. I forgot to put it through the spell-check, and it came back, and she said ‘well, what’s going on here? This isn’t your normal standard. Well what’s gone wrong?’ And I just pulled this word out of my head, that ‘oh I must be a bit dyslexic’ sort of thing, ‘always had a problem with spelling’, and I think I got a bit angry, because she said ‘fair enough, settle down, we’ll talk about it again’ sort of thing.

D: Yes.

R: And I came back the next week and said to her ‘look, there’s got to be something wrong here. I can’t be this thick. I don’t have a problem anywhere else. Why have I got a problem with this? Is it dyslexia, whatever dyslexia is? And she said ‘what are you saying? Are you saying that you want a test?’ And I said ‘Oh shit, I suppose I am, really’. (Laughs) And she said ‘right, fair enough, I’ll see what I can do’. The next week I had an appointment with someone I’d never met before, who was the support tutor for the college. Er, I walked - she was in an office. I walked part the door I think 4 times before I actually walked through the door. Er, and I can remember sitting there on this chair doing these silly little tests, which she was very supportive about, and literally there was sweat running down between my shoulder-blades. I was well wound up. Um, and we did all these silly little tests, one of which was ‘can you read this book?’ or this passage in this book. And er she said ‘you’re a bit, when you read out loud you’re a bit um stop-start, you’re not very smooth’, and then she said, ‘take this piece of acetate, this blue stuff on, does that make it any easier?’ and it was like somebody had switched the light on in the room! I thought ‘this is amazing! What’s happened?’ you know. And so we went through all these different colours, and I came up with the blue one. So I was carrying these little plastic sheets around, and I found out I have a problem with black on white, especially bright white. So that caused me a problem; fluorescent lights also cause me a problem, um, which gives me headaches and what have you - at least they do when I’m not wearing my glasses. So um we talked over what I could do and what I couldn’t do and all the rest of it, and she suggested an Access course. So um I went home and talked it over with my wife. She wasn’t too happy at the thought of me giving up work for a year, but in the end she said ‘well look, you know, if you’ve got to do it, you’ve got to do it’, so I had all the psychological assessments done, and believe it or not, I got 15 minutes extra for every hour of the English and maths exams. But the psychological assessment for that didn’t actually come through until - the exam was at 2 o’clock in the afternoon, and they got the assessment from the psychologist at 9 o’clock in the morning (laughs). The support tutor went to the psychologist and picked up the report, brought it back to college and faxed the exam board, so that I could actually get the time in the afternoon. It was that close, you know?

D: Yeah. Golly.

R: Um, but I did both the English and Maths, and Maths was causing me an awful problem, um, because I hadn’t had the support. But, I went into it, and I got my calculator out, and I didn’t need the fifteen minutes. And I came out with a C. The only thing I had a problem with was algebra. I still can’t get my mind round algebra.
Adrian (1)

D: So who was it then, somebody at Brighton...somebody at Brighton Uni who said you might be dyslexic, was it then?
A: Erm, no, it was actually a friend of mine who was doing a Masters in Human Computer Interaction.
D: Oh, yeah.
A: Er, I was sitting down doing maths one day and he said "You've got such a strange way of doing something."
D: Ah-ha, yeah.
A: And he literally, he'd done A-Level Psychology...
D: Yeah.
A: And he was doing Psychology then. And, erm, we sat down and talk, talked about semantic episodes...
D: Yes.
A: And things along this line and erm, I sat down and read his memory book, like how the memory actually works...
D: Ah, yes.
A: I was like "Hang on a second"...
D: "Sounds like me, this." yes.
A: "What's this Dyslexia?"
D: Yes.
A: And he went, "Ah, that's so and so" and I said "Yeah, but doesn't that sound familiar." He said "Yeah, but then I am as well."...
D: Yeah.
A: And it's like you're low...you're not as much as...I do this and this but does this make us...
D: Yeah.
A: We had to define... In ourselves...What we thought dyslexia was.
D: Right.
A: So I went along to this woman and erm, just up in...
D: What, what woman?
A: Hove. I've actually got my dyslexia report, still...
D: Right.
A: If you want to have a look at it?
D: Yes, yes please, that would be interesting, yeah. So, how did you get to the woman in H___?
A: Er, went in and talked to the Learning Support Unit and they booked me up, with this lady in H____, not H____...
D: No.
A: She's out by the ___________
D: ________
A: That's the lady.
D: Yeah, yeah.
A: You go in a room and, er, a child's room. It's just the sky with a painted tree in the corner and things like this.
D: Very delightful, yes.
A: It's like I am in a dyslexic house, I love it.
Adrian (2)

