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''It takes me half a bottle of whisky to get through one of your assignments'': Exploring one teacher educators personal experiences of dyslexia'

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Abstract

This article uses a life history approach to explore personal experiences of dyslexia of one higher education lecturer and its impact on her professional identity. The informant is currently employed as a lecturer of initial teacher training in a UK university. She worked as a primary school teacher for over a decade prior to embarking on an academic career in teacher education. The informant draws on her own experiences as a pupil, teacher and lecturer and additionally she presents accounts of student teachers with dyslexia drawn from her current professional context.

Although the data is not generalisable, the account nevertheless illustrates the positive impact of the social model of disability for the informant and her students who had been identified as dyslexic during their in initial training as teachers. Additionally, the account also illustrates the ways in which teachers' personal experiences of dyslexia can shape professional identities in very positive ways. Implications for both teacher training and pedagogic approaches in schools to support learners with dyslexia are drawn out of the narrative.

Introduction

This paper explores ways in which personal experiences of dyslexia can impact on teacher professional identity. Using a life history approach, the paper draws out implications for both teacher training and pedagogic approaches to support learners with dyslexia in schools.

In the context of this study Dyslexia has been defined as:

> …a specific form of language impairment that affects the way in which the brain encodes the phonological features of spoken words. The core deficit is in phonological processing and stems from poorly specified phonological representations. Dyslexia specifically affects the development of reading and spelling skills but its effects can be modified through development leading to a variety of behavioural manifestations.
>
> (Snowling, 2000: 213-14)

In England the Equality Act (2010) identifies disability as one of the nine protected characteristics from direct and indirect discrimination and this has fundamental implications for all educational institutions. Schools, colleges and higher education institutions have to be able to demonstrate that adjustments have been made to enable students with disabilities to achieve their full educational potential and educational provision must be based on the principle of equality of opportunity for all learners. This significant piece of legislation supersedes the Disability Discrimination Act (2005).

The existence of disability discrimination legislation and equality legislation more generally is clearly a positive development. Such legislation has been influenced by the social model of disability which positions disability as a socially constructed phenomenon and usefully differentiates between disability and impairment. A fundamental assumption of the social model is that 'people with impairments are disabled/excluded by a society that is not organised in ways that take account of their needs' (Tregaskis, 2002: 458). Thus, disability is created by physical and social barriers in society which result in limitation or loss of opportunities to take part on an equal level with others (Barnes, 1991). At the time of its conception over thirty years ago the

social model challenged the prevailing medical model which viewed people with disabilities as victims and placed an onus on them to adapt and fit in with mainstream society (Barnes, 1992; Spence, 1992; Thomas, 1982). The medical model located the source of disability within the bodies of people with impairments. In contrast the social model necessitates a critical interrogation of the disabling barriers within society that prevents people with impairments from accessing educational, economic, social and cultural opportunities that are readily accessed by those without impairments.

The Labour government in England (1997-2010) invested heavily in improving initial teacher training in special educational needs and disability (SEND) and this aspect of initial training remains a current policy priority under the Coalition government. Many teacher training courses in England now provide student teachers with specific training on dyslexia as a result of the dissemination of national training resources (TDA, 2008), although it is pertinent to note that there is no statutory obligation for providers to offer this training. Additionally, continuing professional development for teachers in dyslexia has been a political focus in England for several years with the introduction of specific Master's accredited courses for practising teachers in dyslexia. Such developments are positive in terms of increasing the knowledge base of new and experienced teachers and increasing teacher confidence and empathy towards learners with dyslexia.

Within this policy context the Department for Education (DFE) has recently made it clear in the recently revised Code of Practice for special educational needs that standards in England are too low, especially for learners with special educational needs (DFE, 2014). The SEN Green Paper (DFE, 2011) explicitly stated that teachers need to have higher expectations of children with SEND and this is echoed in the new Code of Practice (DFE, 2014). In addition, the revised National Curriculum (DFE, 2013) now places a greater focus on the importance of pupils developing their knowledge and skills in spelling, grammar and punctuation. More challenging

age-related expectations have been identified in the new National Curriculum (DFE, 2013) and arguably this has significant implications for learners with dyslexia, some of whom will require specific adjustments in order to achieve these (DFE, 2013).

Key literature

Research has found that personal experiences of dyslexia can have a detrimental impact on pupils' self-concept (Humphrey and Mullins, 2002; 2002b). This can be explained partly by the way in which learners with dyslexia attribute success to external rather than internal factors, such as their own intelligence (Humphrey and Mullins, 2002). They demonstrate a poor internal locus of control and display characteristics of learned helplessness (Peterson, Maier and Seligman, 1993). In contrast, learners without dyslexia tend to demonstrate a strong sense of personal agency by blaming failure on internal factors, such as lack of interest or effort rather than lack of ability, which serves to protect their self-concept (Humphrey and Mullins, 2002).The link between learned helplessness and low self-concept has been identified in literature (Butkowsky and Willows, 1980; Humphrey, 2001) so developing within learners a strong sense of personal agency is essential in terms of protecting self-concept.

