

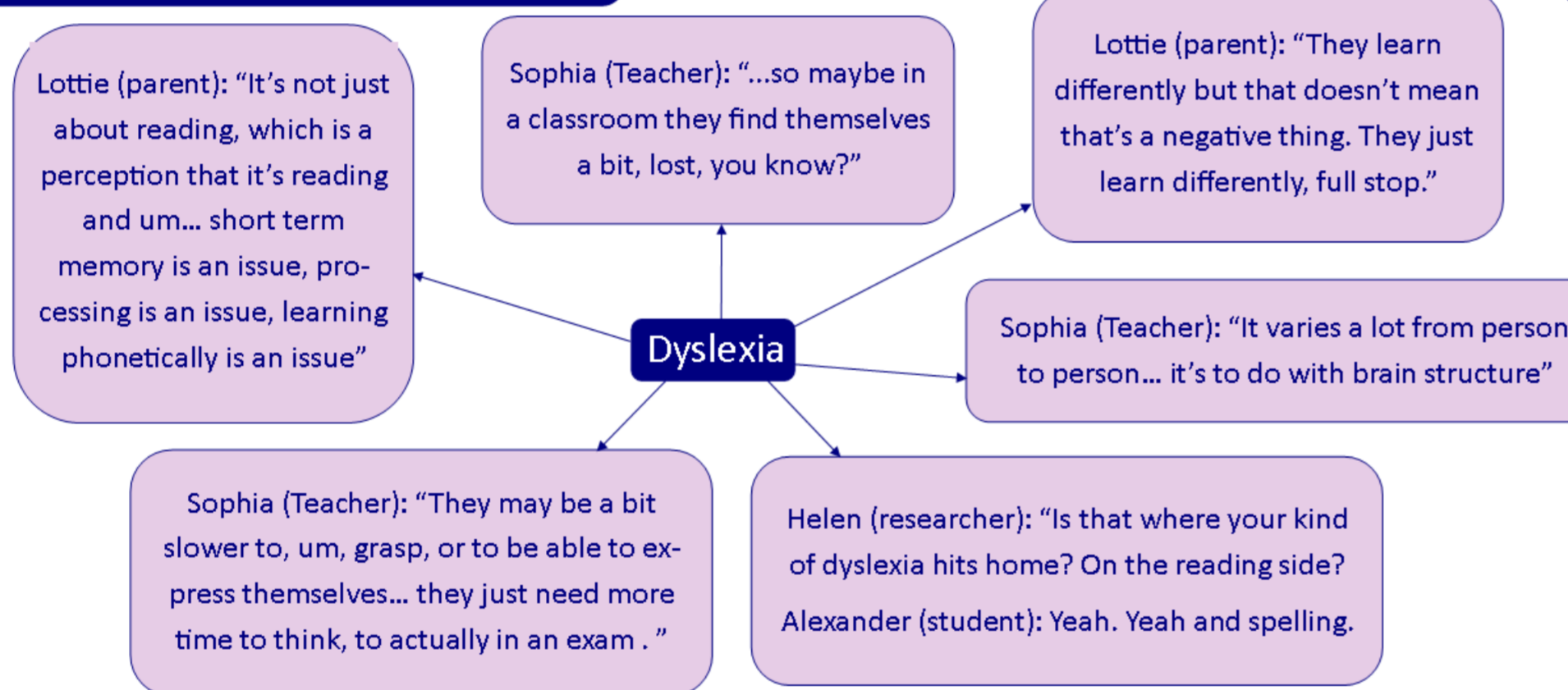
Dyslexia in the Classroom: Accessing Support by Helen Ross, University of Bath

Introduction

Here, I summarise interviews undertaken as part of a PhD project, with a parent, a student and a teacher at Hilltop View School during the Spring Term of 2015. The school is a successful, 11-18, state school with a low proportion of students eligible for free school meals or on the SEN register; it achieves 76% A*-C (inc. Maths and English) at KS4, 95% of students gain at least 2 A-levels, and 5.9 % of pupils listed as having a Statement of SEN or School Action Plus (DfE, 2015).

Young people, whose dyslexia was documented on the school's SEN register, and their families were identified by the school AEN department. The young people's needs varied from those with a Statement of SEN to those whose needs were met in the classroom. Teachers were approached by the AEN department and the researcher regarding participation. Participants were asked about their understandings and effects of dyslexia on young peoples' experiences of learning, social relationships and identity. These are analysed through a Bourdieusien framework, in which 'levels of interaction' (Jenkins, 2008) are used to structure analysis of inter- and intra- personal/institutional interactions which inform the identity and social position of young people with dyslexia.