D: So, you were saying that somebody there said, "Well, you could go and see this woman and be assessed if you want".
A: And see what happens.
D: Right, and was the report enlightening?
A: Oh, yeah, blew me away, blew me away!
D: In, in a good way, or a bad way?
A: Literally. Well she blew me away when I was there. It was like the words, she'd read out, like big words and go slow and she'd speed up and speed up and speed up and there would be smaller and smaller and smaller amounts of text, I'd be like 'ffff' and I was getting into it, sort of thing...
D: Mmm.
A: Really getting into it because I knew it was a test.
D: Yes.
A: And it's just a bit too much. Erm, and she was timing me which is the worst one because I can hear the seconds going down. Erm...
D: Yes, yes.
A: And I was working on that but - she said "Right, okay, what can you remember?" 'ffff', and she was like "Grand, grand, okay, okay." Nowhere through did you know if you were doing good or bad, at all...
D: No.
A: Which was nice, because it didn't prejudge anything...
D: Yes.
A: Or let me prejudge anything and then it came to the pictures and it's like a dog and a car and woman and a car with a lead and silly things, and when it came to that she said I got it back to front, and I'm like, "That's completely impossible, that is the right way round, do you understand why it's that way round?" and she said, "Yes, but this is why it is this way round." It's like "No, that's impossible, because if that is that way round why is she in the car when she is doing that?" And she was like "Yeah, that's actually quite possible." And it's like "I don't understand it."
D: Mmm.
A: And she said "No, but it's round for this reason." She gave me some really technical reason...
D: Mmm.
A: That was a load of hock, really. But, erm, she said "Alright, now we'll put your scores on this," like a line, she said "If you got a line you're normal." And then mine were just like the Himalayas, so it was just like 'ffff' - "What does that mean?" She said "You're dyslexic." "Oh, grand. What does that mean? I don't understand."
D: Right. Well, that's interesting. So, you, you actually said that to her, did you?
A: What's that?
D: What does it mean? What does dyslexic mean?
A: Yeah. I wanted to know what her definition was.
D: Right and...
A: Not what mine was or what the book said.
D: What did you think of her definition?
A: Hock, again.
D: Yes.
A: It was like, "No, this is a bit, you can say what you want but that
doesn't fit me." And then a year later I was travelling the Internet and they said "Oh we've discovered twenty-five types of dyslexia." And it's like, "Well, what are you on about?"

Eliza

E: I went to one of her, her study skills things, and dyslexia had not ceased to be an issue for me, but it was something that I dealt with myself, and for a long time I hadn't been used to other people around me saying 'dyslexia, dyslexia'. And so I went to one of G______'s things, and everyone just sat there for an hour, and said about the experiences they had had, about teachers yelling at them and stuff like that, and I just couldn't cope with it; and I thought 'what a load of bullshit, these people are not learning anything, they're just moping'; and now I think I see that, you know, they needed to get it out because they obviously hadn't discussed it with anybody else, and they needed more like a counselling session; but for me, it just drove me crazy, and I just left. And I didn't get back in contact with G______ until this year. But I did use dyslexia for its concessions, for its extra time, um for the photocopy card that you get, and stuff like that - so I used it to its advantages, but I didn't go to any of the support systems.

D: You've had extra time on your exams as well?
E: Yeah. So I've used it, but I haven't - I've benefited from it, but I haven't given anything to it. So I feel a bit bad about that, but it just put me off so much in my first year, just the way everyone was rabbiting on about 'the teacher made me do this, and the teacher made me do that', and I was like 'just cope with it, guys, you know, move on to the next stage', but obviously they weren't ready to move on to the next stage.

D: No; they needed to get that out and share that, and realise that there were others who'd had the same experiences -
E: Exactly. But I'd passed that.

D: So you went to the study skills course?
E: Oh yes; it's like, all the learning skills things that she does, that you usually just go to, she's running it as a whole module. So you get the study skills, you get the um learning styles, and you get this grammar component.

D: OK, great; um, and that's been worth doing?
E: Um, it's - yeah, I mean it's perhaps brought awareness more than anything else, because everyone was talking about you know the coping strategies that they've learned, about how they have to write lists, and they have to write, um, how to spell all the different numbers on the inside of their cheque book because they can spell them, but they can't spell them under pressure, and all these things. And I've just found that um perhaps almost unknowingly I've done all these coping strategies - you know I've 'been there, done that', and, but they're just putting a label to it and bringing it out, sort of thing.
D: Yes.
E: And also - the one thing that I enjoyed very much was the different learning styles, and the left-hand brain and the right-hand brain, the alternative learning style sort of thing, with the mind maps and using colours and stuff like that, which really is the only thing that I found useful and interesting enough.

**Geraldine (1)**

G: The dyslexia is a disability; your thinking strengths are not.
D: Right.
G: But yes. The language confusion that is not automatic - to me that feels like a disability. Yes and I think it is a disability. I think it's a totally unnecessary disability; that if people appreciated the differences, I mean, the chap I hope to work with next summer brought his, erm, school report with him that went all the way through his secondary school. He was really willing. Brilliant report as to how nice he was and everything; 'must try better on his written work', 'must take heed of the comments that are made', and, you know, and if people only knew 'Hey, hang on, this chap's likeable, willing, what's going wrong? We must investigate this and see what we can do to try something else to help him'.

**Geraldine (2)**

D: We were talking about your model of dyslexia -
G: Yeah.
D: - and you were saying it feels like a definite disability.
G: Mmm.
D: How do you react to the Thomas West type of line about gifted, famous -
G: Oh, I think, I also, to say it's a disability is not to be contradicting people who say we've got these gifts, because yes, I think the gifts are definitely there and because those gifts weren't recognised, erm, I mean, I think, what I think happens is that as you were saying, you learnt that you're an auditory person and not a visual person.
D: Mmm.
G: Now if all your teaching, all your learning was done in a visual way you'd be struggling.
D: Mmm, mmm.
G: So what I think it is, is very much like the left-handed person and the right-handed person. If you try and make a dyslexic person learn in a way that is inappropriate for them, that is, if you don't understand their gifts and use those, then language is learnt in a muddle and becomes non-automatic. So I have no problem with dyslexia both being a disability that has been acquired through inappropriate learning and it's because of gifts that are not being appreciated.
D: Yes. But, some dyslexic people get the false impression that, when it is determined that they are dyslexic therefore they must be gifted in some other way; and they can be disappointed.
G: Erm, well -
D: I mean, everyone's got relative strengths, relative strengths and weaknesses, but that's not the same as being gifted in some way.
G: No. It isn't.
D: Or automatically having a brilliant three-dimensional imaging ability.
G: No. I have no visual three-dimensional capacity at all.
D: No, but there is this idea around that if you are dyslexic you must have that somewhere -
G: Yeah.
D: - and you've only got to discover it.
G: Yes. No, I don't think that's true.

