RESEARCH

‘I’m Dyslexic but What Does That Even Mean?: Young People’s Experiences of Dyslexia Support Interventions in Mainstream Classrooms

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In England, under the Children and Families Act 2014, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice: 0–25 years, the needs of most young people with SEND are expected to be met within the mainstream classroom. A large proportion of young people with SEND have dyslexia or another specific learning difficulty. In this study, the experiences of young people with dyslexia at a mainstream secondary school in south-west England were studied during the first stages of the implementation of this framework via data from observations, focus groups and interviews involving nine young people aged 11–14. Through a Bourdieu-informed ethnography underpinned by Jenkins’ ‘Orders of Interaction,’ it was found that young people’s conceptualisation of their own dyslexia underpinned their interactions with others but was also influenced by those interactions. Young people’s interactions and ‘agentic capacity’ was limited by their status as ‘children’ within the field of education.

Keywords: Dyslexia; inclusion; SEND; children’s voice; qualitative research

Introduction
Specific learning difficulties, of which dyslexia is one, are a common occurrence in mainstream classrooms in English schools. In January 2020, 14.6% of students with documented ‘Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)-Support’ needs had specific learning difficulties (UK Government 2020). There are no separate records as to what precise need these students have. However, it is likely that many of them have dyslexia, given that it is estimated that up to ten percent of the population is dyslexic (BDA Undated). In light of the Children and Families Act 2014 and related Code of Practice (DfE and DfH 2015), this study explores the experiences of young people with dyslexia, specifically focussing on their views of their own dyslexia, how it affects their interactions with peers, teachers/educators and their families, and how they can engage with decision-making relating to their own provision. The study draws on empirical data constructed through observation, focus groups and 1:1 interviews over a five month period. Data was then analysed using Jenkins’ (2008) ‘levels of interaction,’ underpinned by Bourdieu’s principles of habitus, field and practice.

The paper firstly outlines the context of dyslexia within the English mainstream school setting. An overview of previous literature relating to young people’s own views of their dyslexia is given. How young people are conceptualised and their identity formed are described, before the method, data construction and analysis are described. Results of the study, with attention to each of Jenkins’ (2008) ‘levels of interaction’ are presented and discussed in relation to extant literature, as well as the current policy-content. Finally, conclusions are reached, with implications and key points being drawn out.

Dyslexia in Context
The ontology of disability is crucial in understanding individuals’ experiences of it. Dyslexia is a contested phenomenon, with no unified definition or agreed manifestation of ‘symptoms’ (Frith 1999). Frith conceptualises dyslexia as a syndrome, manifesting tangible cognitive and behavioural patterns with biological root causes. Hughes (2009) suggests that a bio-social model of disability allows for individuals to become ‘partners’ in development of intervention plans and decision-making processes. Considering the Children and Families Act 2014, where young people and their families are expected to participate in decision-making processes, a biosocial model of dyslexia allows for holistic consideration of individuals’ social experiences and biological impairments. However, to contextualise young people’s experiences within this paper, it is also important to understand from previous work how young people have been found to view their own dyslexia. As such in this section, a brief review of previous work in that vein is outlined.
Young people and their dyslexia
While diagnosing dyslexia and or making referrals for an assessment are outside of the scope of this study, understanding previous work relating to young people’s experiences of dyslexia is vital.

MacDonald (2012) views bio-social conceptualisation of dyslexia as a powerful tool. He states that this model of dyslexia considers individuals’ dyslexia within a social context through their lived experiences, whilst acknowledging existence of an underlying impairment. Riddick (2001) also highlights the strength of a bio-social model of dyslexia when exploring how schools and the wider education system can exacerbate dyslexia. Therefore, in this paper, dyslexia is considered bio-socially and young people’s own understandings and conceptualisations of dyslexia are sought.

Me, Myself and I- young people’s understandings of dyslexia
Some research has explored young people’s experiences, sense-making and relationships with their own dyslexia through both quantitative and qualitative paradigms. A recurring theme in this research is the effect of labelling on young people: do they benefit from being labelled as dyslexic, or does it negatively impact on them? In 2010, Riddick argued that whether or not a child has a ‘label’ attached to their difficulties makes little difference to their embodied classroom role. She believes that in attributing a child’s difficulties to dyslexia, the child is empowered to better understand characteristics they possess. Other work by Gibby-Leversuch et al. (2019) echoes Riddick’s (2010) view that a label can be emancipatory. However, Solvang (2007) argues that although a diagnosis may help young people understand their difficulties, it can potentially be a source of oppression for them; they are pathologised, their condition ‘treated’ and ‘remediation’ of their difficulties sought. Key to young people understanding their dyslexia positively, however, was its framing through positive role models, teacher/educator knowledge of it and high quality explanations of the implications of dyslexia to those young people. How young people feel about their dyslexia diagnosis is connected to their feelings about learning and it impacts on their relationships with others (Gibby-Leversuch 2019; Riddick 2010).

