

**EXPLORING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF GRADES 6-9 DYSLEXIC  
SCHOOL LEARNERS IN A LONG TERM REMEDIAL SCHOOL**

by

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## DECLARATION

Student number: **4648404**

I declare that **EXPLORING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF GRADES 6-9 DYSLEXIC SCHOOL LEARNERS IN A LONG TERM REMEDIAL SCHOOL** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G.A. Hoskins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "G".

(Mrs. G.A. Hoskins)

Date: 18 October 2015

## **ABSTRACT**

Dyslexia is one of the most common learning disabilities and learners affected by it are found in both mainstream and specialist schools. The aim of this study was to explore and describe the school experiences of learners who had been diagnosed with dyslexia and attended a long-term remedial school. A phenomenological research design was followed. Six learners in grades 6 to 9, who were attending a long term remedial school, were the participants. Semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews were held to collect data, posing questions that focused on the learners' experiences with their educators, peers, written and verbal school work, as well as homework. From the data collected themes were formed. The findings showed that participants believed most of their teachers were aware of and knowledgeable about suitable methods to use when teaching dyslexic learners. The results also indicated that the school understood the challenges faced by the dyslexic learners and it was doing well in attempting to provide them with an educational environment suitable for their academic and personal needs.

## **KEY WORDS**

Dyslexia; learning disabilities; voice of learners; literacy; long term remedial school.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

*Education is the most powerful weapon that can be used to change the world ~ Nelson Mandela* (Brainyquote, 2014).

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Dyslexia is a multifaceted learning disability that can range from mild to severe and is found in both children and adults. Claassens (2007) states that together with Attention Deficit Disorder it is one of the most common learning disabilities, whilst other researchers regard it as *the* most common (Dowson, 2003; Flynn & Rahbar, 1994; Roush, 1995; Shaywitz, 1996). Whatever the case, the International Dyslexia Association (IDA, 2015b) estimates that 15-20% of the general population experience one or more of its many symptoms, such as reading, writing and spelling difficulties or challenges. In South Africa, one in ten people, numbering approximately 5 million, are faced with literacy challenges both in school and in the workplace (Pienaar, 2013). Those who are learners are found in both mainstream and specialist schools. The type of school attended by the learner often depends on the severity of their learning disability.

Enns and Lafond (2007) report that dyslexia is commonly viewed as a learning disability that includes difficulties with word identification and reading comprehension, together with associated difficulties with spelling and writing, despite average intelligence. Literacy is the foundation for most aspects of education, with learning to read, write and spell, as well as learning mathematics constituting the first skills taught in schools. Whilst these might be easy for some learners to acquire they can pose a major challenge for those with dyslexia, and as Shaywitz (2003) states, reading difficulties isolate learners and leave them with fewer career choices. Children with dyslexia are vulnerable to becoming academically, socially and emotionally disconnected from education (Zambo, 2004), whilst the importance and role of literacy is highlighted by Nielsen (2011, p. 551), for whom it is a human right and literacy abilities a necessity for all, both as a learning tool in education and as a natural part of the



daily routines at work. Being able to read determines an individual's ability to earn a living and survive as a fully functioning independent member of society (Cornelissen, 2005). Literacy skills are a necessity for surviving and coping in the modern world, therefore it is important for those with dyslexia to receive an education that can help them acquire these skills.

There is consensus that dyslexia persists and cannot be outgrown. The IDA (2015b) states that even though it affects individuals throughout their lives its impact can change at different stages. Many adult dyslexics have given a voice to what life is like living with dyslexia, and the impact that it has had on them at school, in the workplace and in their private lives (Bennett, 2008; Dale & Taylor, 2001; Gunnel Ingesson, 2007; Melia, 2008; Rogers, 1991; Sander & Williamson, 2010; Wambsgans, 1990; Zipzer, 2007). Dyslexia makes it difficult for such learners to succeed academically and those severely affected by it need special education and extra support (IDA, 2015b). However, there are many famous and successful people, such as those listed in Table 1.1 who have not been deterred by this disability and have proven that success, in spite of the diagnosis, is possible.

**Table 1.1: Famous people with dyslexia (Davis Dyslexia Association International, 2014)**

Henry Winkler	Actor
Whoopi Goldberg	Actress
Albert Einstein	Scientist
Thomas Edison	Inventor
Leonardo da Vinci	Artist
John Lennon	Musician
Mahomed Ali	Boxer
Richard Branson	Entrepreneur
Henry Ford	Entrepreneur
Hans Christian Anderson	Author
Agatha Christie	Author
Steven Spielberg	Filmmaker/ producer

A study found that 35% of American entrepreneurs out of a sample of 139 suffered from some form of dyslexia and that 20% of British business owners were dyslexic (Terblanche, 2010). Sander and Williamson (2010) state that learners with dyslexia can succeed if the education system in which they are studying does not disadvantage them as a result of prejudicial attitudes towards their challenges. Early remedial intervention is an essential component of contributing to the success that these learners can experience, both at school and in the workplace as adults. A lack of early remedial intervention can result in the dyslexic child developing lifelong learning blocks as well as a fear of learning, which could limit their career development as adults (Dowson, 2003). The dyslexic learners' educational experiences play an important role in shaping their lives, notably through their emotional health and self-esteem (Alexander-Passe, 2006; Burden & Burdett, 2007; Burton, 2004; Glazzard, 2010; Gunnel Ingesson, 2007; Humphrey, 2003; Nalavany, Carawan & Brown, 2011).

## **1.2 ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM**

Adult dyslexics recounting their school experiences indicate that learners with dyslexia sometimes become lost in the system and receive little or incorrect attention (Peer & Turney, 2001), hence their needs and feelings are not taken into account or known. A male learner interviewed by Armstrong and Humphrey (2009, p.99) described school as a place of torment: "They wanted to make out like I was stupid at school but I am not". It was described as a place in which motivation dropped and likened it to a "war zone" rather than a place of learning (Peer & Turney, 2001). By contrast, this view is not given by all, as some boys diagnosed with dyslexia who attended a specialist school reported having had positive school experiences (Burden & Burdett, 2007).

Students with dyslexia can achieve academic and personal ambitions if their educational needs are recognised and known, and if they are given the appropriate support (Exley, 2004). According to Davie (as cited in Burden, Burdett, Humphrey & Mullins, 2005), a neglected source of valuable information regarding the effectiveness of educational policies and interventions needed for learners with special needs has been the voices of these learners themselves. The importance of the voice of the learner being used has been indicated by many researchers, claiming that school experiences need to be told by the learner whilst still in school in order that their emotions, challenges and needs are understood and education

programmes in place within the education system improved (Anderson, 2009; Bearne, 2002; Burden & Burdett, 2007; Casserly, 2011; Glazzard, 2010; Quicke, 2003).

A preliminary literature investigation shows much research in the field of dyslexia, resulting in valuable resources for the theoretical background, notably by professionals such as psychologists, medical practitioners and therapists, educators, various researchers and adults who have dyslexia. The bulk of research focuses on identification, causes and assessment (Burden, 2005) whilst others focus on the effects that dyslexia has on self-esteem (Alexander-Passe, 2006; Burton, 2004; Gibson & Kendall, 2010; Glazzard, 2010; Gunnel Ingesson, 2007; Humphrey & Mullins, 2002).

However, literature using the voice of learners about their school experiences is scant and limited. Nugent (2008, p.189) refers to a “dearth of information” about the views and experiences of such learners, whilst Armstrong and Humphrey (2009) state that there is a wealth of information on the possible causes and effects of dyslexia but much less about learners’ experiences of and views on education. Gunnel Ingesson (2007) reiterates this view by stating that research on children and young adults with dyslexia is frequently based on parent teacher ratings and rarely on accounts of the affected persons themselves. Yildiz, Yildirim, Ates and Rasinski (2012) conducted a study in Turkey wherein the dyslexic learner’s school experiences were explored through the voice of the parents.

Casserly (2011) states that by listening to the voice of the learners a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences might result and this could be used to assist those involved in education to use effective teaching and learning strategies. This view is echoed by Flutter and Rudduck (2004), who state that listening to the voice of learners provides them with a sense of control over their learning, leading to an increase in their motivation and an improvement in their academic performance. The importance of listening to the voice of learners regarding their education and learning is also made by Bearne (2002) and Quicke (2003), whilst Anderson (2009) states that learners are able to make insightful comments about their experiences at school and makes reference to Johnson (2004) who states that it is rare for dyslexic learners to be asked for their views. Burden and Burdett (2007) are of the view that an important missing element in much research has been the perspective of the young who have the disability and this is being rectified by using the voices of adults with the disability. The voice of the learners with dyslexia can be used to discover the ways in which schools and teachers can more effectively meet their needs (Glazzard, 2010). The right of

using the voice of the learners is highlighted by McPhillips, Shelvin and Long (2012), who state that all learners have a right to be consulted in decisions affecting their learning.

Researchers therefore confirm that limited research has been carried out on the experiences of learners with dyslexia and the effects of these experiences (Burden, 2005; Burden & Burdett, 2007; Nugent, 2008). For Claassens (2007) the main focus in the school system has been on the academic difficulties that these learners experience, as told by others. No research could be located in South Africa that has focused on filling this gap or discovering the school experiences of these learners, therefore this research could be of benefit to all the relevant parties involved to better understand the educational needs and school experiences of learners with dyslexia.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION**

The literature study and analysis of the problem briefly discussed indicates a need for researchers, especially in South Africa, to investigate the school experiences of learners with dyslexia using their voices to convey their experiences. Based on this, the research question for this study is:

**What are the school experiences of grades 6 to 9 learners with literacy challenges associated with dyslexia who are presently attending a long term remedial school?**

### **1.4 AIMS OF THE STUDY**

The primary aim of this research study was to explore and describe the school experiences of the learners identified in the research question.

In order to answer the research question the specific aims were to

- Conduct a literature study to gain background knowledge regarding dyslexia and the learning challenges presented as a result of being diagnosed with the condition.
- Collect first-hand data from the learners with dyslexia through the use of interviews, so as to explore their school experiences related to interaction with educators, peers, verbal and written schoolwork, homework as well as tests and exams.

- Interpret the findings from the interviews conducted outlining the school experiences of dyslexic learners.
- Formulate themes from the data obtained.

## **1.5 RESEARCH SITE**

The research school was a long term remedial school that had learners from grades 1-12 who had specific learning difficulties. It had been categorised by the Department of Education (DoE) in South Africa as a school for learners with special education needs (LSEN). All learners admitted to this school had been intellectually assessed by a registered clinical, counselling or educational psychologist who then referred them to the school. A multi-disciplinary admissions team was responsible for deciding if they were to be admitted to the school, comprising:

- Principal or deputy principal
- Head of Department (HOD) of the relevant phase that the learner would be entering
- Speech, occupational and remedial therapists
- Psychologist
- Educator

In addition to the learning difficulties were certain criteria that had to be met in order for learners to be admitted:

- Of average to above average intelligence
- Academic underachievement, in spite of potential
- Experience of learning difficulties in language (reading, spelling and written expression) and/or mathematics.

Even though their reading, spelling and mathematical age might have shown a lag compared to their chronological age, they should have shown that they had the potential to cope academically. Remedial teaching was given and learners followed a regular mainstream curriculum that included the writing of examinations. The resources found in the school comprised:

- Qualified remedial educators
- Small classes
- Psychologists who offered small group therapy
- Speech, language and occupational therapists
- Computer and reading centres
- Cycling
- Outdoor club

Parental support and co-operation was deemed necessary by the school to ensure or contribute to a positive outcome for the learner. Parental supervision with regards to the learners' homework and school programme was required, with counselling and guidance offered to the parents when necessary.

## **1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Definitions are provided for key terms as they are understood in relation to the study.

**Dyslexia**, for the purpose of this study, is defined as a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterised by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge (IDA, 2015a).

**Learning disabilities** is as a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning and mathematical abilities. These difficulties are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1990).

**Learner's voice** is a term used to describe the learners expressing an understanding of their learning process (Professional Educator Standards Board, 2009).