'Campaigners'

Lance

C: Starting from the second year, I've started to have migraines. I think that's probably the stress of the campaign, and also the stress caused by people at University not giving me the support and facilities, and me running around, and..... I have to admit at times I've also been rather depressed etc about the situation. I'd say, one thing if you're going to set up a dyslexic unit, one thing you need is a trained counsellor.
D: Yes, absolutely. There's a counselling service though, isn't there, the sort of general one?
C: There is, yes, but I've never used it, for the simple reason I don't know how good it is, and also since I've worked with people, I feel very awkward going and saying 'can you counsel me', because I'd probably be going and seeing them and trying to improve the facilities etc. So I set up a Dyslexic Society, really for other people that are dyslexic. Unfortunately, I haven't yet found - I'm probably going to be meeting those people, so I'm in a situation where -
D: Yes, you'd rather meet them as that than as a client. Yes, OK. So, you call it the Dyslexia Society?
C: The Student Dyslexia Society.
D: How many members have you got?
C: Um, on the books we had about um 18 or so. We've had the problem of giving information. People come to the meetings and say 'we think we might be dyslexic, what can you do?' I give them the list of facilities, money etc. They don't join - they just toddle off and use the information etc. So the Society's.... Originally I set it up at (the other University in the city) and this place (i.e. Burtonforth). The one at (the other University) has just stagnated, because basically people here were wanting to help and do things, but at the other place basically they're just wanting the information without doing any of the work. I think any organisation supporting dyslexics probably comes across that situation. You need the support groups, I think it's important. I think I learnt more from the support of having a group of dyslexic people around me. I was suffering from migraines - I don't know if they were connected to dyslexia. The migraines might have been - I might be allergic to certain colours, like on the computer screen. I've done some reading around dyslexia , and I've heard about the coloured specs. And there are other things: shared feelings and problems at school.
D: Yes. What do you do at the meetings, then?
C: Basically it was a group of dyslexics talking, also giving advice. It was meant to be more, but it never got to that stage, because basically I just didn't have the time to run it singly, and I'm now hopefully going to use whatever information I've got on this dissertation, to try and persuade for some money to get a full-time officer to run those things and the likes.
Mel (1)

D: Yes. So, yeah, you've said a lot of things that show that you know, you know yourself pretty well. About your character, your personality and your cognitive style.

M: Some of it is because of what I want to do; I'm consciously assessing what I do and relating it to other dyslexics. Having dyslexic nieces, you tend to be aware of where we're similar, where we're different, and how completely different you can be, while still being dyslexic.

D: Yes, sure. But dyslexia is obviously - it's a very central thing in your life, isn't it.

M: Yes.

D: You want your work to be focused around it in future?

M: I think I quite like being dyslexic. I think it doesn't bother me to a point where I - I actually found it odd being in a module that was all dyslexics, and eventually I think came to the conclusion that I rather liked having the excuse of doing things differently because I was dyslexic (laughs). But I found a room full of them was rather off-putting. Did find it a little odd being also addressed as a group: 'dyslexics find this, dyslexics find that', and by the third week, I was sick of being told 'dyslexics anything'. We would have done sort of fine!

Mel (2)

M: But I'm not even convinced that dyslexia is going to stay as dyslexia.

D: Ah, yes.

M: Um, delving into the psychology, I fear is sort of - they won't let you use it as a sort of blanket term, rather split it down 'acquired dyslexia' and 'developmental dyslexia'. If you start doing that, which I think is reasonable because you bring in confusions and other effects that might be due to, say, accidents, I'm then not sure that within developmental dyslexia, how much of a blanket term it's become to cover a family of problems perhaps, rather than being uniformly just 'dyslexia'.

D: It is, isn't it.

M: Mmm. I feel that - probably there are some quite distinct sub-groups.

D: Yeah.

M: But, I don't know whether it would be beneficial - because is the point of the exercise to say that we ought to be more accepting of different styles, so does it really matter that there's three styles or four styles or five styles within dyslexia, do you need to do it?

D: Right, yeah.

M: If you're going to teach everybody, right-brained and left-brained, a sort of approach that you call on all the senses, make it multi-media, is that something that works exclusively, just for dyslexics, or isn't it a thing which everybody does better with? So in a way, if you dealt with that, would you be making the issue of being dyslexic almost redundant?
Aarti

A: The lecturers are very good, they're always asking how I'm getting on, if I am struggling in my work, they will say, 'look, do you need an extension?' Stuff like that.

D: Good. Are they doing that as a result of B____'s (EP) report being circulated, or were they doing it anyway?

A: They're doing it as a result of B____'s report.

D: Great. So, as soon as their awareness was raised a small amount, they started responding?

A: Yeah.

D: Well, that's very good. So, the other things you've got - you've got extra time in the library, have you? Can you have books out for longer?