Relationships through dyslexia
Whether young people’s relationships with others are negatively impacted by dyslexia is contested. Gunnel Ingesson (2007) found that most young people reported that their dyslexia did not negatively impact on their relationships with their peers. However, they did report that many young people had been bullied due to their difficulties with literacy, which had in turn negatively affected their self-esteem. However, Gibby-Leversuch et al. (2019) report that young people’s relationships were influenced both positively and negatively by their dyslexia. Particularly influential within relationships was how young people conceptualise their own dyslexia. Their review found within several studies the importance of relationships in the sense-making process relating to dyslexia and the mutual importance of relationships in how young people make-sense of their dyslexia. Teachers’ understandings, empathy and pedagogy were crucial in supporting positive experiences for young people with dyslexia, as was early identification and openness with their peers. Kelly (2016) found that young people sought support from those who had experiential knowledge of dyslexia and the difficulties they faced. We can see then, that framing of dyslexia underpins young people’s relationships, and that relationships underpin how dyslexia is understood by young people.

My place in the world- dyslexia’s influences on social roles
Kelly (2016) found that young people with dyslexia may not be best placed to advocate for themselves. He believes that young people should be taught how to engage in decision-making processes and to be their own best advocates. However, to do so, young people need to have positive relationships with those in their social network so that they are empowered to enact personal agency, according to Kelly (2006). Gunnel Ingesson (2007) found that dyslexia had a large effect on more than 70% of young people’s academic outcomes; they had chosen non-academic pathways, rather focussing on practical routes. This echoes conclusions drawn by Gibby-Leversuch et al. (2019); many studies found that those with dyslexia tended to view themselves poorly academically, even when their attainment was in line with their peers. Thus, where individuals have dyslexia it is likely that their position in their social network is influenced by it, through their own self-concept and by their relationships with others.

Conceptualising ‘Young People’ and their identity
Careful conceptualisation of ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ is vital to understanding their complex position within policy. In this section I discuss different theories of childhood. I then highlight the importance of considering children as both competent social actors and subject to external structures.

Childhood in this Study
Prout’s (2000) ‘New Paradigm of Childhood,’ where young people are capable social agents contrasts with the Victorian concept of the ‘incapacitated child,’ unable to enact their own agency as described by Hendrick (2002). In conceptualising children as capable social agents, Prout (2000) and Hallett and Prout (2003) create social space for children’s voices to be heard. However, this work does not consider structural effects or factors such as ‘age’ which constrain young
people's agency. Wyness' (2012) believes that effects of such structures must be considered when researching young people's experiences. Drawing upon Uprichard's (2008) conceptualisation of young people concurrently as 'beings' and 'becomings,' both individual agency and external structures affecting children and young people will be considered in this study, to gain holistic understanding of young people's experiences of their dyslexia.

Understanding Identity?

The development of identity, both collective and individual, has been subject to much inquiry. A significant proportion of this work links identity to both structural and agentic factors (Bourdieu 1977; Goffman, 1963; Jenkins 2008).

Jenkins (2008) asserts that we cannot access the brain to determine whether an individual has a 'real self,' thus the underlying ontology of 'self' cannot be determined. However, the notion of selectively projected 'selves' links well to Bourdieu's (1989) view that social actors embody the expected habitus within their role/position in a social field. This embodiment leads them to project a particular persona in different settings if their roles vary. Young people may act to mask their dyslexia, where it is viewed unfavourably and/or negatively impacts on their identity or social position in a setting. To understand this process, young people's internal dialogues will be explored to understand how dyslexia and their identity development are connected.

Levels of Interaction and dyslexia

As Hasler (1993) and Watermeyer (2009) write, young people with dyslexia are particularly vulnerable to oppressive power differentials. Within legal frameworks relating to education, young people are frequently represented by their parents/carers (Wyness 2012). This can lead to young people's voices being obscured in the development of support programmes for them, despite explicit guidance highlighting the need for their input (DfE and DfH 2015; Children and Families Act 2014). To explore young people's views, it is important to develop a pragmatic framework that allows for multi-level analysis of their social interactions. Jenkins (2008) developed the concept of 'orders of interaction' to facilitate exploration of the social world through actors' internal sense-making, interactions with other individuals and their relationships with institutions.