**Literacy** is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. It involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, develop their knowledge and potential, and participate fully in their community and wider society” (UNESCO, 2004, p13).

## **1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

After the research question was formulated a suitable research approach was selected and thereafter a research design situated within the chosen approach had to be chosen.

### **1.7.1 Research Design**

The research approach, as well as the research design, informs the researcher about what data to collect, which collection methods to use, recording procedures as well as how to analyse and make meaning of it (Christiansen, Betram & Land, 2010; Creswell, 2014;). A qualitative approach was found to be best suited for the purpose of this study, seen by Creswell (2014, p4) as enabling the researcher to explore and understand the meaning that individuals ascribe to a social or human problem. This approach was located in a phenomenological research design that allows the researcher to go into the world of the research participants. Hycner (as cited in Groenewald, 2004, p.8) states that “phenomenology dictates the method (not vice versa), including the type of participants”.

### **1.7.2 Research Methodology**

The research sample consisted of six learners, four male and two female, in grades 6 to 9 who were attending a long term remedial school categorized as an LSEN, reflecting the gender demographics of the school. All learners in the sample group had been formally diagnosed with dyslexia and had no other co-existing learning disabilities. Each participant had been informed by the psychologist of their diagnosis and this had been explained to them. In keeping with a phenomenological research design, data was collected by conducting semi-structured individual face-to-face interviews with the selected research participants. On completion of the interviews and memoing, data was analysed, after which themes with categories and subcategories were identified and discussed.

An important aspect of all research is that it must follow ethical principles and show respect to all involved. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to the commencement of this research, followed by obtaining permission from the DoE and consent from the principal to conduct research at the said school. Parental consent and the assent of the learners in the sample group were also obtained.

## **1.8 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

**Chapter 1** has provided an overview of the study, with introduction, background to the problem, motivation for the study, the research question, aims of the study, definitions of key terms used as well as the choice of the research design and research methodology.

**Chapter 2** presents a literature study on dyslexia as well as definitions and debates and past studies. Thereafter the school experiences of dyslexic learners, with emphasis on educators, peers, schoolwork and special schools, are discussed.

**Chapter 3** explains the research design, methodology and data collection. Detailed information on the research style, theoretical framework, context and sampling, data collection, analysis of data and ethical considerations is provided.

**Chapter 4** examines the interviews undertaken and makes interpretations of the results.

**Chapter 5** presents the conclusion, limitations of the study as well as recommendations for further research.

## **1.9 SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided an overview of dyslexia and the challenges that it presents for these learners and adults. The importance of providing the dyslexic learner with an opportunity to voice their educational experiences and not rely on it being told by significant others, has been discussed. A background to the research, the research question, the aim and objectives of the study as well as the research design have also been outlined. Chapter two will discuss the theoretical information on what dyslexia is, its definitions, debates surrounding the labelling of 'dyslexia' and the school experiences of these learners as told by others. This will provide a foundation for research to be conducted and increase the researchers' and educators' insight into these experiences



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*If a child can't learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn. ~ [Ignacio Estrada](#) (X-Acto, 2015).*

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 presents a literature review and a theoretical framework that informed this study. The definition, diagnosis, occurrence, characteristics and the effect that dyslexia has on schooling are focused on. Thereafter, the known school experiences from prior research are presented. Past research, both national and international, conducted into the field of dyslexia and pertaining to this study is used in this exploration. It provides a foundation and starting point of this study.

#### 2.2 DYSLEXIA: BACKGROUND AND DEFINITION

For many years the existence of dyslexia has been discussed, debated and doubted (Lawrence, 2009). The terms *word blindness* and *word deafness* were first used in 1877 by Adolph Kussmaul, a German physician, to describe adult patients with a reading disability in spite of being of average intellect (Anderson & Meier-Hedde, 2001). In 1884, Rudolf Berlin, a German ophthalmologist, was the first to use the term *dyslexia* as he felt it was a better description than *word blindness* for a reading problem that had a neurological basis (Elbaum, 2015). Prior to the 1900s, people who had problems with reading and writing had also been referred to as having *strephosymbolia*, a term of medical origin (Lawrence, 2009).

In 1925, Dr. Samuel Orton, a neuropathologist, presented his first paper to the American Neurological Association in which he publicly stated his view that children with reading disabilities did not have a low or defective intelligence (Anderson & Meier-Hedde, 2001). It was only around the mid-1930s that the term *dyslexia* became commonly used, but with many debates surrounding it. The word is of Greek-origin and combines the prefix *dys* meaning absence, and the suffix *lexia* or language (Burden & Burdett, 2007). The literal

meaning is therefore ‘absence of language’ or ‘difficulty with words’. It is viewed by some as being an educational problem, whilst others regard it as a medical problem.

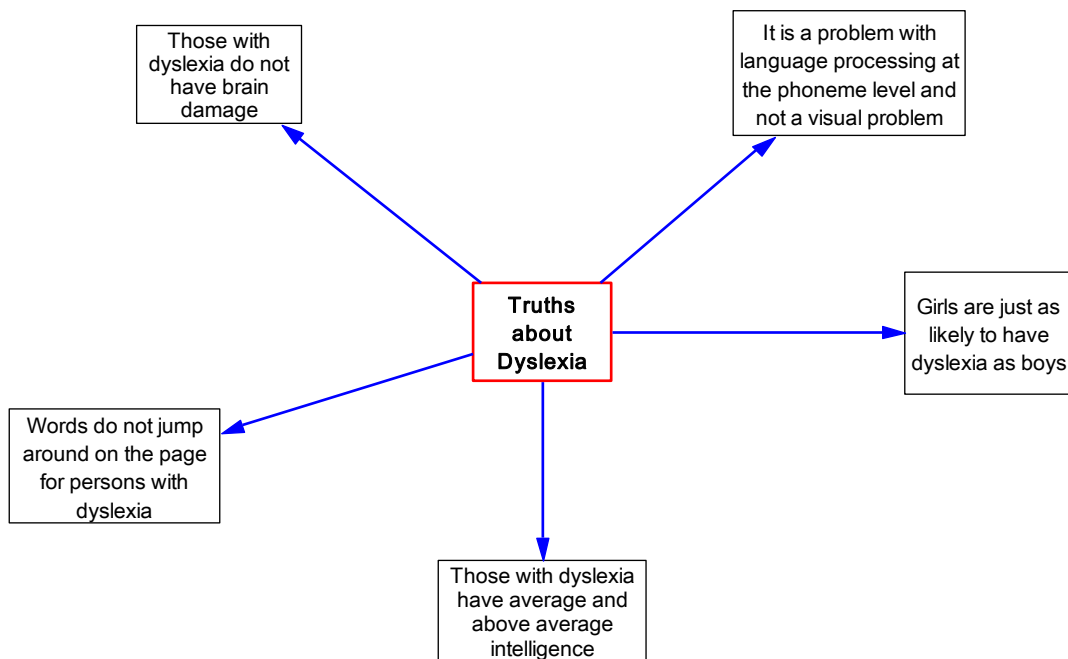
There appears to be no international consensus regarding exactly what falls under the umbrella of the term or what dyslexia is (Hornby, Atkinson & Howard, 1997), and in this millennium the situation is unchanged. Macdonald (2009) states that dyslexia remains controversial and disputed in education, with controversy surrounding the nature and causes and different terms being used to describe it. Williams and Lynch (2010) state that dyslexia refers to a specific type of reading problem that is neurological in nature and even though the term originated in studies of persons with brain damage, those with dyslexia do not have brain damage. Others differ, and state that it is a neurobiological disorder as it is genetic and often runs in families (Allen, 2010; Dowson, 2003; Maughan & Carroll, 2006; Shaywitz, 2003; Siegel, 2006). This view is echoed in Van der Leij (2013), who refers to it being overrepresented in learners who have at least one parent or relative with dyslexia. Shaywitz (2003) verifies her view by stating that between one quarter and one half of children born to a dyslexic parent will also be dyslexic, and if one child in a family is dyslexic then almost half of his or her siblings will probably be dyslexic. Conversely, Kraus and Horowitz-Kraus (2014) refer to it as a neurodevelopmental disorder, mainly caused by a deficit in the phonological component of language. However, Meng, Lin, Wang, Jiang, and Song (2014) are of the view that the root cause is still unknown and remains a controversial issue.

Researchers have had differing views of what constitutes dyslexia, for instance, Nugent (2008) confirming that the term remains contentious, with no consensus view of what it is, and Enns and Lafond (2007, p.64) stating that it “includes difficulties with word identification and reading comprehension, with associated difficulties in spelling, writing and spoken language”. It has been regarded as a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills needed for accurate and fluent word reading and spelling (Rose, 2009) and “persistent difficulties in learning to efficiently read” (Karande, Mahajan & Kulkarni, 2009, p.382). Allen (2010) refers to it as a specific type of reading disability whilst MacKay (1997) found the dyslexic learner not only has problems with reading but also with organising information, writing and learning for tests. Dyslexia therefore goes beyond literacy challenges, as highlighted by adult dyslexics recounting their schooling experiences (Bennett, 2008; Sander & Williamson, 2010; Skinner, 2011; Zipzer, 2007).

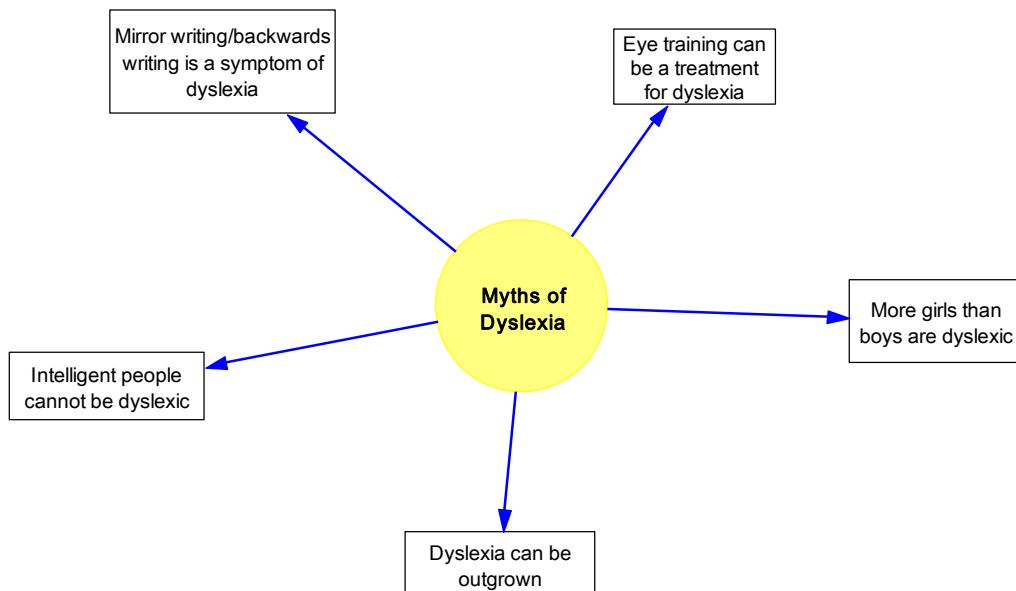
Difficulty with speaking and with words is refuted by many who state that those with dyslexia, while having difficulty with the written word (reading and writing), do not have a problem with articulation (Gunnel Ingesson, 2005; Hornsby, 1995; Mortimore, 2003). Researchers refer to dyslexics as being articulate and intelligent (Morgan & Burn, 2000; Mortimore, 2003), and as Kokot (2005) notes, they include gifted learners in which it is often unrecognized and not diagnosed.

As dyslexia occurs across a range of intellectual abilities (IDA 2015b; Pienaar, 2013) there is a discrepancy between the intellectual ability of the learner as opposed to their literacy difficulties (Nugent, 2008). According to Shaywitz (1996, p.98), "... the seemingly invariant relation between intelligence and reading ability breaks down". Parents and educators see these learners as being both bright and enthusiastic and yet they are not successful with learning to read and write (Alexander-Passe, 2006).