A: Yes, I can. But I've had to go in and ask for that; it should be automatically on the record.

D: Yes.

A: Things like that should automatically be on your record, so when you enrol, it says dyslexia, so when you enrol for your library card, they get the information. It should be on the card when you write it down: 'are you dyslexic?'. Because we need extra time. There are days when I go in and they say 'fines', and I say 'but I've been allowed to have it for longer'.

D: They don't all know.

A: No. And just silly things, like er, I wanted to go into the IT suite, you know, and I couldn't do something on the computer, so I went over to him and I said, 'look, you know I'm dyslexic so I need to use the computer, but I don't know what to do, help!' and he goes, 'oh, there's a booklet over there, read it and that'll tell you what to do'. I've just said I'm dyslexic and he's told me to, he's just told me that it's written on the first page of the booklet! Now lucky for him, I can read, very well; what about if it's been someone who was a very very poor reader? For him to turn round and say, you know, for someone to say, 'look, I'm dyslexic, help', and he says 'go and read a book', was a bit pathetic.

D: Yes, yes. A lot more awareness needed.

A: Not just academic staff; I mean other University staff: I'm talking about the IT suite, the library, people at the offices; it needs to be made aware of.

D: Would you like the instructions for using the computer on a cassette? You could sit with a Walkman on in front of the thing, and a voice would say 'do this'-

A: Do that, do the other- that's what should be there. Or even come over and help, show me - I mean, I look at it once and I'll know what to do again.

Patrick

P: Well the placement is a year out in industry. Um, I went to Nuclear Electric, which in hindsight did do a lot for me, but also it was a big mistake because it was the wrong company. I went - well, no, it was right company, wrong department I went to work in. The thing about that, we had to produce monthly reports for the senior manager, that's the head of the whole department, and um I kept submitting it again and again and again, and then there was one of them I got sent back to me because of the English in it.

D: So it was the English rearing its head again?

P: Yeah. It was the - I was going 'hang on, what's wrong here?' And um -

D: What didn't they like about them? Was it the spelling?
P: Spelling, and the grammar, that was another thing, I got that back. So um I really did not like that when I got it back, so basic- that one was, I can remember that being rushed, and I didn’t have time to sort of put it through a spell-checker; that was basically, ‘God! Human’, and then every one was OK after that, I didn’t get any sent back, although there were probably still spelling mistakes in it. And um, I did that; that year was OK, and I had a placement report, and that was like War and Peace, it was ridiculously large. My placement tutor came up, and I gave it to her and said ‘look, can you have a read over this? Can you just check this over for me? You know, what I’ve done so far?’ And um, this -
D: Sorry to interrupt you - you’d written this placement report?
P: Yeah.
D: You had written a very long one?
P: I’d written a very long one.
D: Putting all your feelings about it?
P: Yeah, everything. It was everything I felt about my time there. Um, I gave the placement report to her, and um she came back, and was saying like er ‘yeah, I can - so you’ve got loads of spelling mistakes here, took me a long time’. I said ‘yeah, well’ - that’s when I told my placement tutor, who later on referred me to dyslexia, ‘well, I did get told once that I might be dyslexic’, and she basically agreed with me at that stage. But nothing was done at that stage. So I did that, um, I handed it in, and I thought, ‘yeah, I’ve got a good job in there’, I thought yeah, and it was like, the thing about it, there was reward for it, for the best one and so I thought, ‘well, I stand –’, I thought I’d done a good job. And like the guy that got it, I mean all he had was like he had flashy graphics in the middle of the thing, and it wasn’t one half the size that I’d done; I thought I’d done a really good piece of work, and I’d put a lot of research into it. I was - you know, I can remember I asked somebody from PR department to give me some stuff, stuff off them I put that in; I related it all, and I did tons of research work on it, and - yeah, I didn’t get any feedback on that, so I didn’t know whether it was, the English was that bad on it or not; I still don’t know. So I thought, ‘move on’. Yeah, the main thing was, again you moved on. And then, it was the final year, and we started the project, and the project was where the problems began. Um, the project was to do with the effectiveness of computers and the like - well, of software in Higher Education, and I decided to look at all aspects to do with using computers in education. Total packages you should teach, um, and, you know how you could use computing in teaching non- sort of like accounts and stuff like that. And um I decided to use a different department; I used the business school, because I knew about the business school because that’s where I did the previous degree, and I had friends there, so it was a double-edged sword. So um, that was where I put, I put an incredible amount of research in. Again, every single day was up and down from where I wa and that - sometimes two or three times a day, to arrange interviews with course leaders and different lecturers, to arrange questionnaires to be dumped out, to arrange collection. D: A lot of organisation.
P: So, I mean I was doing all this, and um the planning behind it went well, um, and um I submitted it, you know, submitted part of it, yeah I submitted it, and um I was in one day, during the break period, you know when you were revising, and A____ called me in and said ‘can you sit down, I want to say something to you’. I thought, ‘oh shit, what have I done wrong?’ And then, I got this spiel um: ‘well, you know, I know you’ve done a good job, and I want to see you get the good- the mark you deserve, that’s why I want you to get this um
assessment. So the first step is to get an interview’. So, I went off and er got an interview, and um the interview went OK and he said, ‘basically they’ll either reach a stage where they might have formed an assessment’, or basically I’d have to pay for it. So basically what happened was I got, I had that during the exams, the worry of whether I was going to have to, you know what was going to happen. My first two exams I cocked up basically because of that. It made me a lot more conscious; I was sort of in an exam, I was ner-, going ‘hang on, I’ve done this wrong, I’ve done that wrong’, and it did cock up the exams. And it was like after the second exam, I got a letter through, I got the assessment, the University was going to pay. So I went off, got the assessment -