Teachers contribute significantly to pupils' self-concept and self-esteem (Humphrey, 2001; Humphrey and Mullins, 2002; Humphrey, 2003). Negative teacher attitudes towards pupils with dyslexia and teacher resistance to the concept of dyslexia are well established themes in several studies (Edwards, 1994; Humphrey, 2001; 2002; 2003; Humphrey and Mullins, 2002; Osmond, 1996; Glazzard 2010). Additionally, students with dyslexia can experience bullying, including verbal abuse from their peers (Humphrey, 2001; Glazzard, 2010).

The identification and subsequent 'ownership' of the dyslexia label is often viewed positively by those with dyslexia (Riddick, 1995; Glazzard, 2010) and this can have a positive impact on both

self-concept and self-esteem (Glazzard, 2010). The diagnosis often leads to the realisation that learners are not *stupid* or *thick* (Riddick, 1995: 463) and it can help them to understand their difficulties.

The research into dyslexia and self-esteem makes depressing reading. It is within this context that teachers with dyslexia can be agents of change in terms of advancing an agenda for educational inclusion. After all, they have personal experience of dyslexia and they understand the difficulties that their pupils are experiencing. However, Griffiths (2012) articulates the tensions associated with being a teacher with dyslexia:

> *...they are often seen as threats to standards and a burden, requiring extra work rather than a valuable resource to promote understanding and acceptance of disability in schools.*

> (Griffiths, 2012: 55)

This 'threat' to standards can deter many trainee teachers from disclosing their disability (Fuller et al, 2009) and the focus on high standards of literacy in schools raises questions about the suitability of teachers with dyslexia (Griffiths, 2012; Riddick, 2003; Riddick and English, 2006). There is an implicit assumption that teachers with dyslexia will not be able to effectively teach reading or writing (Griffiths, 2012; Beverton et al, 2008; Morgan and Burn, 2000; Riddick, 2000). However Griffiths (2012) argues that 'there is no indication that teachers and student teachers with dyslexia are any less competent than their non-disabled colleagues' (p.55).

Griffiths (2012) found that trainee teachers with dyslexia used a variety of adaptations to support them in the classroom, including the use of spell checkers and computers. Research by Burns and Bell (2010) has also demonstrated how teachers with dyslexia used a range of technological innovations to support their teaching. One trainee teacher in Griffiths study resorted to using word banks to help them to remember spellings (Griffiths, ibid) thus

demonstrating that personal experiences of dyslexia can force teachers to develop inclusive approaches in their teaching. These technological aids constitute examples of the social model in practice.

Research indicates that student teachers with dyslexia have empathy for children with learning difficulties (Burns and Bell, 2010; 2011) and that they automatically differentiate the activities that they provide for their pupils (Griffiths, 2012). They can draw on their personal experiences to understand how to more effectively support learners with special educational needs (Burns and Bell, 2010; Griffiths, 2012). They understand how their pupils learn and through this insight they are able to plan engaging and creative lessons to maximise pupil participation and achievement. This *can* make them, in this sense, more effective teachers than their non-disabled colleagues (Burns and Bell, 2010). Additionally, teachers with dyslexia are able to draw on their personal strengths, such as oral communication and visual strengths to enhance their teaching (Burns and Bell, 2011).

Despite these strengths student teachers with dyslexia can feel undervalued by mentors and colleagues and can be perceived as a threat to high standards (Riddick, 2001). Griffiths (2012) found that negative feedback from tutors and mentors had damaged the self-esteem of student teachers with dyslexia or caused some to abandon their dreams of becoming teachers. Negative feedback of this kind reflects a deficit victim blaming medical model which emphasises weaknesses rather than embracing and celebrating the strengths which dyslexic teachers and dyslexic trainees can bring to the profession (Griffiths, 2012).