Whilst consensus on it being a specific educational difficulty has been reached, questions are posed as to whether it should be regarded as a different way of learning rather than as a weakness (Lawrence, 2009; Rowan, 2010), or as being an inability rather than a disability. In spite of the burgeoning studies on its nature and causes, it remains a controversial issue. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 depict the conceptual relationship between some of the many truths and myths surrounding dyslexia.



**Figure 2.1: Truths about Dyslexia (Williams & Lynch, 2010, p.67)**



**Figure 2.2: Myths about Dyslexia (Shaywitz, 1996, p.103).**

Siegel (2006, p.581) states that “the definition of dyslexia has proved to be contentious and difficult”, and the variety of definitions that exist have had criticism levelled at them

(Lawrence, 2009). For instance, Spilsbury's (2002) definition of dyslexia as the difficulty that some have with words was broad, as was that of Sir Jim Rose, in his report to the Secretary of State in Britain, as a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling (Rose, 2009). For the purpose of this study the researcher used the following definition adopted in 2002 by the International Dyslexia Association (2015a) as a language-based learning disability and goes beyond just a reading difficulty.

Dyslexia is characterized by difficulties with accurate and / or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

The reason for choosing this definition was that it was in line with the aims of this study. The challenges facing learners with regards to word recognition, spelling and decoding formed the criteria for selecting the participants. The recognition that it gives to the "unexpectedness" of it in terms of it being found in seemingly intelligent learners, as well as reference to their being provided with effective teaching also made this definition suitable as operational for this study.

### **2.3 DIAGNOSIS OF DYSLEXIA**

The value of having a definition impacts on diagnoses so, again, much debate surrounds the diagnosing, with consensus on the nature and methods not having been reached. Pienaar (2013) states that whilst the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) do have a working definition that is used for identification purposes, a lack of a clear definition in the African context has impacted on its diagnosis. Without a diagnosis, learners are often misunderstood and viewed as 'holding back', 'lazy' or 'undisciplined' (Beattle, 2003).

The IDA (2015b) states that dyslexia has a cluster of symptoms, but regards diagnosing as difficult because it is multifaceted, can take many forms, varies from person to person, has similar characteristics to other learning disabilities, and can even overlap with others

(Lawrence, 2009). According to Rogers (1991), “It is this mix-and-match aspect of the symptoms of dyslexia that makes it difficult to diagnose and the fact that it varies in severity from person to person”. Diagnosis must be conducted by a specialist in the field, but it is usually the educator who is the first to observe its signs (Burden & Burdett, 2007). In South Africa, a formal diagnosis is made by an educational psychologist or by approved professionals who are registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). Research, however, reflects controversy surrounding diagnosis as it is not just one test that can be used but rather many factors to be taken into account (Allen, 2010).

Whilst IQ scores play no role in diagnoses with the use of tests to measure reading, spelling and mathematical skills, there is no cut-off score that clearly divides those with dyslexia and those without, hence there is an element of subjectivity involved (Siegel, 2006). Macdonald (2009) states that diagnosis cannot distinguish between those with general reading difficulties and those with dyslexia, as the educational support given is similar for both groups. Pienaar (2013) is of the view that progress has been made with testing, as the latest research has provided professionals with tests different from those used in the past, and this had helped. However, Tops, Callens, Lammertyn, Van Hees, and Brysbaert (2012) are of the view that it is unnecessary to use a wide range of tests and that three in particular, namely word reading, word spelling and phonological awareness, will suffice. With controversy surrounding the outcomes of the tests used, a common view is that a diagnosis is invaluable for the learner.

Early diagnoses and intervention is of paramount importance and key to assisting learners to achieve in school and life (IDA, 2015b; Pirttimaa, Takala, & Ladonlahti, 2015; Van der Leij, 2013). If schools and educators “recognize the frequency of this disability as well as the benefits to early identification and intervention, the reading gaps will be closed earlier and fewer students with dyslexia will fall through the cracks in the system” (Allen, 2010, p.26). However, in spite of the progress made, the existence of dyslexia remains disputed by some countries. Rowan (2010) states that successive governments in New Zealand have resisted the move to recognise diagnosis and support learners with dyslexia, and this has resulted in an education system that fails to acknowledge the challenges of such learners or to support their learning needs. Pevzner (2015) concurs with this view and states that the misunderstanding and controversy surrounding the existence and diagnosing of dyslexia as a learning disorder impacts negatively on learners, as the majority are not identified or are not receiving effective reading interventions.

## 2.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF DYSLEXIA

Specialists in the field of dyslexia state that it can take many forms and varies from person to person. Of almost 30 scholastic symptoms and a greater number of behavioural symptoms none appear in a predictable combination (Rogers, 1991). People with dyslexia are affected differently and with varying degrees of severity (Lawrence, 2009; Pienaar, 2013; Siegel, 2006). Examples and differences in the challenges they face can be seen in the following:

- a. Difficulty concentrating (p.4)
- b. Difficulty remembering homework (p.26)
- c. Inability to read or difficulty with spelling (p.8)
- d. Difficulty remembering sequences, for example, tying shoe laces (10)
- e. Reading and writing difficult, particularly remembering the way various symbols, numbers, letters, and hence words, look. (p.8) (Spilsbury, 2002)

The IDA (2015b, p.2) states that the core difficulty faced by dyslexics is with word recognition, reading fluency, spelling and writing, as well as the challenges listed hereunder:

- Learning to speak
- Learning letters and their sounds
- Organizing written and spoken language
- Memorizing number facts and hence difficulty with mathematics
- Difficulty with reading and comprehending what is being read
- Difficulty with spelling.

Morgan and Burn (2000) add to the listed challenges and include effects on performance in terms of time management and organizational skills.

The listed characteristics and their impact on the individual are aptly summed up by Nalavany et al., (2011, p.197): “it is clear that life with dyslexia can be complex, with far reaching effects”. Notwithstanding this, there are positive aspects, as stated by Rogers (1991), when those with the disability can learn to cope with its effects and thus ensure that there is life after dyslexia. Burden and Burdett (2007) concur in that the challenges faced by these learners are surmountable.

### **2.4.1 Effects on schooling**

School can be a major challenge for those with dyslexia, depending on its severity, with schoolwork considered as being easy by peers a major challenge or near impossibility for them (Alexander-Passe, 2006). Schooling for dyslexics goes beyond reading, writing and mathematics to encompass the emotional aspect of gaining an education (Nalavany et al., 2011).

On a daily basis, learners with dyslexia face many challenges in the classroom with work that they are given by the educators. The effects that dyslexia has on these learners' in the classroom are noted hereunder, however, it must be remembered that "even though the diagnosis of dyslexia has one common name, its effects vary" (Brante, 2013, p.84):

- Difficulty with reading, writing and mathematics
- Constantly bumping into things or dropping things
- Inability to organise daily activities in the allotted time
- Needing to re-read a word or phrase to get the meaning of it
- Poor or non-existent sense of direction
- Little or no concept of time
- Lack of concentration
- Difficulty in following sequential instructions or events
- Inability to relate to people in groups
- Emotional turbulence or mood swings
- Feelings of inferiority, stupidity, clumsiness
- Doing the opposite of what is told (Ferreri, 2014, pp1-2).

### **2.4.2 Reading challenges**

The necessity and value of being able to read is stressed by many, for instance Duff and Clark (2011), who states that it is critical for successful academic learning to take place, and Lawrence (2009), who regard it as of the utmost importance for all learners as reading forms part of the entire curriculum. Conversely, an inability to read affects all subjects taught and



learned. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) states that literacy is a fundamental human right, a foundation for lifelong learning that is essential to social and human development in its ability to transform lives, as well as being an instrument of empowerment to improve one's health, income, and relationship with the world (UNESCO, 2009). It enables all to keep themselves informed, participate in and exert influence on the world (Nielsen, 2011), and according to Cornelissen (2005, p.209), "For the majority reading is an effortless skill that underpins daily existence and determines an individual's ability to earn a living and survive as a fully functioning member of society"

Reading is a skill that requires intense focus on all the details of a word (letters) so that they can be linked together to the sounds that they make (Allen, 2010). The inability to do so creates problems and confusion for those with dyslexia. Lawrence (2009) states that there are various methods educators can use to teach dyslexic learners to read, whilst Pevzner (2015, p.65) agrees with Siegel (2006) that the reason dyslexics find reading and spelling a challenge is because they "have trouble matching letters on a page with the sounds that those letters make". As dyslexia often has an effect on the ability to read, the inability to do so frustrates them. However, Allen (2010) states that early identification and intervention will enable the learners with dyslexia to keep up with their peers and read at or near grade level.

### **2.4.3 Writing challenges**

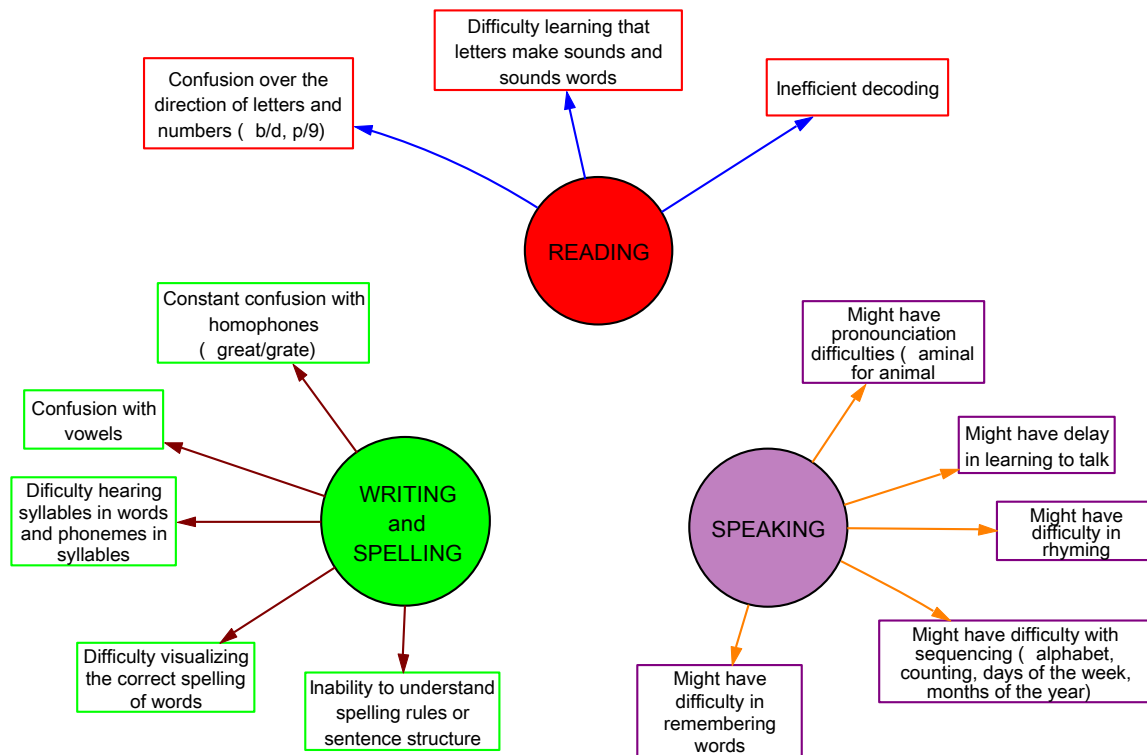
Whilst emphasis is placed on the importance of reading, writing is also crucial for academic success and an important aspect of life. In the same way that some dyslexic learners lag behind their peers with their reading skills, the same occurs with writing. Just as reading is a skill, so is writing, a complex activity and a challenge for dyslexic learners caused by slower language processing and spelling challenges that result in written text being of a poorer quality than their peers (Morken, & Helland, 2009).

Development of writing skills and abilities, and thus expertise in writing takes time (Harris, & Graham, 2013). In spite of this, few educators place value on directly teaching learners the art of writing (Baker, Chard, Ketterlin-Geller, Apichatabutra, & Doabler, 2009). The complexity of writing can be seen in the following skills that are involved in the process:

- Organising information and ideas
- Use of grammar and punctuation
- Writing legibly
- Identifying and implementing rhetorical structure
- Writing in a way that captures a particular audience (Baker et al., 2009, p.303).