D: When you saw B here?
P: That’s B - he put the letter in, and I thought well, I’m going to get a viva. Certainly going to have a look at it. Comes the day of the vivas er, I didn’t get one. I thought, ‘hang on, what’s going on here?’ Went in to get my results, got the results, got a 2:1. I thought ‘great’. Got the breakdown results, not so great! The two exam results: I got 50% in the first exam, I was expecting to get 60; I got 64 in the second exam which I cocked up. Um, previously, in the course-works, I got 84 and 72, so I should have got close to the 70s, so I wasn’t too happy about that. Then the project: 50. I went: ‘hang on’. This didn’t tally up; I go, ‘hang on, no, no, no’. I was expecting something 60 at least, the amount of work I put in. I go, ‘this is not right’, you know. I ran out, fuming and I slammed the door. You know, I can remember her saying ‘you got a good 2:1’, but I said ‘well that depends on your point of view’, and I slammed the door shut and left, because I was very sort of gutted. And um I was going to see- I was really mad, I thought, calm myself down, go and see the project supervisor, and she was out. I saw my moderator, and the moderator said ‘well your research work was good, nothing wrong, it was excellent, there was nothing wrong with it’, he said ‘it was your English was diabolical’. And he said ‘I’m sorry we put you through so much hassle’. And it ended up um, they weren’t going to bother pushing the case for the project, because I wasn’t going to move up a classification.

D: You feel it was because you were assessed too late?
P: It was too late. If I’d got assessed beforehand, I think I would have been more relaxed in the first two exams, I think I would have done better in them. Because I had that thing on my mind, it didn’t work out.

D: So, what should have- what should have been in place, in your opinion, for you to have been assessed earlier? How should it have been organised?
P: Um, really I think basically there should be some kind of um, when people come into Higher Education, there should be some kind of, maybe a test or something. Not an entrance exam; you know, you’re- you’ve got that place, you’ve got, you’ve got the A Levels, you’ve earned the right to get a place, but to say, this is basically just a little test to see if you’ve got dyslexia, just a simple test, just a screen, screen them, and then from there you can say well OK we’re going to make allowances for you, because people are still getting through the net, I think that’s it, and - you know, I’ve since then seen the project supervisor, and I get on well with her now. But at the time, I did have a bit of a grudge, and I realised it wasn’t my fault. It wasn’t her fault; it was just politics.
Appendix XVI: Sources of discourses of dyslexia in informants’ lives

Parents

Enid’s parents were both teachers, and her father was also dyslexic himself. They had consulted ‘a friend who was a psychiatrist’, who had suggested dyslexia. At first, dyslexia was presented to Enid as the reason why she had difficulty with spelling; it was a matter of memory weakness. She had been labelled as ‘lazy’ at school, but was helped to realise that her problems did not result from lack of intelligence. She referred several times to current memory difficulties during her interview, and remained a ‘patient’.

Phoebe also had a dyslexic parent, in this case her mother, from whom she received a rather more mixed message. Her mother had been refused admission to nursing training because of her dyslexia, which had been a great disappointment to her; Phoebe said that when she was a girl, her mother had been ‘quite negative’ about dyslexia. But whereas her mother was now self-confident, and believed that ‘to survive, we’ve just got to be different’, Phoebe said that she herself thought of dyslexia ‘only in academic terms’ and was thus a ‘student’.

Sally, on the other hand, referred to her mother’s support several times in her interview (‘It was my mum, all the way – always has been, and still is’). Like Enid, Sally was told as a child that dyslexia was the reason why she could not spell, although in her case ‘problems with sequencing’ were quoted as the root of it; like Phoebe, she was a ‘student’ in her view of dyslexia, referring to her second psychological assessment at the age of 17 which had stressed her high IQ and linked dyslexia to her ‘performance at school’.

Another supportive mother was Will’s, who read magazine articles about dyslexia and pressed her son’s school to have him assessed. Her reading had stressed the discrepancy between a dyslexic child’s intelligence and his/her achievement at school, and Will said of the other children at his primary school: ‘They knew I was
bright but I couldn’t sort of work’. Interviewed in his first year at University, Will was still firmly a ‘student’, telling me that ‘dyslexia only affects my academic life’.

Canadian Eliza’s parents were both not only supportive, but they also explained a great deal to their daughter from the start. They were both Doctors of medicine, who had Eliza assessed medically at first (when she was eight years old); when they found out about dyslexia, they read about it, took her for another assessment, and explained that ‘you have a very high IQ, you’re very smart, you just have to be taught in a different way’. This point of view is probably the source of Eliza’s willing acceptance of the hemispherist position advocated by the head of learning support at her University.

**Teachers**

The formation of Eliza’s image of dyslexia thus began when she was only eight years old. The same applied to Gary, whose class teacher recognised that he was dyslexic when he was seven. Gary seems to have been given an IQ/attainment view of dyslexia initially, as the need for assessment was explained to him (‘I was really quick at a lot of things, but my reading and my writing was really bad by comparison to everybody else in the class’). He was assessed, and a peripatetic support teacher came to school every week to work with him. However, a striking factor in Gary’s recollection of that teacher is his warmth towards her. He remained in her class for four years, and felt that she not only knew him well but was also aware of his abilities. He described himself as popular, and as regarding dyslexia as a difference about him, but one which affected only reading, writing and spelling. Such an image of it had remained with him; Gary was very clear about the fact that dyslexia was for him a purely academic matter, ‘a bit if an irritation’ but one that he could cope with.