The 'individual order' is 'the human world as made up of embodied individuals and what- goes-on-in-their-heads' (Jenkins 2008: 39). It is the space where young people make sense of their world. Within the individual order, young people can undertake the process of meaning making, negotiate and renegotiate their own sense of self and identity. They can make sense of the habitus and practices associated with the field in which their interactions take place, as part of constructing their own identity.

Jenkins (2008: 39) defines the 'interactional order' as 'the human world as constituted in relationships between individuals, in what- goes-on-between-people.' It is where social actors make sense of their position in relation to others within a social space. This level allows them to develop understanding of the 'objective' social world, through which social actors are constrained and power relationships maintained (Bourdieu 1977). Within the 'institutional order' interactions between institutions such as schools and Local Authorities may be explored. Jenkins (2008: 39) conceptualises it as 'the human world of pattern and organisation, of established- ways-of- doing-things.' Within this level of interaction, there is also capacity to analyse the interactions between those inhabiting institutionally maintained/defined roles such as 'teachers' or 'parents.' Such an analysis gives important insight into the accessibility of institutions through exploration of power differentials, people's ability to access or embody the 'ways- of- doing-things' linked to those roles/institutions and participate actively in decision-making processes.

Through the combination of Jenkins' (2008) 'levels of interaction' and Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of 'habitus, field' and 'practice,' I focus on young people's experiences of dyslexia and support interventions, and their ability to access decision-making processes about their support. Specifically, the current study explores young people's capacity to negotiate their social identity and their role linked to their dyslexia within their school setting (their field of education).

Methods

Young people's experiences of dyslexia in the mainstream classroom are explored and their ability to negotiate aspects of provision relating to their dyslexia are investigated. This is done using Jenkins' (2008) 'levels of interaction' inform data analysis. Ethical approval for this study was granted by [Department of Social and Policy Sciences at the University of Bath].

Data Construction

Access and Consent

Data was constructed in collaboration with nine young people from Hilltop View School (pseudonym), an academically successful school in the South West of England (Progress 8 score of 0.47 [DfE 2018]). The school is located in an area that had participated in pilot studies related to the Education Act 2011. This school was chosen so that views of dyslexia provision could be contextualised within a new policy framework that aimed to facilitate young people's access to decision-making processes (DfE & DfH 2015; The Children and Families Act 2014). Full written consent was granted by all participants. The school and all participants are given pseudonyms. All participants were in Key Stage 3 (aged 11–14) and their primary educational need was documented as dyslexia. This study is part of a wider study where professionals and parents/carers were also interviewed.
On the Ground

My methodological approach draws on Bundegaard and Gulløv (2006). They believe that because young people spend such a large proportion of their time in school, it is necessary to observe their interactions with professionals to understand how they can enact their own agency within that setting. As such, I spent five months in the school during the spring and summer terms, constructing data with participants, through observation of lessons, focus groups and 1:1 interviews. An ethnographic approach was also useful due to its flexibility, and the capacity to modify and update practice as the study progressed (Eder and Corsaro 1999): young people and interacting with them are not always predictable!

Before formally observing young people, I met with each of them during tutor-time to discuss my role, the project and whether (or not) they wished to participate. Once I had obtained young people’s consent to observe them in lessons, I observed them in lessons, making fieldnotes, and at times, actively participating and engaging with the lessons.

I observed lessons across eleven different subjects and three groups, with nine different teachers, who were teaching the nine participating students. The young people participating had varying levels of need, from severe difficulties to mild, with two individuals holding a statement of SEN, where dyslexia was the primary need. Three participants had intersecting needs: one student had dyscalculia, another had Autism, and another had English as an Additional Language. The sample of students, while providing the opportunity to explore effects of different types of dyslexia-related need did not provide capacity to explore any gendered issues, as only one participant was female.

The first phase of data construction with young people, following lesson observations, took the form of focus groups. Group sessions were used so that young people had a chance to interact with and get to know me, as well as the project. Through working as groups with their peers, power differentials (because of my position as ‘adult’ in an educational setting) between young people and me were minimised; they had the support of their peers. The group activities helped to build a rapport with participants, prior to me interviewing young people individually (Bryman 2012). I designed group sessions to last for 20 minutes and to take place during tutor time, to minimise impact on students’ learning time. Each focus group had two or three participants and five group sessions took place.