The growth of the social model of disability has led to the view of disability as a socially constructed phenomenon caused by the failure of society to make adaptations and adjustments. Thus, people with impairments are penalised because they do not conform to mainstream expectations (Finklestein, 1980; Oliver, 1990) and a normalising society is responsible for their

exclusion. The social model draws a distinction between disability (social construct) and impairment (within body). Thus, the assumption of the model is that an impairment only becomes disabling if society fails to make adaptations to enable individuals to access goods and services. The disabling barriers within society can include physical, social, cultural, economic or attitudinal barriers and these can limit opportunities for people with impairments from reaching their full educational potential. The principles of the social model are now firmly embedded in equality legislation (for example, the Equality Act, 2010) which requires all educational institutions to make *reasonable adjustments* to enable learners with disabilities to achieve their full educational potential. However, the term itself is problematic because it is vague and therefore subject to interpretation. What constitutes '*reasonable'* can vary across institutions and even between individuals within one institution. Additionally, individuals identified with dyslexia may require different adjustments to enable them to achieve their full educational potential. Adjustments therefore need to be considered as *'reasonable'* or not in relation to the needs of the specific individuals to which they are applied.

Within the context of UK policy trainee teachers with dyslexia are entitled to additional time to enable them to complete the timed literacy and numeracy skills tests which are an essential requirement for qualification as a teacher. Teacher training providers and partnership schools are also legally required to make reasonable adjustments to school placements to enable trainees with dyslexia to successfully complete the school based elements of their training. The nature of the adjustments will vary according to the needs of individual students and should be negotiated between the student, school and training provider. Primary and secondary schools, further and higher education institutions may provide students with dyslexia specific access to technological aids to help them with reading, writing and planning work or access to learning mentors and academic skills tutors who provide specific tailored support.

Inclusion therefore demands a value commitment to the principles of the social model and more importantly the principle of equality of opportunity. This should not be confused with equality of provision and within an inclusive educational environment differential provision may be needed to enable all learners to have equality of opportunity. Such principles should by now be firmly embedded within schools, colleges and higher education institutions, and education providers that do not make reasonable adjustments are in breach of equality legislation.

However, at the same time as pursuing the principle of equality, the government in England continues to erect barriers which result in discrimination and limit equality of educational opportunity. The government has recently introduced changes to the QTS skills tests. These changes include a limit to the number of permitted re-takes to two and an increase in the pass mark. Such a move will potentially have disastrous consequences for trainee teachers with dyslexia who may struggle to pass the literacy test, thus effectively barring them from teaching. Research has suggested that these trainees have a great deal to offer to the teaching profession (Griffiths, 2012) Such moves do not demonstrate a political commitment to inclusion and diversity and instead simply emphasise that we live in a society which privileges those who are academically 'able'. However academic ability is defined on the basis of achievement of narrow performance indicators which can limit opportunities for both students and teachers with dyslexia.

The recent introduction of the National Curriculum orders (DFE, 2013) further demonstrates the government's refusal to celebrate diversity. The increased expectations for primary-aged children in literacy may serve to further engender a sense of failure amongst learners with dyslexia through the identification of standards that are for some may be unachievable.

Methodology

This study uses a life history approach to explore one teacher educator's personal experiences of dyslexia. This approach was deemed to be appropriate because it provided an opportunity to 'locate' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001: 17) the story within the changing contexts of time and space (Goodson and Sikes, *ibid*). Although studies of single individuals are rare in education, the focus is not on quantity of data but on the depth and richness of the data and the questions that the story raises.

The study used a purposive sample. The informant (Kitty) was selected because she was in her mid-thirties. This provided an opportunity for her to reflect back on the extent to which disability theory and legislation and her own experiences of dyslexia had influenced her own education, her identity as a primary school teacher and the lives of the student teachers she currently works with in higher education. Additionally, we wished to explore the extent to which personal experiences of dyslexia have shaped the professional identities of the student teachers.

The data were collected through digitally recording three relatively unstructured one hour interviews. The digital recordings were subsequently transcribed and the account was written using the transcripts. Each interview addressed one research question at a time and the research question was given to the informant as a starting point for the discussion.

We recognise that life history research has serious ethical implications. There was the likelihood that the research would 'touch on deeply personal, private and possibly painful matters' (Goodson and Sikes, ibid: 91) and this was made explicit to Kitty from the onset of the research. We agree with Goodson and Sikes (ibid) that promises of confidentiality and anonymity can only be tentative and thus, drawing on the work of Clough (2002) and Piper and Sikes (2010) we have fictionalised the data in places to protect the anonymity of the informant and the individuals that she talks about in her account.

In presenting Kitty's story we privilege data which is subjective and idiosyncratic. We believe that 'the social world is an interpreted world' (Altheide and Johnson, 1994: 489) and consequently the account will be variously interpreted by the readership depending on the particular perspectives they adopt. We also recognise that Kitty's story may not capture a true version of events as they were experienced. We are not interested in presenting truths. As life history researchers we are interested in how Kitty has made sense of her experiences rather than whether the account is factually correct.