Alison also heard an IQ/attainment discrepancy view of dyslexia at school, but she was at secondary school by the time this happened, and had also been aware of media coverage:

I knew that it was a reason for having bad English skills, yet still remaining quite bright at the same time. (...) I think teachers had
mentioned it in front of me and stuff, but um there’s always stuff in the media about it at different times.

Alison and Gary were both 20 years old when interviewed, and were therefore more likely to have come across dyslexia-aware schoolteachers than older respondents, as they started school in 1981 (see Chapter 4). There were six respondents who had reached University via Access courses, and all of them had worked with course tutors who were aware of dyslexia; in Peggy’s case, the first suggestion of it in her life had come from the tutor, who had broached the subject via a discussion of Peggy’s spelling. Access courses are designed for students who are motivated to go to University, but who have not achieved A Levels (DfES 2002); it is likely that the kind of characteristics currently known as dyslexia will have contributed to this state of affairs for some candidates. As well as making course tutors aware, this means that dyslexic students may influence each other as to their images of it. Fenella, Robert and Ron all met other people on their Access courses who identified themselves as dyslexic. Robert seems to have heard a medical view from the tutor (‘who began to explain to me what it was, and what the common symptoms of it were’), but when she introduced him to another dyslexic student, he realised that there were ‘many many things’ involved (such as ‘someone telling you to go left and you turn right (….) It was just little things like that really that suddenly began to click’).

Another kind of teacher who frequently has dealings with a dyslexic person is of course the learning support tutor, who may be the first teacher to state a model of dyslexia. In Stephen’s the case, this was the beginning of his ‘hemispherist’ view (‘like you’re born with it (….). You pop out with it, and you just have to deal with it’). His parents read about dyslexia, and told him of ‘theories about – hemispheres are larger (….). I’ve got really good spatial and visual skills’).

Lance’s learning support teacher at school had been dyslexic herself, and had probably sown the seed of his ‘campaigner’ view: ‘You can make it; you’re dyslexic, but you can get there’. Perhaps it is not surprising that, of those respondents who mentioned images received from learning support tutors, the majority were speaking of University tutors. Geraldine (who runs the learning
support at her University, as well as being a respondent herself) figured in several interviews, perhaps never so directly as in Eliza’s:

*Geraldine has injected this view that I love, that you’re dyslexic, and therefore you do things differently, and you do them in different ways, and you have your own ways of doing them, but you’ll get there in the end.*

Eliza also spoke of dyslexia as ‘an overall life thing’, which is a perfect encapsulation of the ‘hemispherist’ position. However, this response may be contrasted with that of Alice, who attended the same course run by Geraldine for dyslexic students, and remained firmly a ‘student’:

*It’s been invaluable in that I realised how much I do visualise, which I wasn’t aware of; and how useful concept mapping is, which I’d never heard of; and the use of colour, which I’d never used.*

Barton and Hamilton (1998:104-5) speak of dyslexia as ‘a cultural belief’, referring to the mutual support parents of dyslexic children find in local Dyslexia Associations. A similar experience of the empathy of fellow dyslexic people is sometimes felt by students who find that the University learning support tutor is herself dyslexic. Susan said of her first appointment:

*I shall never forget that day as long as I live, because just speaking to her, um, she seemed to be so aware of the difficulties I had.*

Susan then quoted the support tutor as saying:

"You know, it isn’t really a disability, as such, it’s just a different way your brain copes with things. It’s because we’re forcing it to do something it shouldn’t be doing."

Charles, another mature student in the same town as Susan, had seen the same support tutor and been told that, after identification, he would probably be able to look back at his previous experiences and understand them.

**Printed/broadcast information and the ideas of other students**

Uniquely among my informants, Geraldine was involved in delivering workshops on dyslexia. She spoke of agreeing with research into automaticity (Nicolson and Fawcett 1990) and working memory (McLoughlin, Fitzgibbon et al. 1994) in relation to her own experience of dyslexia. This cognitive reading had not
however made her a ‘patient’ or a ‘student’; Geraldine’s over-riding theme was her view, quoted above, that ‘the dyslexia is a disability – your thinking strengths are not’. She added: I have no problem with dyslexia both being a disability that has been acquired through inappropriate learning and it’s because of gifts that are not being appreciated’.

Alison had seen ‘stuff in the media about it at different times’ which seemed to have led her to the belief that dyslexia was ‘a reason for having bad English skills, yet still remaining quite bright at the same time’, a clear statement of the ‘student’ discourse. Peggy was a ‘patient’; Chapter 2 above indicated that much literature on dyslexia retains a medical discourse to this day, and Peggy had ‘gone through educational books and actually found a fair bit (about dyslexia), and a lot of it quite recent’. Eliza’s mother had also carried out book research, and Eliza remembered her saying that this helped her to understand why her daughter had various difficulties. In terms of discourses of dyslexia, the significance of this interview moment lies in the immediate context of Eliza’s statement (quoted in the previous section) that dyslexia is ‘an overall life thing:

.....now I sort of look at it as an overall life thing, but in those days it was very much not like – my Mum always said: ‘Oh now I understand why you couldn’t ride a bike......’