In the first focus group, young people were given various proformas as well as plain paper for sharing their experiences relating to their dyslexia. As noted by Punch (2002) standard worksheets may not be accessible to individuals, depending on their literacy levels. With this in mind and drawing on Porter et al. (2012) who noted the potential of drawing, collages and mood boards for engaging with young people, various proformas such as mind maps, blank paper and story-boards were provided in the first session so that young people were not obliged to write. They were also given the option of writing frames, in case they did prefer to write. The students chose to use the mind map format. However, upon reflection after the first session it was clear that using the proformas was not suitable for the process; the young people were unsure of which one to use and took a large amount of time to decide. In subsequent sessions, we discussed whether they wanted to draw, write or have me write their ideas down. One group of students chose to draw and make their own notes, with me adding elements towards the end of the session. In three of the five sessions, young people asked me to note their views on their behalf. This allowed them to better interact with each other, and not rely on me to facilitate discussion. Once young people’s discussions had finished, I read out what they had discussed and checked with them that the content was accurate.

Young people who wished to do 1:1 interviews were then interviewed during the summer term. Full details of participants can be found in Table 1. Semi-structured interviews lasting between 16 and 23 minutes were undertaken to ensure that common themes and topics were discussed with each participant (Bryman 2012). They were undertaken in a glass-fronted room (in line with the School Safeguarding Policy). Prompt materials in interviews were used; we looked through students’ outputs from the focus group sessions. Additionally, an interview schedule covering the following themes was devised to ensure that they were covered in each interview:

- What is your understanding of dyslexia?
- How do you think dyslexia affects how people learn in the classroom?
- How do you think that dyslexia affects how people feel in the classroom?
- How do you think that having dyslexia affects people’s feelings about themselves?
- How do you like to be helped in class?
- How do teachers help you?
- Do you think it matters if people are told that they have dyslexia? Why?
- Do you think that being dyslexic is an important part of who you are? Why and how?

Data Processing and Analysis

Data is held compliant with the Data Protection Act 2018. All interviews were recorded, then transcribed and encrypted. Field notes were transcribed into encrypted and physical copies removed from field notebooks. Copies of notes were then destroyed. All data is stored on a password protected device and is encrypted where possible.

Data was analysed using an inductive, grounded-theory approach to generate new theory rather than ‘fit’ the data to existing theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The study was underpinned by Bourdieusien ethnographic concepts...
of habitus, field and practice throughout the three-levelled analysis based in Jenkins (2008) ‘levels of interaction.’ An initial coding framework was developed through the open-coding of observation notes using NVivo 10. The coding framework was subsequently checked by project supervisors and revised in line with feedback. Following this refining of the coding framework, interview and focus group data was entered into NVivo 10 and coded accordingly.

Analysis at the ‘individual order’ involved analysis of interview and focus group data, where young people’s own voices were the main source of information. In particular, analysis focussed on understanding how young people framed their own dyslexia and its effects on their lives. In their position as ‘beings’ and ‘becomings,’ the capacity to observe their interactions with professionals and in the classroom setting, then combine those with their sense-making of their own dyslexia was vital. Their own presentation of dyslexia to others gives insight into how young people conceptualise their own experiences.

At the ‘interactional’ and ‘institutional’ levels, data analysis drew on interview and observational data. To some extent, data was also taken from informal discussions about young people with teachers, carers and other staff members. Where this takes place, it is made clear within the discussion. The ‘interactional level’ analysis explored how young people interacted with adults around them. Young people’s conceptualisation and (non)disclosure of their dyslexia and how it informed their interactions with others was explored through interview and observational data. Interview data provided insight and reflections about those interactions and how young people's needs were met (or not). Institutionally during analysis and coding of data, focus was on power relationships and how they were created, embodied, and maintained within the systems of Hilltop View School and further afield. While observational data was useful to understand power dynamics within the school, data in this section is largely drawn from children’s interview data and informal discussions with adults working with young people (it is made clear where this is the case).

Coded data, quotations and coding frameworks were then translated into MindView 4.0, mind mapping software to aid my visualisation of links between concepts, themes and structures. A mind map for young people’s interview data, and a mind map for observational data were made, as part of a wider project, evaluating other stakeholders’ views. These pictures were then used to understand how young people’s experiences of the classroom affected their understandings of dyslexia, the influence of this conceptualisation of dyslexia on their inter-personal interactions and then how these fit into wider institutional settings.