We do not believe that researchers can claim neutrality in the conduct and presentation of their research. As Goodson and Sikes (2001) have pointed out the biographies, interests and backgrounds of the researchers inevitably shape any analysis which is made on the data. For the purposes of this study it is sufficient to acknowledge that as researchers we both share personal experiences of disability and that these experiences shaped our analysis of the data. Although the process of analysis usually involves fitting the data into a framework we agree with Goodson and Sikes (2001) that 'what constitutes a framework can be variously interpreted' (p.34) which places an onus on researchers to be explicit about the processes they adopted. In presenting a detailed account we wanted to capture what Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) refer to as catching 'the wholeness of individuals' (p.468). We have deliberately avoided more systematic approaches to data analysis because we want the account in many respects to speak for itself. However, we have drawn out of the data the pertinent points which we considered to be worthy of discussion. These were extracted from the life story to create an account which fitted the sequence of Kitty's life story.

Research questions

According to Griffiths (2012) '…empirical research relating to specific placement experiences and support to student teachers with dyslexia is lacking' (p.55). Additionally, Burns and Bell (2011) have stated that 'Although research into adult dyslexia has increased over the last decade it is only recently that researchers have begun to listen to the voices of dyslexic adults themselves' (p. 952). Given the paucity of research in this area this study sought to ascertain:

- What is the effect of personal experiences of dyslexia on teacher professional identity?
- What are student teachers personal experiences of school placements and how are these experiences influenced by their dyslexia?
- To what extent has the social model of disability facilitated equality of opportunity for the informant and the student teachers that she educates?

Kitty's account

Finding out

Kitty was studying at university when she was identified as dyslexic. She was training to be a primary school teacher. Her initial reaction was the feeling of being empowered and hope for an improved future. She felt that some things, which had always concerned her, were suddenly explained. For example, she was the only person in her family who was left handed. Her writing was always untidy and she had always struggled with spelling. This had always made her feel different. She felt that she finally understood the way she thought and that she would therefore be able to learn more efficiently. She was quietly confident that she could now put appropriate strategies in place to help her do this.

Kitty's first memories of school

Kitty loved her primary school experience, summing it up as '*wonderful*'. The account is presented below:

I had a great time at school. I think this is mainly because I was born and educated in the 1970s and 1980s when punctuation and spelling were not that important. If I had been educated now, I feel that I would not have had such a wonderful time. There now seems to be what only can be described as an obsession with correct written expression. One of my main memories is reading books by Rosemary Sutcliff. This fired my imagination and I can remember writing story after story, pages and pages long. These stories were really enjoyable to write and were seen as so good they were shown to students at a teacher training college. I wrote these stories with appalling spelling and very little punctuation. However, the teachers at school never damaged my feelings of self-worth. The streams of ideas that I documented were constantly praised and it gave me the sheer drive to produce more.

There were many teachers who inspired me along the way, but there was one that remains prominent within my mind. His name was Mr Jeggings. He always gave us exciting things to do. He used to ask us to write exciting historical stories about the Romans or the Vikings and he used to read my stories out to the rest of the class because he loved what I had written. He gave me so much confidence and it did not matter that I had made spelling mistakes. He loved my ideas and he praised me for having such a vivid imagination. That gave me so much confidence.

My secondary school experience

Kitty's experience of secondary was the opposite of what she had experienced at primary school:

"Go and stand in the cupboard, your spelling is so appalling that is the best place for you" said my Domestic Science teacher. The bubble created by primary school no longer surrounded me. The teachers at secondary school had very similar views to my father. This was when my confidence first plummeted. I feel that if a similar approach had been taken at primary school my life choices could have been extremely different. From this point on I hated Domestic Science and was adamant that this would not be a subject choice for my GCSE examinations. The comments made by this teacher and then several others, such as *"it takes me half a bottle of whisky to get through one of your assignments",* soon began to make me feel small I felt very self conscious about my difficulties with spelling, handwriting and punctuation. It felt like all of a sudden presentation was really important and it was something that I found extremely difficult. I would often look at work I had produced and remember thinking that it looked just as if a spider had crawled across the paper and died! This didn't help my self-worth at all, especially when I looked around at other girls in class and their handwriting was really neat. Slowly but surely my confidence was being battered out of my soul like an old fashioned rug hung over the washing line. The other children in my class also began to make comments. They often laughed at my work and this undermined my confidence.

Family life

My father was a 'perfectionist'. This often had a negative effect on my feelings of self worth. He often read my written work and 'tore strips off me'. This is something I feel I particularly struggled with and something that I still struggle with today. Although I am a great believer that

there comes a point in your life where you stop trying to please your parents and you do things for yourself, this is not an easy thing to do. I tried really hard in school but my written work was never good enough for him.