Eliza is not only aware that there are different discourses of dyslexia, but also that hers has changed.

Victoria and Stephen both remembered seeing or hearing about dyslexia in the media but not associating it with themselves at first. It is not surprising that they thought it applied to children, rather than adults; the majority of media references to dyslexia are still focused on children today.

**EPs**

By virtue of their status as experts, EPs feature among the influences (in terms of their images of dyslexia) affecting respondents who subscribe to every image. It is perhaps not surprising, in the light of the variety of stances taken by EPs (see Chapter 8), that no one image predominates in the cohort among those who referred to their Psychologists’ ideas.
To begin with a respondent who expressed warm acceptance of her Psychologist’s explanation: Peggy described hers as

*very good, very reassuring, very helpful, explained a lot. I learned more in that sort of hour and a half about dyslexia... (laughs)*

Peggy felt that the idea of her having a ‘smaller clipboard’ than non-dyslexic people made sense to her, as she was very aware of her memory weaknesses (which, as a result of her EP’s assessment, she thought were ‘a physiological thing’).

Adrian, on the other hand, had not felt that his Psychologist understood him. He had argued with her about the sequence of pictures in the picture arrangement test (Wechsler 1981), and said of her report: ‘You can say what you want but that doesn’t fit me’. Adrian had preferred the view of his group learning support tutor, who had created an atmosphere of mutual support among people whose ways of thinking were ‘different’. (He used that word several times when speaking of the group.)

Rachel was assessed when she was 16. Until that time, she had frequently doubted her own intelligence; when the EP told her she was ‘really intelligent’,

*it just made me feel a bit better because it was actual like, it sounds like a professional saying “you are OK.” And you are.*

This Psychologist had gone on to use similar words to those of Geraldine quoted above:

*It’s just the way you are. It’s not because you’ve been lazy or anything. It’s something you’re born with (...) You’re just different, you interpret information differently.*

Again, this is a basis for the hemispherist or cognitive style view.

Eliza had also been reassured by her Psychologist in respect of her intelligence; she had been told she was ‘very smart’, and ‘just ha(d) to be taught in a different way’. She too was a hemispherist, although in her case this image had come to her from others as well, including her parents and her first learning support teacher.
Sally, who took a 'student' view of dyslexia, recalled that her EP had reported clearly on her reading difficulties and recommended extra time in examinations as a result. The assessment session had 'made things a lot more clear in the end'.

Harry was also a 'student'. His view of dyslexia had been initiated by a fellow student, who had described his own literacy difficulties. After looking at a poster at University which contained spelling errors such as 'yuo' and the message: "If you can read this, maybe you are dyslexic," Harry had been assessed by a psychology lecturer. He had been impressed by the comparison between his spelling ability and 'what you'd expect an undergraduate to be at'; the report had set his scores out in terms of 'standard deviations away from the norm', and the degree of difference highlighted by this had worried him. However, the report went on to assure Harry that

None of the tests that I have given indicates that you lack the ability
to perform well in your studies at _________ University.

The definition of dyslexia given to Harry in the psychologist's report ('your reading and spelling ability is out of step with your general intellectual level') is a discrepancy-based view, focusing on aspects of academic performance. Harry had received this report at the age of 26, a year before our interview; Bruce on the other hand had been assessed at the age of 16, and had had eight years to internalise the discrepancy image contained in his report:

He is almost five years retarded in spelling relative to his age and
even more so taking his superior intelligence into account.

Bruce described himself to me as 'intellectually (...) quite comfortably off, but um my language abilities aren't equivalent'.

Robert has been referred to above (under 'Teachers'), but he was also influenced by his EP. He had been assessed a year before our interviews, at the age of 29. Robert's report (based on the WAIS – Wechsler 1981) described him as having 'a pattern of profile fluctuation consistent with dyslexic disability', and went on to set out his strong areas as well as his weaknesses. Robert described the report as 'a big relief'; having been a successful architectural draftsman, he knew that he had strengths in terms of three-dimensional imagery and pictorial representation,
and yet had struggled for years with handwriting and spelling. His psychologist confirmed the 'hemispherist' view which he had already been developing.

Ron's experience was similar. Like Robert, he had worked in areas where his ability to work with three-dimensional imagery was an advantage; also like Robert, he had become aware of dyslexia through talking to a fellow Access student, and had initially explored the concept with an Access course tutor. Ron's reaction to his discussion with the psychologist shows how images of dyslexia cannot be regarded as discrete: after years of failure at school, he was delighted to discover that his scores on some WAIS sub-tests were above average even though his arithmetic and spelling scores were very low, and he was thus influenced by a 'comparer' element. However, unlike Robert, Ron was given an explanation of the sub-tests on the spot. Robert was sent a report which gave figures for Performance Scale IQ and Verbal Scale IQ, but as he said, 'I've got no reference point for it'.
Appendix XVII: Meares-Irlen syndrome

Meares (1980) noted that some dyslexic people reported visual disturbances when reading. Irlen (1989) found that these distortions could be relieved by the use of coloured plastic overlays. The problem is sometimes referred to as 'pattern glare', and arises most markedly when reading black text on white paper, because that is when the contrast between the two colours is most extreme. Research by Stein (2000) links the visual aspects of dyslexia with defects in the magnocellular pathways within the optical nervous system; Wilkins (1993) devised a test procedure for determining the best coloured overlay for an individual, which is now widely used by University learning support departments. As regards the prevalence of visual disturbances in dyslexic people, Lovegrove (1994:130) states that 'data reported in the last ten years show that many dyslexics have a particular visual deficit'. Hogben (1997) confirms this, as does the NWP report (Singleton ed. 1999:199), which proposes that 'visual discomfort is fairly common amongst students with dyslexia'. This is confirmed by my experience.