Once data analysis and processing were complete, results and recommendations were written up and presented to parents, the school and young people. This used appropriate formats for each audience to triangulate data and allow for renegotiation of my interpretation where necessary. Participants did not query findings or interpretations of the study.

Table 1: Participant Details.

| Year | Group | Name  | Status          | Needs^1                      | Observation Details                        | Focus Group | Inter-viewed? | Duration |
|------|-------|-------|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------|
| 7    |       | John  | SEN Register    | Dyslexia                     | Main-stream English                        | 2           | Yes          | 19:09    |
| 7    |       | Alex  | SEN Register    | Dyslexia                     | Main-stream English                        | 2           | Yes          | 19:08    |
| 7    |       | Emily | SEN Register    | Dyslexia & other needs       | Learning Skills                            | 1           | Yes          | 19:14    |
| 7    |       | Samuel| SEN Register    | Dyslexia                     | Main-stream English and Literacy Plus      | 1           | Yes          | 19:13    |
| 8    |       | Alfie | SEN Register    | Dyslexia & other needs       | Not observed                               | 2           | Did not wish to take part | NA       |
| 8    |       | Connor| SEN Register    | Dyslexia                     | Main-stream English                        | 5           | Yes          | 16:40    |
| 8    |       | Jake  | SEN Register    | Dyslexia                     | Main-stream English                        | 5           | Yes          | 19:28    |
| 8    |       | Callum| Statement       | Dyslexia & other needs       | Main-stream English and Small Group Literacy | 3           | No parents did not consent | NA       |
| 8    |       | Josh  | Statement       | Dyslexia and other needs     | Main-stream English and Small Group Literacy | 3           | Yes          | 16:17    |
| 9    |       | Benjamin| Statement      | Dyslexia                     | Small Group Literacy, Main-stream Science and Geography | 4           | Yes          | 20:07    |
| 9    |       | David | Statement       | Dyslexia & other needs       | Small Group Literacy and Main-stream Geography | 4           | Yes          | 22:49    |

^1 I have not given full details of the participants’ needs as this constitutes information that could identify the young people.
Results

Individual Level

When considering their own dyslexia, young people tended to draw on medicalised models of dyslexia. When describing it, it was a separate entity whilst concurrently part of them. Connor (Year 8) conceptualised his own dyslexia as a, ‘condition, um, really makes your mind feel like, it’s like, your mind can’t do all the reading and stuff. Kind of basically, it makes your mind not to learn a lot of stuff but some stuff, lessons or activities, you’re better at.’

Connor’s view of it and language use in relation to it suggests that he does not view his dyslexia as something intrinsic to him but rather something that causes certain effects within his brain and subsequently in his learning. Samuel (year 7) also noted that when he, ‘first noticed that I had dyslexia, I didn’t really know what to think… ’cos I had dyslexia I don’t know what to think or what, like!’ His understanding of dyslexia was of something that was pathologised in the way that individuals describe ‘having’ a disease, rather than being part of his identity. David’s (year 9) understanding of dyslexia was informed by his interactions with his mum, when he was first ‘diagnosed’:

‘I asked my mum and she said it’s like how, in like maths or something, if somebody gave you and one of your friends a sum to add up, they might be able to add it up different. And then I asked why and she said because your brain works differently than everybody else’s’

The interactions shared by young people and others around them informed how positively they framed their dyslexia and its effects. David (Year 9) drew on interactions with his teachers in helping himself understand his dyslexia, stating that, ‘Sometimes people might be smart at something like Albert Einstein … he was apparently dyslexic. We searched him with Miss. He was very bad at reading but he was good at maths so that’s all. That’s one idol we look up to.’ He and John (Year 7) looked to their own social network when making sense of their own dyslexia. Describing his feelings about his dyslexia John was seemingly unsung, ‘Well I’m not really too bothered, ’cos I know a lot of adults who have it and they’re really clever.’

Emily (Year 7) was able to draw on her talents at singing, and she, ‘really enjoyed being on stage.’ Her sporting prowess was also an area which was not affected negatively by her dyslexia. This helped her to frame it positively. Connor described his success on Minecraft, particularly noting, ‘all my friends say how can I type so fast?’ Despite their dyslexia, these students could describe their areas of success and say how they may have some difficulties, but that their dyslexia did not define all of their areas of success. However other participants did not always have the capacity to view their dyslexia positively. Jake (Year 8) reflected on his experiences and found, ‘It’s quite frustrating knowing that you’re, in a way different, but you’re not really different. I think human and just … yeah. It’s just like, you have it and another person doesn’t.’ In forming his negative views of himself and his dyslexia, he drew on his interactions with others and made comparisons. It is apparent that individuals’ internal conceptualisations of dyslexia are (re)constructed by interactions with others in their social networks, as well as their own experiences of difficulties in learning.