The value of being able to write is pointed out by researchers, as essential for learning as it provides learners with the opportunity to express their feelings and opinions on various topics as well as allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge on specific content (Baker et al., 2013). Their struggle with writing leaves them greatly disadvantaged, which increases in higher grades (Harris, & Graham, 2013) and increases the risk of failing. The challenges presented by dyslexia can make writing a difficult task, resulting writing slowly, encountering problems with understanding, spelling and legibility, the result of which is a lack of confidence in written work (Kinder, & Elander, 2012). However, despite their lack of confidence, dyslexic learners often hide their inabilities and become competent at concealing them ( Lawrence 2009; Morgan, & Burn, 2000).

This empirical research review has shown that dyslexia presents these learners with challenges that have a crucial effect on their schooling. The IDA (2015b) lists the core academic challenges faced by dyslexics as word recognition, reading fluency, spelling and writing. Figure 2.3 indicates the relationship between these challenges and the confusion within each that sometimes occurs.



**Figure 2.3: Academic challenges faced by learners with dyslexia (Porch and Gilroy, 2003, cited in Williams, & Lynch, 2010, p.69).**

## 2.5 OCCURRENCE OF DYSELXIA

Related literature repeatedly states that dyslexia is a common learning disability that is not outgrown, whilst the symptoms experienced and its severity differs for individuals. Beattle (2003, p.90), an adult with dyslexia, refers to it as being his “constant companion”. The controversy surrounding dyslexia has possibly impacted on the statistics for its occurrence, leading to researchers and professionals providing differing statistics for its occurrence.

About one in ten people have some kind of dyslexia, and about four out of every ten have serious difficulties with it and need special help (Spilsbury, 2002). According to Shaywitz (2003), dyslexia is *the* most common learning disability affecting one in five learners and accounts for over 80% of all learning disabilities. Similar findings state that it affects between 5% and 12% of all students (Dowson, 2003; Shaywitz, 1996).

As a result of it not being outgrown, “3% to 5% of adults are confronted daily with a disability that in our literate society may prevent them from participating as fully as others” (Hellendoorn & Ruijsenaars, 2000, p.227). Siegel (2006) states that, depending on the definition used, 5% to 10% of the population are seen as having dyslexia. The IDA (2015b)

states that as many as 15% to 20% of the entire population have some of the symptoms associated with it and even though it affects individuals throughout their lives its impact on the individual can change at different stages in life. Pienaar (2013) states that in South Africa one in ten people are dyslexic, which equates to about 5 million people struggling with literacy problems in school and the workplace.

Living with dyslexia involves either acceptance or rejection of the diagnoses as well as the label. Armstrong and Humphrey (2009) state that it entails psycho-social processes that indicate a resistance or accommodation of the label 'dyslexia'. The psycho-social processes involved, as well as the factors that play a role or influence this resistance or accommodation, are indicated in Figure 2.4.

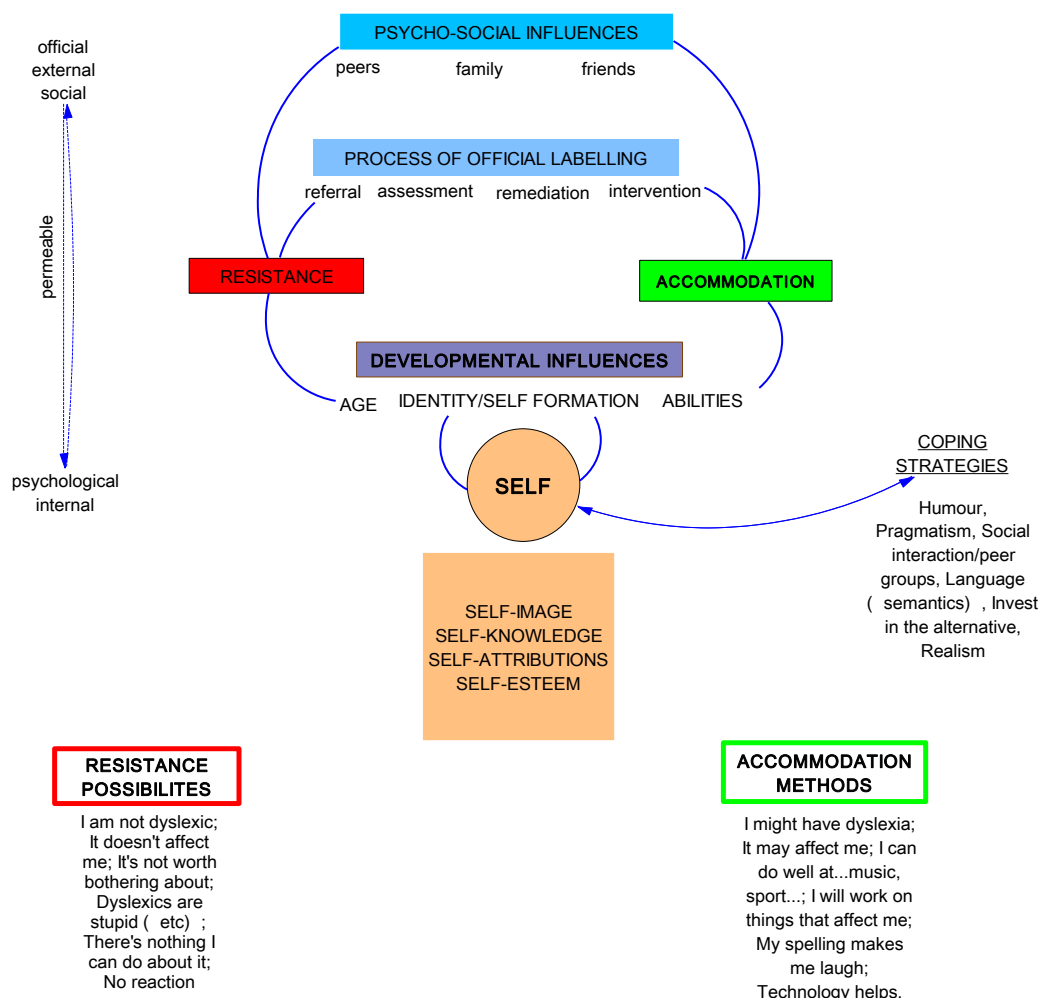


Figure 2.4: Resistance-accommodation model (Armstrong, & Humphrey, 2009, p.98)

### 2.5.1 Intervention

The value of early intervention for dyslexic learners is seen as imperative in boosting their self-esteem, as well as enabling them to keep up with their peers in the classroom and achieve academic success. Rose (2009) reports that it is important to develop, as well as thoroughly implement, high quality interventions for learners with literacy and dyslexic difficulties. Literature repeatedly states that the symptoms and severity of dyslexia differ for individuals, therefore, when providing intervention it must be borne in mind that there is no uniform approach, depending on the learner, his or her nationality, and the cultural and educational context (Smythe & Salter, 2005, p.1).

The intervention provided to dyslexic learners in South Africa has been affected by its historical past, which as Hattingh (2005) states, saw the development of specialised education resulting in an education system that provides for the needs of all learners from all ethnic groups, with learning disabilities affected by the political system of the country. The provision of specialised education today has to take into account the imbalances created by the past political system which has negatively impacted on schools, educators and the finance that is available for intervention.

In 1994, with the advent of democracy, there was radical political change in South Africa. Prior to this the education system had been divided along racial grounds, with each group having its own schools and education departments. The white group was more privileged and although remedial and special schools were scarce they did exist for learners from that ethnic group (Flack, 2009). The other race groups had few if any such schools. In 1996 the government of South Africa merged 17 racially designated Departments of Education, to one Department of Education with one curriculum for all the country's learners (Department of Education, 2005).

In 2001, the South African Department of Education published Education White Paper 6 that outlined plans for an inclusive education system, including in it the strengthening of special schools so as to provide education for learners with disabilities (Department of Education, 2001). This policy acknowledged, accepted and respected that:

- All children and youth can learn and they all need support
- All learners are different and have different learning needs which are equally valued and an ordinary part of human experience

- Education structures, systems and learning methodologies must be enabled so as to meet the needs of all learners
- A change in attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, curricula and the environment have to occur in order to meet the needs of all learners
- The participation of all learners must be maximised in the culture and curricula of educational institutions and barriers to learning must be uncovered and minimised.
- Barriers to learning must be minimised and all learners empowered by developing their individual strengths and enabling them to participate critically in the process of learning (Department of Education, 2001, p.16).

However, criticism has been directed to the various policies presented by the DoE. For instance, Pillay and Terlizzi, (2009) state that as a developing country it does not have the resources or facilities that are necessary to meet inclusion as outlined in the document. “Inadequate alignment of policies to plans” (DSD, DWCPD & UNICEF, 2012, p.14) weakens the rate of service provision as the policies have not been consistently linked to either national or provincial planning therein.

Presently, learners with dyslexia in South Africa are educated either in a mainstream school environment or in a school for special education needs (LSEN). In a study conducted by Pillay and Terlizzi (2009) it was shown that such learners benefited more from the education received in an LSEN environment on a psychological, social and academic level, as a result of learning in an environment that provided valuable resources necessary to meet their learning needs. However, as a result of South Africa only having a limited number of LSEN schools, intervention for all learners with dyslexia is limited so many are being educated in mainstream schools.

### **2.5.2 Role of the school**

School can be a very challenging environment for learners with dyslexia, and on entering school “...they enter a world where their abilities and strengths are different from those around them” (Alexander-Passe, 2006, p.256). Higher grades are viewed as crucial times for learners with learning disabilities as it is here that academic skills and learning strategies have to be strengthened to enable them to feel competent, independent and able to make the transition from school to tertiary education or work (Morocco, Aguilar, Clay, Brigham &

Zigmond, 2006). It is therefore important that schools provide dyslexic learners with sufficiently effective support that allows for successful transition to take place.

The negative effects of lack of such support on these learners into adulthood is reported upon in the study of Davies and McNeil (2005, p.23), as the sample group believed that “it was not dyslexia that had stopped them from achieving their goals... rather it was the lack of appropriate support from schools... that made fulfilling their potential more difficult”. It is important that schools provide dyslexic learners with the right strategies as this will enable them as adults to make positive contributions to society and thereby prevent feelings of defeat or severely damaged lives (Grant, 2002).

Burden and Burdett (2005, p. 103) are of the view that high quality teaching is of utmost importance if students with dyslexia are to progress with their academic learning, and this needs to go “beyond multi-sensory programmes to encompass the needs of the whole child”. Schools should encourage learners with dyslexia to participate in sports, social activities or a special interest that they might have, as well as provide them with alternative education programmes that are best suited for them, which could result in them doing well and viewing themselves positively (Gunnel Ingesson, 2007). Schools that provide these learners with academic choice, school support, and ways of motivating them to challenge themselves and give of their best have been found to be the most successful at ensuring they achieve academically and are prepared for life after school (Morocco et al., 2006).

Strong communication between school and home is a two-way process and fundamental for positive and successful learning. Schools should have mechanisms in place to ensure that communication with parents is continuous, thus keeping parents informed and providing for mutual communication. Apart from the school report indicating academic performance in exams, methods of communication that can be used include:

- A notebook/communication book that is sent between home and school and signed by the parents. Educators and parents can use it to communicate and share information
- Newsletters in which to share written information with the parents
- Regular parent days, which enable parents and learners to communicate with class and subject educators about the learners’ performance and areas of improvement (Chung, & Yuen, 2012; Farrell, & Collier, 2012; Graham-Clay, 2005).

Family involvement contributes to student success, therefore it is important that schools continue to develop and expand their skills and maximize effective communication with parents, thus promoting parental involvement (Farrell & Collier, 2012). However, Crawley (2013) indicates that a healthy, successful connection between home and school requires communication, trust and understanding, and if this is achieved an active exchange of information will take place.