Enjoying school

At school I enjoyed anything that was creative or imaginative. I loved music, drama and art especially. I never realised at the time, but the writing part in any subject area would take me much longer than other people. Yet, this never stopped me from writing. I just had to spend copious amounts of time drafting and redrafting work. This did take away some of the enjoyment that I experienced during primary school when I could just write and write without a care for the spelling, punctuation or presentation.

I found examinations really difficult. I had the ideas, but struggled to 'get them down' on paper. My creative writing suffered tremendously, because I concentrated so hard on getting the spellings right. I often found myself restructuring sentences, using words I was confident to spell, rather than words I really wanted to use.

Identification

Being identified as dyslexic wasn't a problem for me. It was just what I like to call 'an added challenge'. I do think differently to other people, but surely this should be celebrated. This is who I am. Dyslexia is not a problem and it makes me really angry when people view this as a disability. It adds colour and interest to the world. I do think that people with dyslexia have to work harder, but then to be honest I don't know how hard other people have to work. It's just a different label slapped on people to describe the way they think. However, to say I have a

problem with the way I think is wrong. I would never blame not being able to achieve things on my dyslexia.

There are people in this world who do have things that really stop them from achieving and in my eyes dyslexia is not one of them. I can remember when I was teaching in a primary school, I had a child with a stump to her elbow and only three fingers on one hand. This child joined in everything, including abseiling and driving a quad bike. When you see children with such severe impairments, dyslexia is a small pebble dropped within an ocean of opportunity and colour.

Word processing is one thing that people take for granted, but I don't. The most basic word processors where not readily available until my second year of university in 1992, and then they were very expensive. Before this fabulous invention one of the main barriers to my learning was redrafting. I could easily say this was my most hated, time consuming way to spend hour upon hour of my life. I had a constant ache in my hand and a lump on my finger, which felt like the size of the world. Word processing is a strategy I now use daily. It has made spelling and juggling sentences much easier for me and many other people. The only difference is that because I have worked for many years without word processing, I appreciate it all the more. To say it is like gold dust would be not exaggeration. Although I do not view dyslexia as something that has prevented me from achieving my goals, I cannot help but think that if I hadn't had to spend copious amounts of time drafting and redrafting work, my qualifications could have been higher. Although this is only my opinion, I believe that having access to word processing earlier would have helped tremendously.

Working with student teachers with dyslexia

I now work with student teachers who have dyslexia. They have access to a wide range of technological inventions to help them with planning and drafting essays. Some of my students

also have access to a specialist tutor in dyslexia. Some of these students with dyslexia have made exceptional teachers. They are creative and inspiring in the classroom and they demonstrate a positive attitude towards children with special educational needs. They know how to make learning accessible. They are caring and have empathy for children who struggle and this is refreshing to see. I will tell you about a few of them.

James was one of those student teachers. He did not declare that he potentially had dyslexia when he applied for the course and neither did he disclose it at the interview. However, it was obvious that he had major difficulties with spelling. He had mastered the skill of reading but his spelling difficulties were persistent. After several weeks I suggested to James that he needed to make contact with the disability services in the University and request an assessment for dyslexia. James agreed and the assessment came back with a positive diagnosis. Neither I nor James was surprised by this. He told me that he had initially struggled to learn to read but that spelling had been a consistent problem. He struggled to plan his assignments and needed help with sorting out the structure and linking ideas together. He also struggled with personal organisation. Following the diagnosis James was given a personal learning and support plan which included access to specialist computer software to help him to plan and write assignments. He was also given access to a dyslexia trained tutor for weekly support. In the classroom James was brilliant. He was creative and rather than struggling with the teaching of early phonics and reading he excelled in these lessons. He was able to put his creativity to use by designing lessons that inspired children. He made sure that he used a range of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic approaches in his lessons so that each child was able to access the learning. He really cared about his pupils and when they struggled with reading or writing he knew exactly how to support them. However, I recall James being demoralised at the end of the course because he kept failing the literacy skills test. This is a test that all teachers in England need to pass before they qualify to become teachers. It was ironic because he was a brilliant

teacher of children in the early years and early primary phases. However, he simply could not grasp the rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation. After persisting James did eventually pass and he is now enjoying a very successful teaching career. I am so pleased that he did not give up because the teaching profession would have missed a great teacher.