Interactional Level

As noted above, young people’s conceptualisations of dyslexia are informed through both their own experiences of learning and through interaction with others. Samuel (year 7) highlighted that his best friend was dyslexic, ‘so we kind of interact more than say, I would do to one of my friends that doesn’t have any problems at all.’ Connor (Year 8) felt that, ‘[dyslexia] makes you less confident’ and that his friends who did not have dyslexia were more confident than him. Young people do not want their dyslexia to become ‘public property’ and felt that teachers should, ‘give you sly bits of help every now and then… I just want to kind of be the same’ (John, Year 7).

It is important to note that in this study participants appeared to do this through careful choices as to which of their peers they align themselves with. All participants in this study felt that they did not wish to appear different from their peers. However, John (Year 7) felt that his dyslexia set him apart from his peers and affected their relationships. He viewed his dyslexia as,

‘a really big [part of me] really, ’cos it. I am different to, what I like and my friends like somethings. They’re all into like skateboards and stuff. I’m into cars and rugby. And then a lot of sport and some of them are more into reading and stuff.’

Benjamin (Year 9) echoed John’s view that his interactions and subsequent position within his social network were affected by his dyslexia, ‘it’s hard with like friends and that, it it’s, it is hard, what you want to say to like popular kids.’ He viewed himself as less popular than others and was in a relatively disadvantaged position socially, where his voice was less ‘heard.’ Connor’s experiences also drew parallels with this; his word-finding difficulties impeded his interactions with friends. This highlighted the difficulties he experiences: ‘I’m like, I want them to pass the drink and I’m like ’can you pass the French?’ or something really weird… I think they find it funny but yeah, it’s sometimes annoying.’
All participants in this study exerted control over how their dyslexia was presented to others, where possible. Alexander (Year 7) asserted, ‘I tell people when I need to tell them,’ referring to peers and professionals. Young people did not wish to appear ‘different’ in their interactions and where possible wanted to control disclosure and presentation of self within those interactions so that they were not disadvantaged socially by their dyslexia.

**Institutional Level**

The importance of considering the structural factors affecting young people was suggested when exploring their interactions with others. The notion of popularity for them amongst their peers was connected to the perceptibility of their dyslexia. Alexander’s (Year 7) need to control who he told and when referred to both peers and professionals. He was particularly private in disclosing his dyslexia (extract from interview with researcher H):

‘H – Has, has it bothered you having dyslexia, like sort of known as having dyslexia or?
A – hmm. No.
H – no?
A – mmm.
H – Just part of who you are?
A – mmm. I tell people when I need to tell them.
H – mmm
A – but I don’t think many people know that I’m dyslexic.’

Field note excerpts also recorded that he, ‘read very quietly and I would suspect that much of the class didn’t hear what he said’ (Author field notes).

Connor (Year 8) noted that teachers rarely talked to him about his dyslexia. When asked if he would want to discuss it, he said, ‘No. ‘Cos it’d be awkward.’ However, Jake (Year 8) felt that, ‘it’d be quite nice, like a bit, if they talked to me about it [dyslexia and support].’

Whilst discussing structures that support young people in enacting their agency through interactions, for some it was important to consider that young people are working within a system where,

‘Especially in secondary school, so much of the curriculum is based around the reading and writing, and um, you know, the assumption that everybody can do it to a degree that even those kids who can’t, the gap is just wider and um, therefore, a lot of things are inaccessible.’ (Kate, Teacher-discussion).

Young people were subject to the structures of the education system, and within that the curriculum and the frameworks of support for young people with SEND.

Alexander noted that it was important for him to have a structural ‘device’ by which he could make his needs apparent, and his voice heard. He was able to (and did) challenge his teachers when they made assumptions about his capabilities or way of working, stating that, ‘it’s usually when teachers try and make you do something, and I go and show them this [support plan].’ Where there was a structure in place that support him to enact his own agency. He could disclose his dyslexia as and when he wanted to. This structural device helped him to counter teachers’ assumptions. However, he (and others) still felt subject to their teachers’ authority and the potential difficulties that may be in place as a result of that. Only Alexander in this study said that he felt directly able to challenge adults about his dyslexia, and ask for what he needed.