It is the duty of schools to do their best to assist these learners in developing the necessary skills. Pienaar (2013) states that the educational experiences of learners with dyslexia in Africa needs to improve, and that this can be done by looking at experts in the UK and USA who can help with information and courses that enable schools to develop the necessary expertise so as to improve learning outcomes and provide access to specialised educators. Rowan (2010) indicates that dyslexic learners in New Zealand are also disadvantaged because the country has not recognized the struggles of these learners and they face educators and system ignorance, therefore inappropriate support is given and this has impacted on these learners success.

Within the school environment modern technology can assist learners with dyslexia, play a large role in enabling them to feel equal to other learners, and help them academically and emotionally. Schools can assist by allowing the following:

- a. Computers - the spelling programmes are useful and will assist with handwriting, which is often illegible
- b. Tape recorders - learners' ideas and lessons can be recorded instead of leaving them to make notes of these. Books and tests can be placed on tape
- c. Screen readers – used to read aloud what is on the computer
- d. Speech recognition devices – the learner can talk into a microphone which will then type the words onto the computer screen
- e. Extra time to complete tasks and take notes. (Hodge, 2000; IDA; 2012; Pirttimaa et al., 2015 ; Siegel, 2006).

The value of a computer is however personal, as Nielsen (2011) discovered that whilst some of her participants found it useful and indispensable others preferred using pens or pencils as their hands knew how to write and the keyboard of the computer demanded far more concentration than traditional writing materials.



School examinations and tests can be challenging for those with dyslexia. Conventional methods of assessment used in schools are made up of typed questions on a question paper and learners are required to provide the answers in writing, conducted within time restrictions. The dyslexic learner is therefore faced with three challenges, namely, reading, writing and time. In spite of the challenges, literature referring to school tests and exams written by those that are dyslexic to test their academic knowledge and allow progression is scarce and limited. Time constraints for dyslexic learners in tests and exams cause them to achieve lower marks, possibly caused by the following:

- Words in the questions can be misread
- Greater number of spelling errors
- Even though the answer is known the ability to express is restricted
- Difficulty in expressing ideas in a structured written form
- Greater illegibility in handwriting because of speed
- More linguistic errors resulting in conveying what was not intended
- Anxiety (Osborne, 1999).

Whilst it is the duty of the school and educators to ensure that learners' are fully prepared for tests and examinations, and that extra time and access to a reader or word processor is allowed, it is the duty of those involved in the setting of tests and examinations to ensure fair assessment of these learners and that they are not disadvantaged. They must be given "a fair opportunity to show their knowledge, understanding and skills relating to the subject under assessment" (Crisp, Johnson, & Novakovic, 2007, p.17), however, arguments on the value of extra time for dyslexics proved inconclusive in a study conducted by Crisp, Johnson and Novakovic (2012, p.814) who researched methods of making examinations "dyslexia friendly".

Recommendations from Osborne (1999) of ways in which schools can assist these learners are:

- Have short break periods during the exam or split it into two sessions
- Use a written question paper and an audio tape of it
- Allow candidates access to electronic spelling aids

- Indicate on scripts that the candidate is dyslexic and that subject knowledge and logical reasoning is being tested, not the language skills
- Allow learners to give verbal answers on tape instead of writing
- Assess these learners orally.

Dyslexic learners can succeed but if the education system that they are studying places them at a disadvantage because of prejudiced attitudes towards their literacy challenges these learners are less likely to succeed (Sander, & Williamson, 2010). Brante (2013) concurs with this and states that in order for the chances of the dyslexic learner to improve, educators must recognise the diverse effects of dyslexia. Schools should assist learners who have dyslexia to “develop critically important adaptive coping responses” that will increase their resilience and well being, thereby assisting them to succeed and lead productive happy lives (Firth, Frydenberg, Steeg, & Bond, 2013, p.126). Alternative methods of assessment might be a good exploration for schools to ensure fairness.

Since the importance of the learners’ social experience at school has been neglected in research (Nugent, 2008) there are various factors that schools can use to increase learner enjoyment that could have lasting positive effects. Gorard and Huat See (2011, pp.678-682) state that the following can be determinants that impact on learner enjoyment of school:

- Having friends at school provides social interaction and leads to learning
- Small classes are less intimidating
- Group work encourages the social aspect of learning and enables learners to talk to and support each other
- Having a good relationship with educators, which includes trust and respect, minimises stress
- Variation in teaching methods, which includes physical activities, practical work, dramatizations, debates and the unexpected, avoids boring lessons
- Providing additional support for learners that they can access when needed, thus providing extra help
- Controlling disruptive behaviour, which could take place in the classroom or on the playground in the form of bullying, violence, theft and social isolation.

Flutter and Rudduck (2004) state that it is important for schools to listen to the voice of these learners as this provides them with a sense of control over their learning, thereby leading to an increase in their motivation and an improvement in academic performance. Their voice can be a powerful source of information for schools.

### **2.5.3 Specialist schools**

The ethos of the school plays a large role in contributing to whether the dyslexic learner views their challenges in a positive or negative light and therefore as a challenge that can or cannot be overcome (Burden & Burdett, 2007). Learners in special schools and reading units seem to be happier and have more positive experiences than those in mainstream schools (Nugent, 2008). Karanda et al., (2009) found that some dyslexic adolescents who attended a mainstream school did not indicate positive experiences, whilst Hellendoorn & Ruijsenaars (2000, p. 233) noted that one learner said the special school “gave me a sense of myself and some sense of who I could be.”

The value of attending specialist schools was explored by Nalavany et al., (2011, p.196), who found:

- adults with lower levels of anxiety and depression
- less emotional distress about their dyslexia
- higher levels of self-esteem than those dyslexics who did not attend one
- educators were adequately trained to meet the academic and emotional needs of the learners
- peer support had a direct influence on positive emotional experiences that are carried into adulthood
- a community of support for these learners
- potential long-term and self-esteem benefits which continue into adulthood.

In contrast, some researchers have indicated that negative feelings can result from attending special schools, even though it resulted in more learning and a contributory factor to their success in later years. Adults found their experiences at a special school humiliating, as they had to go to a special school with a special bus, and this caused loneliness and a loss of friends (Hellendoorn & Ruijsenaars, 2000).

#### **2.5.4 Role of the educators**

According to Gwernan-Jones & Burden (2010, p.66), educators' "abilities in dealing with different forms of learning difficulties will be affected by their knowledge and attitudes towards these difficulties." It is imperative that dyslexic learners are taught by educators who are knowledgeable about dyslexia and the challenges that these learners face so that they are able to help them achieve their highest potential (Rose, 2009). The value of educator knowledge about dyslexia is seen in the study of Karande et al., (2009), in which learners stated that they made more progress in subjects that were taught by educators who were understanding of their challenges and difficulties.

Learners interviewed by Glazzard (2010, p.68-69) stated:

- "I think if teachers knew a bit more about dyslexia and they had a student in their class, they would know they were having difficulties and they would know how to help them. I think when teachers get trained they should do a section on how to deal with dyslexia and how to help dyslexics in class."
- "When teachers are training they should go through a training course where they get to learn how to deal with dyslexic kids because it isn't fair on the dyslexic kids to put up with chelping from teachers – why haven't you done your homework? Why haven't you done enough work? It's not really fair. It gets me down. It's not that we are thick or anything. It's because our minds are working in a different way to everyone else's."

Research indicates that many educators lack knowledge in this area and this can be blamed on teacher training preparation (Youman, & Mather, 2013). The lack of training provided for educators to detect and manage dyslexia in the classroom results in a system that continually neglects the needs of such learners (Morgan, & Burn, 2000; Williams, & Lynch, 2010). Many other researchers, as stated hereunder, attest to the need and importance of educator training programmes in the area of dyslexia.

Recognising a need for more and improved training for educators who teach learners with dyslexia (Nalavany et al., (2011) and Aladwani & Al Shaye (2012)), attribute poor educator preparation programmes as the cause of educators lacking knowledge about dyslexia, its characteristics, diagnoses and the teaching methods to use. Williams and Lynch (2010, p.69) state that "when teachers understand the nature and characteristics of dyslexia they are better able to address their students' needs". Pevzner (2015, p.65) states that many educators are "in

the dark” about suitable methods to use when teaching reading to those with dyslexia as they are not emphasised in teacher training colleges. The different forms of learning required pose a challenge to educators who lack knowledge and training, and it is important that educators recognise the diversity of dyslexia and identify the individual strengths and weaknesses if they are to gain appropriate and adequate instruction to improve their reading abilities (Brante, 2013). Some educators fail to realize the challenges faced by these learners and that they are trying their best (Bennett, 2008). This could be due to a lack of knowledge or insight into dyslexia (Bennet, 2008; Sander & Williamson, 2010; Skinner, 2011; Zipzer, 2007).

Williams and Lynch (2010) state that it is essential that educators recognise the indicators of dyslexia and know what strategies to use so as to meet the needs of learners as traditional methods to teach these learners to read, write and spell make the learning process even more difficult. A deeper understanding of what dyslexia is will enhance educators’ ability to address learners’ needs (Williams & Lynch, 2010), especially in high schools where they have difficulty in building and maintaining approaches that meet the varied academic and social needs of learners with learning disabilities (Morocco et al., 2006). A turning point at school for an adult interviewed in Wearmouth (2004b) was an educator who recognised that it was not just laziness but possibly dyslexia.

Rose (2009) states that it is imperative for educators and support staff to be well trained and knowledgeable so as to ensure that successful intervention and teaching of dyslexic learners can occur. The basic teacher training for mainstream educators in South Africa does not equip them with the knowledge or skills required to educate learners with dyslexia as it does not form part of the curriculum (Mahlo, 2011). A further Diploma in Education (Special Education Needs) must be studied in order to competently educate these learners (Hattingh, 2005) and be knowledgeable of their learning challenges and educational needs.

Western Cape educators interviewed in the study of Thompson (2013) were of the view that, despite them receiving no pre-service and little in-service training in dyslexia, they had adequate knowledge about it through classroom experience. However, this finding is questionable as it indicates that these educators, with no training in dyslexia, felt they had the knowledge and skills gained through experience to educate these learners. In spite of this finding, the study emphasised that it should be compulsory and form part of the curriculum, whereby educator training institutions in South Africa provide pre-service training for trainees in the field of dyslexia. Hattingh (2005) stated that attempts were being made by various organisations in the country to influence policy at national, regional and local level so

as to rectify this gap in education. She added that university departments and various other organisations were contributing in the form of research and publications, thus creating awareness and imparting knowledge about dyslexia.

Educator knowledge is essential, as can be seen in the study of Melia (2008), which cited an adult dyslexic recounting her schooling experiences of educators who did not care or know how to teach her. In another study, a first-year education student interviewed stated that her learning difficulty as a result of dyslexia was worsened by “teaching styles and the inability of her teachers to respond directly to her particular needs as and when they became apparent (Gibson & Kendall, 2010).

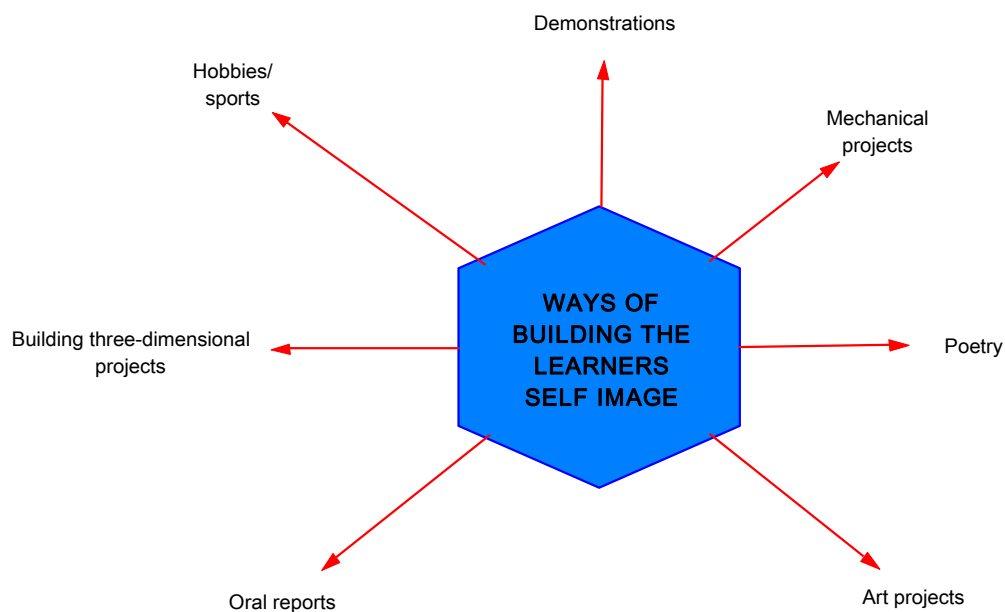
Teaching and learning can be challenging for educators and for learners who have dyslexia. Long, MacBlain and MacBlain (2007) state that there is a need for closer examination of educator learner empathy when the quality of the learning environment is explored. Educators require a great deal of patience and understanding when teaching learners who are dyslexic “because things that are apparently learned one day often have to be relearned the next day” (Rogers, 1991, p.121). As a result, small classes are more desirable and hence manageable.