Thirteen informants (39%) referred to visual disturbances when reading. This percentage makes it more than 'fairly common'. Of these, half described it as 'blurring' of the print. Some (Rachel, Enid) blamed this on tiredness; they were inclined towards an 'everyone gets it at times' approach. Bruce ascribed it to boredom or lack of concentration, and Harry was stoical: 'you just have to wait for it to clear'. Bruce's eyes certainly did not function equally; it was hard to make eye contact with him, because only one eye seemed to be looking at me. Robert and Ron had both believed that everyone experienced the same visual symptoms, which often caused headaches; Robert explained that no one had told him 'well words don't move around like that on the page, they're static'. Ron described the experience as 'two images that vibrated'.

Robert was the only informant who reported having adopted his own coping strategy: wearing sunglasses to the architect's drawing office where he worked, in spite of being teased about it. Several others (Phoebe, Lisa, Stephen, Susan, Ron) used coloured overlays. Lisa said that this strategy 'lifts the words off the
page for me', and Ron remembered his first experience of an overlay: 'It was like somebody had switched the light on in the room'.

Another strategy reported by these informants was the use of coloured paper, to relieve the contrast between white paper and black ink. Charles was clear that he preferred light brown. Rachel set her PC to a dark blue background with white text.

Betty, Robert and Ron agreed that fluorescent light made their visual problems worse.

Since these interviews were carried out, I believe there is greater awareness of Meares-Irlen Syndrome in University learning support departments. The Wilkins Rate of Reading test (Wilkins 1993), which enables a tutor to guide a student towards the right coloured overlay for him/her, is inexpensive, and some Universities (such as De Montfort Leicester) give students an A4 overlay in the colour selected.

There are also increasing numbers of optometry practices which have what Wilkins calls an 'intuitive colorimeter' (Wilkins et al. 1992), a device which allows the practitioner to prescribe spectacles with lenses tinted to one of over 7000 shades.
Appendix XVIII: Conclusions of Riddick et al. (1997) and the present study

- "The accounts that our subjects give of their schooldays are their perceptions in retrospect and, as such, are shaped by the multiplicity of factors that shape our recall of the past." (page 160). This is true of the present study.
- It was the older subjects who spoke of humiliation by teachers and being labelled as lazy. This was sadly not the case with the present informants.
- Early identification as dyslexic is a 'protective factor'. This is confirmed by the present study, to the extent that most informants who were identified before admission to HE approached it in a confident manner (in particular those who had been assessed at their primary schools), and tended to regard dyslexia as affecting only their education-related experiences.
- Some teachers were very supportive. Including HE tutors, many informants also reported this.
- It was painful and difficult experiences which stood out most clearly. This applied to the present study.
- Sometimes the support offered was inappropriate. This also applied to the present study.
- Parental support can be an important protective factor. This was confirmed.
- Several subjects’ parents struggled with the school to have the nature of their difficulties recognised. This was also the case with the present informants.
- Parental education level, and subject’s age, were factors in differentiating between parents who provided support and those who did not. This was also found.
- School experiences continue to influence subjects’ university life. This was also found; Riddick et al refer to motivation to ‘show them’, anxiety, anger and poor self-esteem, all of which were evident among the present informants.
- "Nearly all at some point have been labelled (..) as stupid or lazy." (page 163). This was true of 9 informants called ‘lazy’ and 18 called ‘stupid’.
- "Many of them tell of the great relief that they felt when they were told that they were dyslexic and need no longer consider themselves to be unintelligent." (page 163). This was true of 10 informants.
• The dyslexic label allows subjects to understand their past experiences in a different light. This was also found.
• The label can be traded for support of various kinds. This was very clear.
• The label carries a stigma in the eyes of some others. This was felt by 8 informants, either in respect of peers, tutors or potential employers.
• "The concepts of dyslexia held by all these individual students are quite varied." (page 164). This was a very clear finding.
• They see it as something constitutional, and themselves as different. This was another very clear finding.
• "Some see it as purely a difficulty with literacy skills, others see it as far more pervasive." (page 165). This was another very clear finding. The first type resembles the ‘student’ discourse.
• "The range of difficulties, their patterns of development and degrees of severity vary enormously between individuals." (page 165). This was apparent.
• The "development of self-awareness and self-understanding" may enable some students to adopt a constructive approach, informing "their tutors and peers of their difficulties and searching for methods to improve their skills and to manage their difficulties" (page 173). This applied particularly to those who adopted the ‘student’ discourse.
• The reframing of experience (Gerber, Reiff et al. 1996) is evident in several subjects’ accounts. This was achieved more by the ‘hemispherists’, who were aware of their strengths.
• Personal assertiveness is a protective factor for some. This was true of the ‘campaigners’.

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**Notes:**
- John is an avid cyclist and runs a small business related to cycling equipment.
- He is a fan of classical music, particularly Beethoven and Mozart.
- John enjoys volunteering at a local animal shelter.
- He is a member of the local cycling club and often attends races.
- John is interested in learning more about renewable energy sources.
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