In field notes we can see that a teacher disclosed a student’s difficulty to another young person inadvertently, whilst trying to support them. The other student queried, ‘why doesn’t he just copy it off the board?’ (field notes) and the teacher’s reply presented the other student’s dyslexia negatively, stating ‘sometimes it can be difficult.’ The young people had not actively articulated their views and appeared not to feel able to do so. John (year 7) noted that support is not always subtle; he felt different from others, which chimed with Samuel’s experiences (year 7), that he felt, ‘A lot different than other people. You don’t. I don’t feel normal.’ He did not wish to stand out from his peers but his dyslexia/needs were sometimes inadvertently disclosed by teachers. As such, it is clear that power relationships and teachers’ status directly impact on how young people can(not) enact agency and negotiate support systems effectively as individuals.

**Discussion**

**Individual level**

Young people’s sense making of their own dyslexia drew upon others’ understandings of it. Their views were largely located within medical conceptualisation of dyslexia as a condition that causes difficulties or differences in how their brains worked. They generally found it helpful to know that they had dyslexia and were able to locate their difficulties in it. It was freeing for the young people in this study to understand why they found things difficult, rather than them feeling they were intrinsically bad at learning or lacking ability. This echoes work by Riddick (2010) and Gibby-Leversuch et al. (2019), who argued that a ‘diagnosis’ can help young people understand themselves and be emancipatory. The
emancipatory nature of a diagnosis i.e. that there was something that was at the root of young people's difficulties, helped them to understand they were not intrinsically 'stupid,' or 'less than' their peers. The cause of their difficulties was tangible and their literacy challenges could be explained through the label that comes with a diagnosis. Solvang (2007) pointed out that a ‘diagnosis’ may act to oppress and pathologise young people, as remediation and ‘normalisation’ strategies are sought to resolve their difficulties. This was apparent at times in young people's description of not wanting to appear different from their peers but feeling very strongly that they were different, because of their dyslexia. The very thing that helped to emancipate young people and explain their challenges when engaging with literature can cause them to stand out. The act of labelling may increase the perceptibility of their differences and prompt young people's internal sense-making to frame it negatively and as a force of oppression, setting them aside from their peers.

Young people felt that their dyslexia set them apart from others and in making sense of it, they sought positive examples of individuals with dyslexia as well as explanations that framed dyslexia encouragingly. Although two participants made reference to famous or well-known role models in making sense of their own dyslexia, more young people drew on their peers and families in framing their dyslexia. In the case of this study, young people drew on Einstein, discussion with their parents and sometimes with teachers. This resonates with work from Kelly (2016), who found that young people sought support from individuals who experienced dyslexia personally. Through engagement with individuals who have direct experience of dyslexia, young people in this study conceptualised their dyslexia relatively positively, despite acknowledging the challenges presented by it. This positive framing, combined with their understanding of their related difficulties, underpinned young people's interactions with others in school and at times, influenced their relationships.

**Interactional Level**

In this study as noted above, young people's interactions affected how they conceptualise their dyslexia. That conceptualisation then underpins how young people interact with others and for some young people, who they interact with. Several participants in this study chose to align themselves with others who have learning difficulties of varying types such as dyslexia, dyscalculia or autism. Their friendships were informed and influenced by their experiential knowledge of dyslexia and other learning difficulties. This echoes Gibby-Leversuch et al.'s work (2019). They found that young people's relationships were influenced by dyslexia, both positively and negatively. Their work also noted the importance of how young people viewed their own dyslexia in the formation of relationships. The findings of this study chime with their review findings: peer relationships play a significant role in young people's understanding of dyslexia and the subsequent relationships that they form. This was also exemplified by the negative experiences young people described in relationships such as with those who they viewed as ‘popular.’ Dyslexic young people in this study felt less able to engage with ‘popular’ students in light of their dyslexia, due to the difficulties it posed. At times their dyslexia impaired their interactions.