Educators can contribute to enhancing learners’ self-confidence by encouraging them and conveying that they care for them. In so doing learners will be provided with positive learning experiences (Long et al., 2007). Supportive educators are those who show learners not only their problems but also their potential and thereby give them hope and trust in their future. They create an atmosphere in their classes in which all learners show an attitude of openness and kind curiosity for others, as well as empathy for the challenges (Nielsen, 2011, p.562).

A successful dyslexic business person in South Africa states that his success was as a result of the patience of a teacher who urged him to read more than just comic books (Terblanche, 2010). Earlier, Hellendoorn and Ruijssenaars (2000) and Beattle (2003) found that whilst dyslexics are able to recall negative experiences with educators they will remember the names of certain ones who understood their challenges and praised them, although they were unable to read and write like other learners in the class. An adult dyslexic in Pienaar (2013) stated that the turning point in his life was in Grade 6 when an educator gave him great praise, and this positivity and support pointed him towards university where he achieved a first class degree. Research shows that there are supportive and highly regarded educators

who understand learners' abilities and challenges, recognise their interest in subjects and avail themselves even outside teaching hours to help with extra tuition or to explain the work in a variety of ways that meet learning preferences (Rowan, 2010).

The academic barriers caused by dyslexia can be minimised and overcome if the correct teaching methods are used. For example, research shows that dyslexic learners have difficulty with sounds, therefore educators should use pictorial and experiential learning material when teaching them (Taylor, Duffy, & England, 2009). Methods should encompass a combination of all the available methods that have been shown to assist them and it is important for educators to discover the learning methods, skills and equipment that suite these learners and to keep abreast of new information. This will assist these learners with reading and writing, as well as provide them with access to meaningful contexts and thus release the learners' strengths, curiosity and will to learn (Nielsen, 2011). Gorard and Huat See (2011) state that it is important for educators to use different teaching methods and include physical activities and practical work. Examples of teaching content which will not only make lessons enjoyable and achievable but also enhance the self-concept of the learners are shown in Figure 2.5.



**Figure 2.5: Ways in which educators can build the learners self-image (Williams, & Lynch, 2010, p.70).**

Research using the voice of adult dyslexics or parents of learners with dyslexia repeatedly states that a lack of understanding of the challenges faced has been shown by educators. Many successful dyslexic adults state the achievements that they have been able to make, and feel aggrieved that they were not understood or assisted by their educators (Bennett, 2008; Grant, 2002; Hellendoorn, & Ruijsenaars, 2000; McNulty, 2003; Melia, 2009; Miller, 2011; Morgan, & Burn, 2000; Sander & Williamson, 2010; Skinner, 2011; Wearmouth, 2004b; Zipzer, 2007). This is, however, the view of adults recalling their school experiences and little is known of today's experiences because of a lack of research. No matter how hard they try, parents and educators sometimes think that dyslexics are misbehaving, being defiant, being lazy or not trying (Mortimore, 2003; Sander & Williamson, 2010). Their apparent inattention, carelessness, poor spelling, messy handwriting and misunderstood instructions are seen as a lack of effort on their part (Armstrong & Humphrey, 2009), and educators' attitudes impact greatly on these learners (Gibson & Kendall, 2010).

Sander and Williamson (2010) state that a change in educator attitude from ridiculing learners to providing helpful support is required, whilst Karande et al., (2009) found that 63.3% of adolescents interviewed reported classroom educators who were supportive and encouraged them while teaching in the classroom. They added that the young learners might have felt this way because they were more accepting of the situation as well as less judgmental, and this could be caused by their "innate innocence" (Karande et al., 2009, p.388).

Adult dyslexics have indicated that they experienced contentious relationships with educators as a result of the latter misunderstanding their difficulties and challenges (McNulty, 2003). It is important that educators realise that these learners are not lazy or unmotivated, and that their limited academic success might cause feelings of frustration and avoidance of work given, therefore strategies that are useful in unlocking the language and literacy challenges faced by them must be sought and used (Williams, & Lynch, 2010).

A common theme from most dyslexic adults interviewed about their school experiences is the negativity experienced, which affects their self-esteem. Experiences with educators are often found to be negative, as the learners feel that they are not being understood (Bennet, 2008; Hellendoorn & Ruijsenaars, 2000; Nalavany et al., 2011; Sander & Williamson, 2010; Skinner, 2011; Zipzer, 2007). An adult interviewed by Hellendoorn and Ruijsenaars (2000) stated that criticism from educators concerning his work and handwriting resulted in him closing up and losing pride and pleasure in his schoolwork, in turn leaving educators to



believe that he was stupid. Negativity from educators was also highlighted by an adult interviewed by Wearmouth (2004b) who stated that no matter how hard he tried educators told him that he was not working hard enough, which led him to feel agitation and despair.

Adult learners interviewed recounted the following negative and hurtful actions from educators:

- Being forced to stand and spell words, failing to get them correct and feeling “thick and stupid” (Dale & Taylor, 2001, p.1000);
- Being called ‘stupid’ by her educators, and “if you are called stupid often enough you begin to believe it” (Melia, 2008, p.28);
- The humiliation that a certain teacher caused her by telling the class to listen to her read so that they could have a good laugh, and further stated that “if ever I came across her I could still kill her for what she did to me.” (Hellendoorn & Ruijsenaars, 2000, p.233);
- School was horrible for a boy as he had an educator who was “very hard, a very nasty person altogether. She said I was useless and slow” (Melia, 2009, p.30).
- Words spoken to others can build or destroy the person and the words educators used to insult one, such as “you are ugly” and “you will never amount to anything” stayed a long time and still affect my self-esteem, even though I am successful in the work place (Pienaar, 2013).

These responses and feelings are echoed in the writings of Bennett (2008): “Teachers are supposed to educate not humiliate and belittle” and a change from ridicule to helpful support is required (Sander & Williamson, 2010). Respondents in Gibson and Kendall (2010, p.190) referred to the “negative teacher attitudes, lack of support and low expectations they felt that teachers had” towards them. According to Sander and Williamson (2010, p.61), although one learner had a few educators who inspired him, the main lesson that he learnt from his educators was that he was “useless at spelling and that in their humble opinion he should do something about it”

Educators need to understand the challenges that these learners face as well as the effect on them, both academically and emotionally. Educators should provide positive learning experiences for those with dyslexia to “ensure that they feel less isolated and more socially included” (Long et al., 2007, p.133), and “high quality teaching is vitally important if

students with dyslexia are to make progress with their academic learning” (Burden, & Burdett, 2005, p.103). Educators should use the appropriate language to listen and talk to learners (McPhillips et al., 2012) as they are instrumental in promoting learners’ self-concepts through showing their understanding and support.

Shaywitz (2003) states that focusing solely on the phonological weakness of the learners’ causes an imbalance and that educators must identify their strengths in critical thinking, reasoning and problem-solving which are often their assets. Nielsen (2011) states that providing these learners with extra time, not working within constrained timeframes, as well as allowing them to work at their own pace, enables learners to feel comfortable and this will lead to effective learning. Too much support can however be negative so educators have to find the right balance. Educator support can be embarrassing if the learner is constantly asked by the educator during lessons if they understand the work as it draws the entire class’s attention to them (Rowan, 2010).

### **2.5.5 Role of peers**

Peers form an important component of learners’ lives, and Nugent (2008) is of the view that the importance of social experiences at school has been neglected. In interviews conducted with dyslexic teenagers and adults, the majority indicated that their first six grades were characterised by distress, failure, and in many cases bullying (Gunnel Ingesson, 2007; Hellendoorn & Ruijsenaars, 2000; Humphrey & Mullins, 2002;). The bullying, teasing and ridicule from their peers were the result of their reading and writing difficulties, but some indicated that relations with their peers improved in secondary school (Bennet, 2008; Sander & Williamson, 2010; Skinner, 2011; Zipzer, 2007). According to Humphrey and Mullins (2002), learners with dyslexia often felt excluded and lonely, therefore dyslexia can damage peer relationships and thereby have a negative effect on their self-esteem.

Nugent (2008) indicates that many dyslexic learners who attended mainstream schools indicated that they were often teased about their learning difficulties, a phenomenon attested to by Riddick (2010), who states that learners with special needs attending mainstream schools are more likely to experience bullying from their peers. However, Rowan (2010) states that peers who are friends and part of a group are more accepting of the challenges faced by learners with learning disabilities and willing to assist when asked. She further states that close support within the peer group consists of one or two friends with whom they are

able to laugh about their mistakes. They can ask them for assistance, for example with proofreading, and receive encouragement from them.

Nugent (2008, p.197) states that the type of school attended by these learners affects friendships and that in a 'special school' setting they are more likely to have positive experiences with friends, and develop a feeling "that they are all in it together". This view is contradicted by Hellendoorn and Ruijsenaars (2000), who found that because special schools have a mixture of learners attending them, with various learning and behavioural problems, bullying was a continuous problem.

Gibson and Kendall (2010b) found dyslexic learners reported experiencing verbal abuse but no physical bullying in their peer groups, but in contrast, an adult in Wearmouth (2004b) stated that his academic achievement stopped the bullying that he experienced and earned him respect from his peers. Educator treatment and actions also appear to affect the way in which these learners are treated by their peers. Trevor Ncube in Pienaar (2013) stated that the way that the educators treated him affected the way that his peers treated him.

### **2.5.6 Role of the family**

Dyslexia is a learning disability that is challenging for both the child diagnosed with it and the one who experiences its symptoms, as well as for their caregivers and families. Literature shows that it is often the parents who are the first to know that their child has an academic problem and is not just stupid, lazy or backward (Donawa, 1995; Hornsby, 1995; Pevzner, 2015; Swalander, & Taube, 2007). According to Scott et al., (as cited in McNulty, 2003), one of the keys to success for those with dyslexia is good family support.

This is echoed by adult dyslexics in Hellendoorn and Ruijsenaars (2000) who stated that parent school cooperation was non-existent, but family relations were predominantly both positive and supportive, contributing to their wellbeing as adults. Parental support was therefore their greatest source of assistance during the early years of their school life. Research has repeatedly affirmed the value of the family in the lives of these learners and confirms that the role of the family is a critical component in ensuring their success.

The value of parental or home support is of extreme importance for the dyslexic learner (Donawa, 1995; Gunnel Ingesson, 2007; Hellendoorn, & Ruijsenaars, 2000; McNulty, 2003). Parents and caregivers of learners with literacy challenges are an important source for providing learners with additional support, thereby assisting and encouraging good literacy

development as well as literacy acquisition in their children (McCray, Vaughn & Neal, 2001; Wearmouth, 2004a). Often, parental involvement and support include the use of tutors to provide additional support to their children (Rowan, 2010). Sheldon and Epstein (as cited in McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor and McClowry (2013) state that parents' involvement in their children's schooling enhances their academic, socio-emotional and behavioural outcomes.