Jasmin was identified as dyslexic during her second year of her teacher training course. She struggled with academic writing and writing essays was tedious. Following her diagnosis she started to use some mind mapping software provided to her through the Disability Services in the University. This software enabled her to plan, organise and structure her assignments more logically. She was an outstanding teacher. Her teaching was based on establishing positive relationships with her children and she was very creative. However, Jasmin's confidence plummeted during her a school placement when she inadvertently made several spelling mistakes on the board. Her mentor was highly critical of this and complained to the University. Jasmin had disclosed the fact that she had dyslexia to her mentor prior to starting the placement but no adjustments are made to help Jasmin to cope with the literacy levels of a high-ability class of six and seven year olds. The effect of this on Jasmin's confidence was profound. She suffered sleepless nights and she began to believe that she was a weak teacher. The University supported her through this and decided not to use that mentor again with students who had disabilities. Luckily Jasmin survived. She had a positive experience during her final placement and sheer determination to succeed in her academic work paid dividends.

Frances was identified as dyslexic during her final year of teacher training. She had two fantastic placements during her first and second years but the mentor during her final placement was incredibly 'picky'. The mentor was a perfectionist and she would not tolerate any mistakes from Frances. During one lesson the mentor humiliated Frances by telling her publicly in front of her pupils that she had made a spelling mistake on the board and that it was not acceptable. She slid her hand across the board to remove the incorrect spelling and this made Frances feel

very small. Frances got used to her mentor being critical about her planning and teaching. She was told that she would only ever be a satisfactory teacher and that she would never be outstanding. This had a devastating effect on her confidence. Her worksheets were criticised, along with her writing on the board. During one shared reading lesson the mentor stepped in and took over because she said that Frances was apparently not reading the story effectively. The problem was that Frances had not had time to prepare for reading the story. The mentor had asked her to read the book that morning. This caused Frances great stress and consequently she did not read the text to the best of her ability. She loved teaching art, dance and technology. However, she had very little opportunity to teach the subjects that she enjoyed. Frances eventually completed the placement but her confidence was rock bottom. At the end of the course she frequently questioned her motivations for teaching and her ability to teach. This was such a shame because she was lovely with the children. She was positive with them and she knew how to support them, especially those who had difficulties in their learning. She intuitively knew how to break the steps down to make the learning accessible.

Luke had already been identified as dyslexic when he started his teacher training course. He had a personal learning and support plan and he excelled through his first and second placements due to having supportive mentors. He had a passion for play-based active learning and he demonstrated genuine warmth and care towards his pupils. It was during his final placement that things started to go wrong. He had disclosed his disability to the school and he felt confident that his mentor would support him. However shortly after starting the placement she started to criticise his phonics lessons. She frequently told Luke that his knowledge of phonics was inadequate and that he was teaching the children incorrectly. She started to take over his phonics lessons and she disempowered him by making him feel that he was useless. Eventually, after weeks of stress, Luke gave up. He did not have the strength to fight it. He walked away from that school wondering if he would ever teach again. With the support of the

University Luke slowly regained his confidence and he decided to re-take the placement in a different school. Luke is now teaching and inspiring children through creative, active approaches to learning. It could so easily have been very different.

Professional identity

One of my biggest fears throughout my whole teaching career has been that I might make a public spelling mistake, especially in front of young children. This fear has eased with time and experience. I always ensured that my classroom was equipped really well to aid spelling. My confidence with this has dramatically increased over time. I always informed the children I taught that I found spelling quite 'tricky' and that I would often need help with this. I feel that this strategy worked really well. I often worked with the children looking words up in a dictionary. You cannot prepare for everything a child might say, especially within a shared writing situation with a group of very able eight year olds. I feel that dictionary skills are essential. As a result of my own problems I have always ensured that the children knew why we would use a dictionary in real life situations.

I am also much more aware of children who are displaying similar difficulties to those I experienced. I was able to identify these children and support them more effectively because I understood the problems they were experiencing. As a primary school teacher I understood the difficulties some of the children in my classes were experiencing, especially those children who could not read or write. I tried my very best to help them and give them self-belief. As a professional, I I look back and believe that there were many other children at my secondary school who experienced similar difficulties to me. These children also went unnoticed. I would really like to put my hand on my heart and say that these issues no longer exist, but I can't. Many parents have come to me for advice about dyslexia and asked for my opinions. I feel that

it is its very interesting that I still have many friends with young children who come to me and say *"do you think he or she is dyslexic? School doesn't know!"* Although I don't blame the schools or teachers, it is difficult to accept that in this day and age there is still such ignorance about dyslexia. Teachers don't know enough about the way brains work, how we process information, or how someone with dyslexia understands things.

Key Findings and discussion

Kitty's account of her own experiences of school demonstrates the significant influence of teachers' attitudes on her self-concept. This supports existing research which has emphasised that unfair treatment and negative attitudes of teachers can impact detrimentally on pupils' self-esteem (Edwards, 1994; Humphrey, 2001; Humphrey, 2002; Humphrey 2003; Humphrey and Mullins 2002).