Young people's interactions with teachers were influenced by their dyslexia. Disclosure was a key theme within discourse. Young people were open to discreet discussion of their difficulties, but did not want their dyslexia 'outing'; they wanted to control when/if their others were made aware of it. This chimes with Goffman's (1963) work, where actors aim to conceal potentially 'stigmatising characteristics' to maintain their social position and sense of agency. However, where there is a structurally defined power differential between social actors within a field, their interpersonal interactions are affected. Young people felt somewhat dependent on their teachers in relation to disclosure of their needs. Teachers hold power and may make those disclosures ‘for’ young people. Most students in this study did not feel able to challenge their teachers, even when they did have a support plan with their needs detailed on it. Thus, while young people have some agency and capacity to negotiate their own interactions at the ‘interactional order,’ they depend on others to support them in this process. It seems then that young people’s position as both capable social agent- a ‘being’- as well as an acted-upon individual – a ‘becoming’ – is manifest clearly at this level as per Uprichards’ (2008) work.

**Institutional Level**

In this study, young people's relationships and interactions were influenced by structurally defined positions. Young people could overall navigate their interactions with peers effectively and enact agency in if/how they disclosed their dyslexia. However, there were times where they felt structurally disadvantaged due to it: they did not identify themselves as ‘popular’ or ‘in-group’ (Goffman 1963) and their dyslexia became a factor in structural oppression (Bourdieu 1977; 1985).

In school young people had even less agentic capacity in relation to their dyslexia support. Connor and Jake appeared relieved that teachers had dealt with their dyslexia as they had hoped; it appeared fortuitous rather than by design. The mechanisms by which young people were able to articulate their views in the school were nascent; the study took place during the phased introduction of a new framework for provision of support for young people. Despite the implementation of some support structures, such as support plans or learning profiles, young people did not feel able to challenge adults or teachers in their school when they needed different forms of help. This echoes Kelly's (2016) work, which found that young people were not always able to be their best advocates; they did not always have the skills to engage with processes. At times teachers/adults disclosed their dyslexia as part of discussions with other students that were entirely contingent on the teacher's position of authority and power within the field of education.
It is clear in this study that young people's status as children structurally disadvantages them and affects their ability to engage meaningfully in decision-making processes related to supporting their learning. They cannot always adapt to the 'habitus' and form of interaction required because of their position within the classroom. They may not feel able to challenge those in dominant positions. This then feeds into young people's perceptions of themselves and risks them viewing themselves and their dyslexia negatively. This then filters down to the 'individual level' and maintains the oppressive structures within the field of education as highlighted by Bourdieu's (1972–75; 1977; 1985; 1989) sociological project.

Conclusions
In this study, young people’s capacity to negotiate their social identity and role links to their dyslexia. Analysis of data reveals that young people’s ability to negotiate social identity and role varies according to the ‘level of interaction’ (Jenkins 2008). At the ‘individual order’ young people draw on medicalised notions of dyslexia, as tangible reasons or explanations for their difficulties. Positive reframing of their conceptualisation of dyslexia supports young people’s development of a positive ‘public identity’ to underpin their interactions with others at the ‘interactional order’. Interactionally, young people find strength and solidarity from being able to reveal their ‘full’ self with their peers. Even in this context, their dyslexia is generally the ‘reframed,’ positive version. Young people also act to minimise perceptibility of their dyslexia where they do not wish to disclose it. Institutionally, young people are acted upon by policy and adults within those institutions. They are dependent on adults to facilitate their access to the curriculum and resources in school. Young people’s lack of control over disclosure of their status as ‘dyslexic learner’ may be due to teachers’ dominant position within their ‘field’ of Hilltop View (Bourdieu 1972–1975; 1977). Teachers disclosed dyslexia on their behalf without consultation and due to young people’s subordinate position within schools, they largely felt unable to challenge this. Due to young people’s position relative to professionals within the structures of education, young people’s ability to negotiate and define their role as ‘dyslexic learner’ with their teachers is substantially impaired. Their capacity to enact agency in their own educational journey and make meaningful contributions to decision-making processes is limited and they have relatively little opportunity to make changes independently: young people rely on adults.

Key points
An official ‘label’ or ‘diagnosis’ of dyslexia empowers young people, providing explanation for their difficulties to help positive reframing of them.

The classroom role of ‘dyslexic learner’ is rejected by young people in this study. They did not want to be identified by their teachers or peers as ‘different.’ This has implications for professionals working with young people with dyslexia. Support should not draw attention to students or inadvertently disclose their needs to others.

This study found that SEND provision structures substantially constrain young people. Further study into young people’s ability to enact agency within school settings is necessary to explore its implications outside Hilltop View School.

This theoretical framework provides a powerful lens for exploring young people’s experiences. Further research into young people’s dyslexia, other SEND and their identity is recommended to strengthen the theoretical framework and to better understand how to empower young people.

Competing Interests
The author has no competing interests to declare.

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