As a result of parental involvement, improvements are noted in their academic performance as well as in their self-esteem. Apart from supporting their children academically, especially in their formative years at school, family support continues and includes other kinds of support (Nalavany, & Carawan, 2012). A learner interviewed in Brante (2013) stated that his handwriting looked like abstract art and that his mother corrected his homework and gave him many writing assignments for which he remained grateful. The majority of the adults interviewed by Brante (2013) indicated that one of the keys to their success was the role played by their parents in encouraging and assisting with reading, writing, and homework, and giving emotional support.

Schools must therefore encourage parental involvement in the school and in the lives of these learners as this provides a strong foundation stone on which the school can build (Wragg et al., 1998 quoted in Wearmouth, 2004a). Rose (2009) emphasises that the family plays a crucial role in the life of the learner and that the school should encourage and assist parents to be involved and support their children's learning difficulties. By working with the school as a team parents are able to make a difference for their children (Pienaar, 2013), but the school, parents and learners should be seen as a partnership that is strong so as to meet the needs of the dyslexic learner (Long et al., 2007).

## **2.6 PERSONAL EFFECTS OF DYSLEXIA ON LEARNERS**

Dyslexia affects not only academic life but also other parts of the life of the person and therefore has lasting consequences (Pirttimaa et al., 2015). According to Burton (2004), learners with dyslexia often suffer negative psychological, social and emotional challenges as a result of their academic difficulties. Struggles and failure can negatively affect the self-esteem (McNulty, 2003), whilst feelings of inferiority often remains with them for the rest of their lives (Nielsen, 2011).

Beattle (2003) states that as a dyslexic his childhood was a continuous struggle in his attempts to navigate his early school years: "I don't have any words to explain the enormity of not being able to read and write - it's immense". It is difficult to understand unless experienced, but when one is able to read one has to learn to overcome feelings of anger, frustration and embarrassment, thus leading to a feeling of joy (Melia, 2008, p.28). An adult recalling his school experience stated that not being able to read and write like others was awful and added that he was the laughing stock, seen as being lazy and stupid (Hellendoorn & Ruijsenaars, 2000, p. 233). The connection between being stupid and dyslexia is also made in Evans (2014) and Melia (2008), with the latter stating that if one is labelled as stupid one may eventually come to believe one is.

For some, the inability to read like the other learners in the class results in feelings of failure, frustration, fears, anxiety, hopelessness, aggression and feelings of inferiority (Hellendoorn & Ruijsenaars, 2000; Melia, 2009; Nalavany et al., 2011). McPhillips et al., (2012, p.62) found that learners with literacy problems are aware of the importance of developing appropriate reading and writing skills "to support their overall learning and progress in school and recognized that this would have significance for their adult lives". As a result they attach much significance to becoming good readers.

Life for those with dyslexia is not just filled with negative factors, with some said to have special skills and talents in spite of their learning challenges. They are imaginative, make up wonderful stories, are good at drama, music, sport, 3-D constructions, and computers, whilst some are creative (Gunnel Ingesson, 2007). Rogers (1991, p.121) states that most dyslexics are "highly mechanical", leading Lawrence (2009) to ponder the question of whether dyslexia should be regarded as a different way of learning rather than as a weakness.

Miller (2011) states that dyslexia can be viewed as a blessing as learners with it have to exert themselves much more to achieve positive results and continually working hard bodes well for further education and being successful in the workplace. This view is echoed by Morgan and Burn (2000), who state that it often forces those who have it to work harder and leads to a determination to succeed. Adult dyslexics reported that the feelings of insecurity they experienced in school had been a driving force to succeed in later life (McNulty, 2003). Rogers (1991) states that he had learnt as a dyslexic that although there was no cure for it those with this disability could learn to cope with its effects, thus ensuring a fulfilled life. Burden and Burdett (2007) concur with this, stating that the barriers caused by dyslexia are surmountable.

In accepting that dyslexia cannot be cured or outgrown, the voice of the adult dyslexic shows that a greater understanding of their challenges and experiences can result in them conquering their disability and becoming positive and meaningful citizens in society. However, the opposite can also be the result. Allowing the voices of these learners to be expressed can contribute to increasing their positivity.

## **2.7 RESEARCH INTO LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES**

Burden (2005) states that although research into the field of dyslexia is continuous, resulting in valuable literature resources for its theoretical background, very little research has been carried out on the experiences of these learners. Karanda et al., (2009) indicate that little is known about the actual impact of the schooling experience on adolescents with specific learning disabilities, a view attested to when looking at the focus of international and national research into the experiences of these learners, using their voice. Such research is scarce and limited, with few studies found.

Bearne (2002) investigated the contribution of learners in the debate about inclusion and stated that allowing them to have a voice in their education increased self-respect. Anderson (2009, p.55) used the voice of dyslexic primary school learners to explore the experiences of “small-group withdrawal tuition”, and the results of this study revealed that whilst the learners felt excluded an improvement in their self-esteem was noted. Glazzard (2010) used the voice of dyslexic learners to investigate the factors that affect their self-esteem as well as providing recommendations for ways in which the school and educators could meet the needs of these learners. Nugent (2008) and Casserly (2011) evaluated the different Irish educational settings for dyslexic learners, namely special schools, reading units and mainstream resource provisions using the voice of these learners. Yildiz et al., (2012), however, conducted a study wherein they used the voice of parents of children diagnosed with dyslexia to gain insight into the problems experienced as a result of the diagnoses and it included school experiences. Thus far, the only similar South African academic literature source I have found is Claassens (2007), who focuses on dyslexia amongst learners whose mother tongue is Afrikaans. Flack (2009) includes dyslexia amongst several learning disabilities that she investigates.

Existing literature that highlights school experiences using the voice of the dyslexic are based on adults relieving their past (Karanda et al., 2009; Sander & Williamson, 2010; Skinner, 2011). Gunnel Ingesson (2007) reiterates this view by stating that research on children and

young adults with dyslexia is frequently based on parent teacher ratings, and rarely on accounts by the affected learners. Around the world, education systems are seeking to address literacy standards as there is an awareness that an improvement in the literacy levels of learners requires an improvement in instruction (McPhillips et al.,2012). The importance of showing respect for the views of the child is highlighted by UNICEF, Article 12, which states that “when adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account”. The right of using the voice of the learners is highlighted by McPhillips et al., who recommend that all learners have a right to be consulted in decisions affecting their learning, thus enabling them to influence the decisions-making process in schools and so ultimately their learning. They cite Shier (2001), who states that the first steps to involve learners in the decision-making processes in schools, is to listen to them, and support and respect them in expressing their views.

The learners’ perspective on learning is a growing field of interest as their voices are rich sources for conveying experiences of their learning environment, thus enhancing a better understanding of it for schools and educators (Tetler, & Baltzer, 2011). Wearmouth (2004b, p.64) refers to Bruner (1996) who states that “if school is an entry into the culture then we must constantly reassess what school does to the young student’s conception of his own powers and his sensed chances of being able to cope with the world both in school and after”.

School experiences have a profound and lasting effect on the academic and emotional lives of the learners, both in school and as adults. Literature repeatedly states that school experiences can either be positive or negative, depending on the assistance and understanding given to such learners (Bennet, 2008; Hellendoorn & Ruijssenaars, 2000; Sander & Williamson, 2010; Skinner, 2011; Zipzer, 2007). Negative experiences, as well as positive experiences have a lasting effect on these learners. Various studies show that negative experiences result in feelings of failure, helplessness as well as the inability to succeed (Burden, 2005). Negative school experiences for learners with dyslexia have resulted in negative life outcomes, such as school dropout, juvenile delinquency, unemployment, social isolation, lower self-esteem, depression and mental health problems (Firth et al., 2013). Some dyslexics feel so detached and isolated by their early educational experiences that it has negatively affected their academic performance, resulting in them leaving school at an early age (Miller, 2011). Many learners with dyslexia state that ignorance about dyslexia was a major contributory cause of miserable school experiences by (Melia, 2009).

Burden and Burdett (2007) explored school experiences amongst boys who attended a special residential school for boys diagnosed with dyslexia. Many stated that their school experiences were positive, thus ensuring that they saw dyslexia as being surmountable. Mortimore (2003) conducted a similar study and his findings concur with Burden and Burdett. Positive experiences enable these learners to cope and succeed with the dyslexic challenges, and research suggests that the type of school attended determines whether the experience will be positive or negative for learners with dyslexia: “There is no reason why dyslexic learners can’t succeed unless the education system that they are studying in disadvantages them through a prevalence of prejudice attitudes” (Sander, & Williamson, 2010). Dyslexia-friendly schools attempt to create an environment in which the educational, social and emotional wellbeing of students with dyslexia is intentionally addressed (Nalavany et al., 2011).

## **2.8 PHENOMENOLOGY**

This study was based on a phenomenological perspective, chosen as a paradigmatic framework because it is evident from the literature that it is most suitable for studying direct experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Its suitability for this study is also indicated in Groenewald (2004), who states that phenomenology allows the researcher to accurately describe the phenomenon being explored and further allows him or her to present evidence that is free from bias or where the bias has been noted and restricted.

Phenomenology was originally developed by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the 20th century (Husserl, 1969), focussing on the “lived world” as a central theme (Wertz, 2005). He was of the view that philosophy should be as rigorous as the sciences and proposed phenomenology as a method for analysing conscious phenomena (Giorgi, 2008). English and English (as cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison , 2007, p.22) determined a broad meaning of phenomenology as “a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value; and one which sees behavior as determined by the phenomena of experience, rather than by an external, objective and physically described reality”. The aim is to accurately describe the phenomenon, remain true to the evidence and understand it from the perspectives of the people involved (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenology is summed up as being “a project of sober reflection on the lived experience of human existence - sober, in the sense that reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxications” (van Manen, 2007, p.13).



The advantages of using phenomenology listed shows its suitability for this research (Denscombe, 2014, pp. 102-103):

- It is suited to small scale research
- The descriptions of experiences are easy to read as it deals with everyday life that can be related to by many
- It allows the researcher to provide authentic accounts of phenomena that are complex
- It represents a human style of research.

The initial phase in phenomenological research is acknowledging the need to understand the phenomenon from the point of view of the lived experience so as to discover its meaning (Englander, 2012). Phenomenology states that immediate experiences and “realities are treated as pure phenomena and the only absolute data from where to begin” (Groenewald, 2004, p.4). The absolute data required for this study was the voice of dyslexic school learners explored in order to gain insight or knowledge into their school experiences.

Precise descriptions of the research findings that are free of bias are a very important aspect of a phenomenological study. To achieve this the researcher has to “adopt an attitude of consciousness....that is free from worldly and empirical assumptions (Giorgi, 2007, p.64). Husserl identifies two procedures or steps which he called epochés that should guide the researcher, Epoché 1 being when the researcher has to “put the world in brackets” and thereby become free of the usual way of perceiving the world (Cohen et al., 2007, p.22). All personal past knowledge and that obtained from sources other than the data collected must be excluded (Giorgi, 2008; Wertz, 2005), so that full attention is given to the phenomenon on hand. In line with this principle, the researcher in this study identified the assumptions and preconceived ideas that the researcher might have had concerning the school experiences of learners that are dyslexic. These assumptions and preconceived ideas were noted prior to conducting interviews with the research participants. Epoché 2 is the reduction wherein the bracketed world identified by the researcher is noted and set aside. This allows the researcher to enter, reflect and describe the lived world of the research participants, solely based on the view of the participants given during data collection (Wertz, 2005). The researcher was mindful of this epoché throughout the data analysis procedure in this study.

Giorgi and Giorgi 2003 in Wertz (2005, p.170) state that there are four steps involved in the process of analysing the transcribed experiences provided by the participants, namely:

- Reading the complete transcription in order to grasp the sense of the whole
- Rereading it and demarcating “meaning units” in the text with an interest in the phenomenon under investigation
- Reflecting on each meaning unit in order to discern what it reveals about the phenomenon being investigated or what research relevant psychological insight can be gained from it
- Synthesizing reflections and insights gained into a consistent statement that expresses the psychological structure of the experience.