What does dyslexia mean?

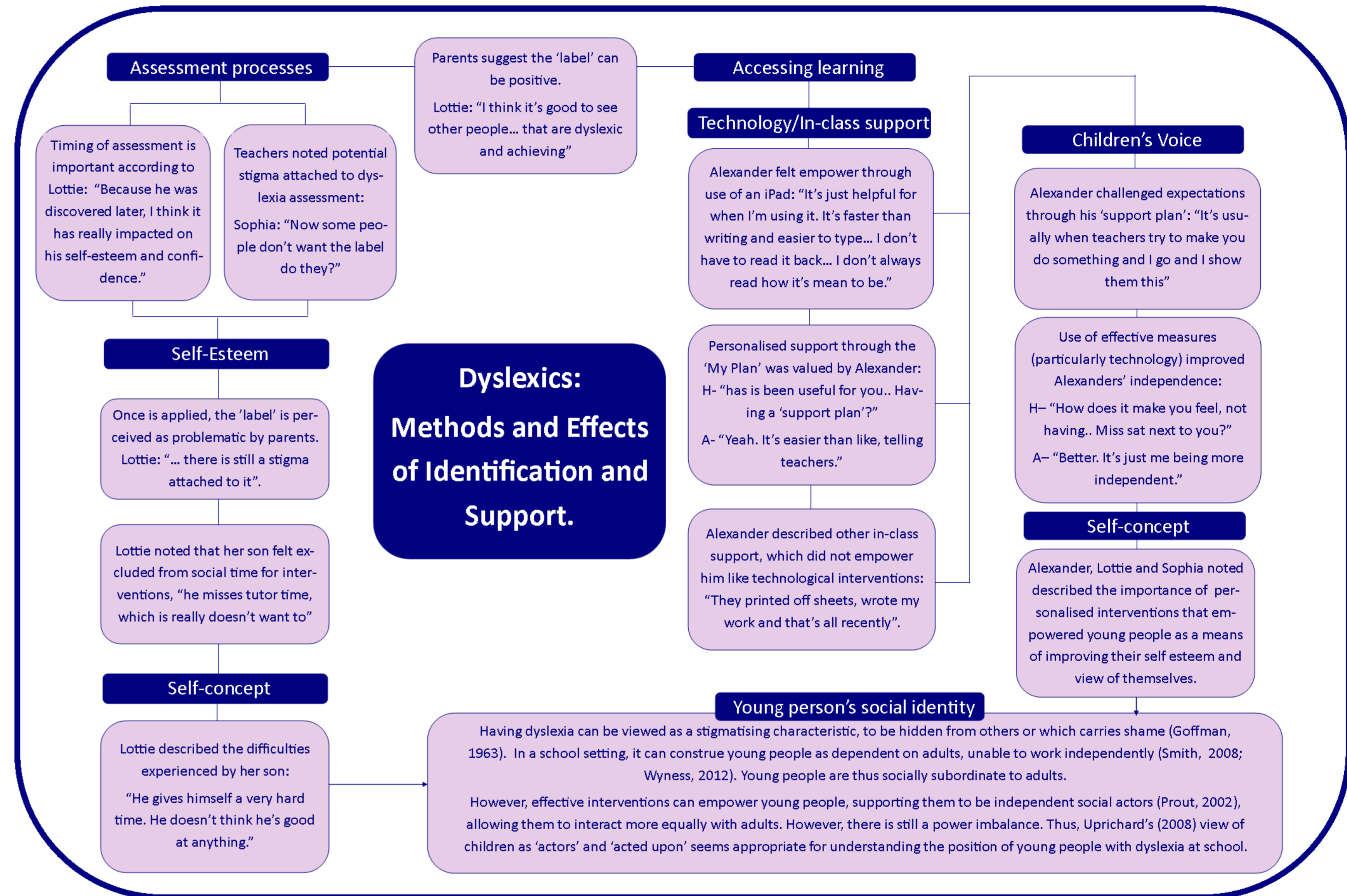
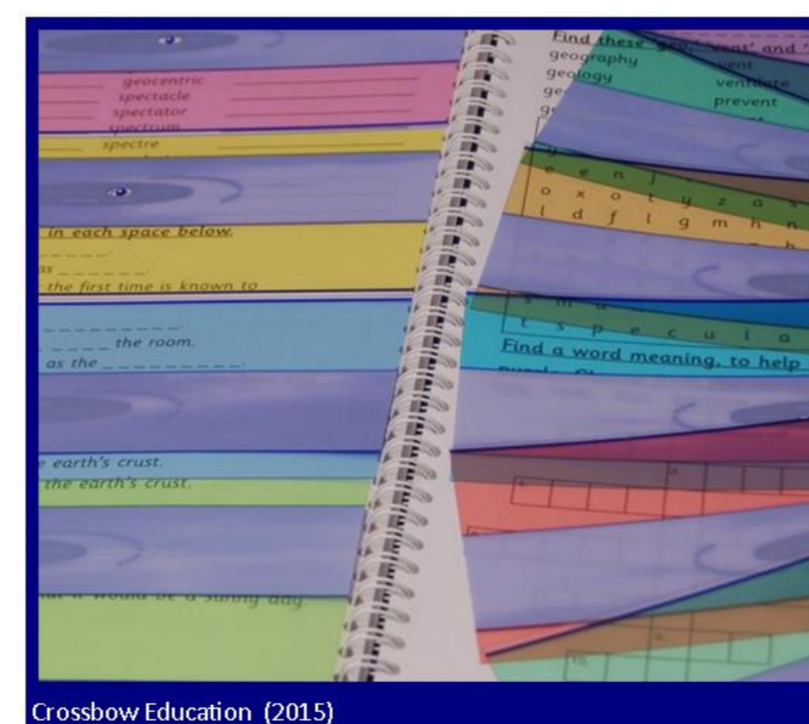