The account illustrates the extent to which an over emphasis on the technical aspects of writing can limit creativity in the composition process. As Kitty reflected back on her experiences at primary school it became clear that her teachers had valued her creative ideas rather than focusing on the quality of her spelling, grammar and punctuation. In contrast Kitty's confidence in writing was impeded during her secondary education when her teachers began to focus on the technical aspects of writing rather than the quality of her ideas. In the 1970s Kitty's own primary education was not influenced by the National Curriculum or the standards agenda which were born out of the 1988 Education Reform Act. Her written work was valued for being creative and engaging and this motivated Kitty to write more.

Primary schools in England today are very different places to what they were in the 1970s and 1980s. For the last two decades education has operated within a discourse of performativity (Ball, 2003) which rewards academic achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. For

learners with dyslexia, this limited view of what constitutes 'achievement' may well reinforce a sense of failure and lead to learner disengagement. The revised National Curriculum (DFE, 2013) further emphasises a 'back to basics' approach and marginalises the broader curriculum which may be detrimental to learners with dyslexia. Drawing on Kitty's experiences it is possible that the current focus on grammar, spelling and punctuation in the revised National Curriculum could impact negatively on learners with dyslexia by privileging the technical aspects of writing over the composition process.

Throughout Kitty's own schooling she experienced negative comments from peers which affected her confidence. Again, this is consistent with findings from the literature (Humphrey and Mullins, 2002). The unrealistic expectations of her father served to reinforce within Kitty a sense of failure. Kitty's self-concept plummeted during her own secondary education as a result of comments made to her by teachers, peers and through the comparisons that Kitty made between herself and others.

Kitty's account illustrates the impact of the social model on her own life and the lives of the student teachers that she now educates. Tregaskis (2002) has argued that 'the social model of disability has been an emancipatory force in the lives of many disabled people' (p.457) and this was certainly the case for Kitty. The impact of technological developments such as word processing was significant for Kitty because it helped her with the technical aspects of writing composition. The student teachers that she had recently worked with had clearly benefitted from access to reasonable adjustments on campus such as access to dyslexia tutors and software to help them with planning and writing essays. Such adaptations had enabled these students to progress successfully through their academic course, thus demonstrating the positive impact of the social model and disability discrimination legislation on breaking down barriers to learning and achievement. The use of word processing had also enabled Kitty to carve out a successful academic career, thus demonstrating the powerful positive effects of the social model.

Strong themes emerge in Kitty's account about the student teachers that she now works with. She described them as creative, caring and empathic teachers who make good use of inclusive teaching strategies in their own teaching. This theme is consistent with findings from the academic literature (Burns and Bell, 2011) and such narratives indicate that personal experiences of dyslexia can have a marked positive effect on the professional identities of teachers. This theme is also evident in several other studies (Morgan and Rooney, 1997; Duquette, 2000; Riddick, 2003). However, the narratives of the student teachers in Kitty's account also illustrate the disparity between their university-based course and their experiences on school placements and this is consistent with the findings of Griffiths (2012). Whilst it is clear that the University had provided the student teachers with a range of adaptations to support them in achieving their potential there is a clear sense that the support mechanisms were not always evident during school placements. Frances' mentor placed a limit on what she felt that Frances could achieve. Luke was criticised for his phonics teaching. Given that he had dyslexia, it is unsurprising that Luke may have struggled with teaching this aspect of the curriculum. The sense of humiliation that Jasmin experienced clearly had a profoundly negative impact on her self-concept. The narratives of these student teachers demonstrate that student teachers with dyslexia are often perceived in ways which disempower them. Despite having many positive qualities, including their creativity and empathy, their mentors evaluated their effectiveness on the basis of their literacy skills.

Such accounts illustrate that schools may have not fully embraced the principles of inclusion for all members of the school community, even though schools may have developed inclusive teaching approaches for the learners they educate. However, inclusion necessitates a whole school commitment to inclusive principles for all members of that community. In short, it represents the ability to respond to diversity (Azzopardi, 2009). The teacher mentors in these narratives illustrate that no consideration had been given to how the student teachers could

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have been supported through their placements. The University had been proactive in embracing the social model to support the student teachers with the academic aspects of their courses. In contrast, the schools had not considered how to support these students during placements to help them to become more effective teachers. Such narratives illustrate how teachers can perceive their colleagues with dyslexia as a threat to high standards rather than considering the strengths they can bring to the profession (Griffiths, 2011). Such discriminatory attitudes reflect a deficit approach and this can negatively impact on teachers' self-concepts and their self-esteem. Inclusion is about a deep culture of acceptance which is embedded through the fabric of daily life in the school (Corbett and Slee, 2000) within a school which focuses on celebrating disability, breaking down barriers and raising achievement. Schools that do not extend inclusion to their staff, parents or community are not inclusive schools.

Kitty's 'policy' of being honest about her own problems with literacy is characteristic of teachers in other studies (Griffiths, 2012). Her determination to teach children self-help strategies helped to facilitate a sense of agency amongst her pupils. This characteristic is also evident in the literature (Griffiths, 2012).

Kitty's refusal to view dyslexia as a disability could reflect the fact that she was identified with mild dyslexia. Had her dyslexia been more severe it is questionable whether she would have held this perspective. However, Kitty's viewpoint clearly illustrates that she dyslexia as a positive aspect of her professional identity. She recognised her many strengths and dyslexia had shaped her identity as an educator in very positive ways. She was committed to inclusive principles, she was a caring and empathic educator and these characteristic were also reflected in the accounts of the student teachers that she had worked with.

Implications

Kitty's account of her own experiences of school demonstrates the significance of negative teacher attitude and its detrimental impact of self-concept and this resonates with previous research (Glazzard, 2010). It is important that teachers embrace an 'affirmation model of disability' (Shakespeare and Watson, 2002; Swain and French, 2000) in which disability is viewed as a positive and celebratory aspect of the disabled identity, thus challenging presumptions of 'normality' (Griffiths, 2012). However, given the discourse of performativity which is prevalent throughout the education system this can present considerable challenges for teachers who are responsible for enabling pupils to reach age-related normative standards. However, despite this teachers still do have considerable agency about their own professional practice and should draw upon pupils' strengths and talents to engender within their learners a positive sense of self.

The experiences of the student teachers during professional teaching placements in Kitty's account raise several implications for the development of teacher education practice. Given that research indicates that schools may be reluctant to accept student teachers with disabilities (Beverton et al, 2008) or perceive them as having a detrimental impact on standards (Duquette, 2000; Riddick, 2003) it is important to acknowledge the positive impact that trainees with dyslexia can have on pupils and schools.

Griffiths (2012) emphasises the importance of developing effective communication between all parties involved in planning school placements, providing proactive and flexible support to student teachers during placements and placing the student teacher at the centre of any discussions about what might constitute reasonable adjustments. Placement experiences for student teachers with dyslexia need to be carefully planned and monitored (Bassey, 1999). Schools and teacher training providers would benefit from more collaboration, particularly during

the planning of specific placements when reasonable adjustments are being identified. There are also important implications for the training of school-based mentors. Kitty's accounts of both Frances' and Jasmin's experiences serve to demonstrate that the mentors could have benefitted from more awareness raising of disability. Additionally, providers could be more proactive in terms of highlighting to schools the potential benefits of accepting trainee teachers with dyslexia. Kitty's account evidences some of these benefits and this resonates with existing literature (Burns and Bell, 2010; 2011).

Conclusions

Kitty's account raises questions about the extent to which the curriculum and its associated assessment systems serve to emphasise the technical aspects of writing at the expense of creative composition. The performative culture (Ball, 2003) which pervades education and the current focus on a 'back to basics' approach (DFE, 2013) potentially have serious negative implications for students with dyslexia who may be unable to achieve the standards which have been set. However, within a standards driven agenda, educators may feel they have limited room for manoeuvre but to focus on the priority areas of the curriculum which are measured (reading, writing and mathematics) at the expense of the broader curriculum which offers potential for engaging learners with dyslexia.

Kitty's account illustrates powerfully how student teachers with dyslexia can be marginalised by the discourse of performativity which surrounds teaching. These trainees bring many benefits to the profession but there is danger that they are viewed in deficit ways by their teaching colleagues and that they are seen as a threat to the standards which schools aim to achieve (Griffiths, 2012). It is essential that providers of initial teacher training work more closely with their schools in the design and delivery of school placements. This will enable student teachers

with dyslexia to thrive during periods of professional practice. Additionally, schools may need to consider how teacher and student teachers are deployed to enable them to teach to their strengths.

Kitty's account illustrates the positive impact of technological innovations on her own career and on her students' progress throughout an academic course of higher education. The narratives in this account illustrate how the social model has eradicated potential barriers to academic achievement. However, the narratives of the student teachers illustrate that the principles of the social model are not firmly embedded within schools for the benefit of the whole school community. Schools may have developed inclusive practices for their learners but these do not always extend across all members of the school community. This demonstrates that there is not always a cultural change within a school which celebrates diversity and challenges discrimination. Schools where inclusive values only extend to pupils but do not reach staff, parents or members of the community are not inclusive schools.

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