Dyslexia has a diverse range of characteristics, for both Lottie and Sophia. Their understandings of it align with Solvang's (2007) view, and allusion to phonological differences is also made by Snowling et al. (2003). At an individual level, Alexander has viewed himself as a young person with dyslexia, bad at spelling/reading, embodying that habitus in a classroom setting (Bourdieu, 1977; Smith-Lovin 2002).

Systemic Considerations

Dyslexia support is viewed as both problematic and successful by parents, teachers and young people. They were each asked what was problematic and how provision could be improved. Themes arising included the following:

- Lack of information:** In order to access the system, you have to have knowledge of it; in order to have knowledge of it, you have to be in it. This paradoxical position was described by Lottie, who had worked as a SenCo, "If I hadn't been in the system, the I wouldn't have known that you can pay to have them tested... I wouldn't have had enough information to make those informed choices".
- Young people's voice:** Alexander was broadly happy with the technology he had. However, he couldn't add 'apps' to the iPad; he had to go through school staff in order to be able to do so.
- Parents' voice:** Lottie felt that she would not have been listened to without the 'official' assessments for both of her children's dyslexia. She had to pay privately for them both.
- Lack of personalisation:** Lottie argued that her son's reports were not differentiated. She viewed them as produced, based on progress models originating in central government, forcing schools to adopt unrealistic expectations of young people, leading to her son's own sense of failure.
- Delays in identification:** Young people's dyslexia was not identified before the end of Key Stage 1 (year 2, aged 7) (gov.uk, 2015). Parents and teachers viewed this as detrimental to young people.
- Localised success:** Lottie noted that Hilltop View School was very good with the implementation of support for her son, "From a parent's point of view, Hilltop View School is very good".
- Moving Goalposts:** Threshold levels at which support is granted were viewed as inconsistent by parents, resulting in changeable support for young people.



Conclusions

- Parents felt that young accessing support for their children was dependent on knowledge of the system and whether they could pay for assessments in order to secure the 'diagnosis' of dyslexia. Powerlessness was felt by them, as they did not necessarily have the cultural/financial capital to secure the symbolic capital (assessment for dyslexia) required to access support for their children (Bourdieu, 1991).
- Teachers were viewed as 'clerks of the state' with the capacity to allocate official categories, and subsequently roles, to individuals as requiring additional support or not (Barker, 2012; Hatcher, 2011)
- Young people felt disempowered when unable to access the curriculum, embodying the habitus of the incomplete person, with both childhood and dyslexia contributing to this status (Smith, 2007; Wyness, 2012).
- National Government pupil progress expectations were applied at local level to young people with dyslexia. Their self-esteem was negatively impacted through unrealistic, 'normalised' expectations; failure and disengagement with school perpetuates lower social status for lower academic achievement
- Despite national-level constraints at local level, parents and children perceived Hilltop View School as removing barriers to learning, in particular with technology; thus young people were empowered, and less likely to adopt the role of 'acted-upon'. Rather they became active social agents within their setting (Proud, 2002). However, parents, young people and teachers were acutely aware of power differentials in their interactions, such that roles of 'parent', 'pupil' and 'teacher' were not systematically challenged. They were thus maintained (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970).

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