In using phenomenology as a research design it is also important for the researcher to recognise limitations which could impact on the study. According to the Education Portal (2014) and Denscombe (2014), the limitations of the use of phenomenology can be summarized as follows:

- Subjectivity of data can affect reliability and validity
- Researcher bias is difficult to detect or prevent
- Bracketing can be difficult to implement thus interfering with data interpretation
- Data cannot be generalised because of small sample groups.

## **2.9 SUMMARY**

In this chapter an overview on research conducted into dyslexia was provided. An exploration was made into the history of dyslexia, as well as into the debates and controversy surrounding its definition, characteristics, occurrence, and the intervention required. Past studies of the school challenges and personal effects that dyslexia has on the learner was explored, together with the role of the school, educators and the family. The known school experiences provided mainly by adults recalling their schooling was included in this chapter. Phenomenology was discussed, its suitability as a research design for this study being indicated and the limitations posed by it were listed.

In chapter 3, the research methodology that was used to gain insight into the school experiences of learners with dyslexia who are attending a long term remedial school is discussed.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

*If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough – Albert Einstein*  
(Brainyquote, 2015).

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter describes the methodology that was used to explore the school experiences of grades 6 to 9 learners diagnosed with dyslexia. The research approach and design which influenced the identification of the research participants, the methods used for data collection, data recording procedures as well as providing the theoretical framework for the data analysis are discussed in detail. The various ethical issues that had to be observed and steps taken so as to conduct the research in a professional manner are also outlined.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

In formulating the research question a phenomenological research design which falls under the umbrella of qualitative research was found to be best suited for the purpose of this study. Whilst both qualitative research and quantitative research are concerned with the individuals point of view, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that qualitative researchers can get closer to the research samples perspective. Qualitative research also provided depth to the topic being explored as it enabled the researcher to collect both textual and verbal data (Christiansen et al., 2010). Participants' meanings, perspectives and subjective views were focused on throughout the research process (Creswell, 2014).

As indicated in the previous chapter, phenomenology which has a central theme of exploring the lived world of the individual (Wertz, 2005), was used as a foundation for this study, hence it informed its methodology. A phenomenological perspective enabled the researcher to explore and describe the lived experiences of individuals who share a common phenomenon, which in this study was the school experience of learners with dyslexia. It allowed the researcher to focus on the subjectivity of these viewpoints and experiences, as the learners in the sample group were viewed as being the best authorities on their lives and so

were regarded as being able to interpret their lives and help others to understand their experiences (Claassens, 2007). The phenomenological perspective also informed the selection of the sample for this study. It provided the framework for the procedure followed in data collection and analysis.

### **3.3 SAMPLE**

Purposive sampling was employed in this study, regarded by Patton (2002, p.563) as enabling the researcher to select “information rich participants” who will provide the researcher with in-depth information about the issue being explored. Purposive sampling involves deliberately choosing each participant because of certain qualities he or she possesses (Tongco, 2007). Purposive sampling therefore enabled the researcher to select participants who were suited for the study and were the “best to answer the research questions” (Creswell, 1994, p.148). The participants were deemed to be appropriate for this study because they met the following specifications:

- In grades 6 to 9 (13-15 years of age), as learners in these grades had possibly spent more years at a remedial school and therefore had more experiences to share, thus providing adequate information related to the aims and objectives of this study.
- Participants needed to have a confirmed diagnosis of dyslexia by the school psychologist.
- Participants had to have the ability to articulate their experiences in response to the questions asked during the interview and thereby provide the researcher with insight into their school experiences.
- Diversity based on mixed genders and cultural difference was noted and considered to be a possible factor that might have increased the representativeness of this study. Learners in the sample school represented various ethnic and religious groups found in South Africa.

The Educational Psychologist based at the research school assisted with the selection of the participants based on these criteria, thereby ensuring that they were met. The assistance of the psychologist was further necessitated so as to be in line with the ethical requirements as stipulated by the HPCSA, which stipulated that the diagnosis for dyslexia can only be made

by a licensed psychologist. The demographics of the sample in this study are presented in the following table.

**Table 3.1: Demographics of the sample**

<b>Learner</b>	<b>Chronological Age</b>	<b>Reading Age</b>	<b>Spelling Age</b>	<b>Years in a Remedial School</b>
A	15,3	10 years	9.8 years	5
B	13,4	8 years	6.7 years	4
C	13,10	10.6 years	8.2 years	7
D	14,8	8.9 years	9 years	1.6
E	14,3	8.2 years	7.8 years	9
F	14,4	13.6 years	11.7 years	5

Table 3.1 shows that the sample for this study consisted of six learners, four male and two female, in grades 6 to 9 who were attending a long term remedial school. All participants were aware of their dyslexic condition which had been explained to them by a psychologist at the research school. The sample size recommended for a qualitative study is between three and ten participants (Henry, 2008), therefore six was deemed appropriate for this study as. As indicated in Table 3.1, learner D was the only participant relatively new to a remedial school but was able to give adequate views about the present school and appeared to be in a better position to make comparisons with the previous one as memories were still fresh.

The IDA (2015b) estimates that 30% of those with dyslexia have attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) as a coexisting learning disability, however, based on the information received from the Educational Psychologist, none of the participants in this study did.

### **3.4 DATA COLLECTION**

As the information and evidence that a researcher collects when attempting to answer the research questions, data can take many forms (Christiansen et al., 2010), and data collection methods are influenced or determined by the type of study being conducted (Englander,

2012). Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data for this study. Memoing was used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the interviews.

### **3.4.1 Interviews**

Giorgi (2009, p.122) states that when interviews are used as a method of data collection in phenomenological research the researcher's aim should be to get "as complete description as possible" of the participants lived experience. Interviews are defined by Christiansen et al., (2010) as a conversation between the researcher and the respondent wherein the former aims to get particular information from the latter and has designed questions that can be used as a guide.

The semi-structured interview protocol was developed by the researcher based on the research question, the aims and the objectives of this study. Interviews were conducted by the researcher. All interviews took place in a private room which was provided by the psychologist at the research school, and conducted in English which was the medium of instruction. Each interview was approximately one hour long and took place after school, recorded through the use of two audio recorders to ensure backup and assist with the trustworthiness of the transcription. A digital recorder and audio cassette recorder were used, bearing in mind the caution of Easton, McComish and Greenberg (as cited in Groenewald, 2004) that equipment failure and environmental conditions could be threats to research undertaken. Spare batteries and cassettes were kept on hand and each interview was recorded on a separate cassette and labelled.

### **3.4.2 Memoing**

Memoing is a research strategy that involves creating memos of what was heard, seen, experienced and thought of both in the process of data collection and afterwards, when making a reflection on the data collection process. It helps the researcher understand possible subjective influence on the collection and interpretation of data (Groenewald, 2004). Memos should contain observations, notes made on the emotions, facial expressions, body language, behaviour, analytic comments and expressions displayed by the participants during data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Polkinghorne, 2005). Information from memos was added to the transcriptions of the interviews and was considered during data analysis.

### **3.5 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data from the interviews was transcribed by the researcher and verification of the accuracy of the transcriptions carried out by a third party who listened to the recorded interviews whilst reading them, in the person of an academic researcher with a Master's degree. Holloway and Hycner (as cited in Groenewald, 2004) state that the researcher should listen to the audio recording repeatedly to become familiar with the words used by the interviewee and thereby develop a holistic sense of its meaning. This was implemented by the researcher.

Once transcription was completed, the reduction process followed wherein the second epoché was implemented. During the second step of rereading, a list of "meaning units" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) was extracted from each transcription. Meaning units were analysed, scrutinised and coded, resulting in redundant units being eliminated whilst others were grouped. This process resulted in the drawing up of a list of units which was analysed and sorted into themes with categories and subcategories. The final themes, categories and subcategories were formed and were the results of reflection and insight which enabled the researcher to describe the actual lived school experience of the participants. During the entire process the researcher was mindful of the bracketing required in epoché 1 and epoché 2 as recommended by Husserl and indicated in chapter 2 of this research.

#### **3.5.1 Validity**

Validity in qualitative research is based on "determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, participant, or the readers of an account" (Creswell & Miller, as cited in Creswell, 2014, p. 201). Trustworthiness is a concept often used by qualitative researchers to measure the validity of their work. Given and Saumure (2008, p.897) state that "trustworthiness provides qualitative researchers with a set of tools by which they can illustrate the worth of their project outside the confines of ...quantitative parameters." This concept was outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and measured by the following characteristics:

- a) Credibility - whether the study reflects the actual lived experiences of the participants
- b) Transferability - the extent to which the research can be transferred to another context

- c) Dependability and Confirmability - the extent to which the findings of the study reflect the lived experiences of the participants and are not shaped by the researcher's bias.

Although the writings of Lincoln and Guba (1985) date back more than three decades, modern researchers still refer to trustworthiness in terms of these listed characteristics, which are discussed in the works of many, including Given and Saumure (2008), Christiansen et al., (2010), Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Loh (2013), with the latter (p.4) citing the works of Lincoln and Guba (1985) as “highly regarded and much referred to by many... it has in a way obtained a recognized status”.

The credibility of the transcriptions and data were ensured by using memoing and also by using a third party to confirm the accuracy of the interviews transcripts. In line with Lincoln and Guba (1985), the principles of phenomenological research design were also followed so as to satisfy the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Bracketing was used to consciously focus on the views of the research participants being the source of data used and preventing bias and the influence of secondary information.

### **3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

An important aspect of all research is that it must follow the required ethical principles and show respect to all involved in the study, hence, throughout the research process the researcher was mindful of the ethical considerations. Cohen et al., (2007) state that researchers are faced with a major ethical dilemma in striking a balance between the demands placed on them as professionals in pursuit of truth, and the rights of the participants which could be threatened by the research. Special attention herein is required when young children and those with disabilities are involved in a study.

Ethical considerations are especially important as the researcher negotiates entry into the research site, involves the participants in the study, gathers the personal and emotional data that reveals details of their lives and asks them to give their time to the study (Creswell, 2007). Murray and Beglar (2009, p.32) state that the “participants have rights that must be protected”. The eight general ethical principles, namely, respect, autonomy, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, integrity, fidelity and responsibility (Christiansen, et al., 2010) served as guidelines.



Social research necessitates obtaining the consent and cooperation of institutions providing the research facilities (Cohen et al., 2007). Entry to the research site required obtaining official permission from the DoE to allow the researcher to conduct research at the said school, which is an institution that falls under this body (see Addendum B). Departmental permission was followed by a letter to the principal of the research school together with proof, requesting permission to conduct research at the school (see Addendum C). After permission from the parties was obtained the researcher was able to proceed with the necessary consent and assent required.

As per the recommendation of the Unisa College of Education's Ethics Committee which issued the ethics clearance certificate (see Addendum A), a letter was addressed to the psychologist based in a research site, requesting her to assist with accessing the targeted sample of learners (see Addendum D) as well as with the process of asking for informed consent from the participants' parents (see Addendum E) and assent from the participants. After receiving the signed parental consent forms on which the parents gave permission for their child to be interviewed, the psychologist assisted with requesting for the assent of the learners (see Addendum F). The returning of the parental consent forms was time-consuming and a challenge for the psychologist.

The letters of consent and assent indicated the following to both the parents and research participants:

- A written explanation of the purpose of the study, the method used to collect data and information on the researcher
- Assurance was given that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time if they so wished to without prejudice
- The participants would remain anonymous and that pseudonyms would be used for the purpose of the research
- All information given by the participants during the interviews would remain confidential.

Throughout the research process the researcher ensured that the rights of the learners in the sample group were not compromised in any way. The psychologist provided the interview room, the times for each interview and introduced the researcher to each learner in the sample

group prior to the interview. Prior to the commencement of each interview the researcher made sure that:

- the study had been discussed with the research participants by their parents and vice versa
- the ethical issues noted were verbally repeated by the researcher
- participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions before the interview commenced
- although assent forms had been signed, interviews commenced only after the participants verbally confirmed that they were willing to participate and felt comfortable in participating in the study.

Researchers have to protect the identities of the groups and individuals when the results of the study are published (Christiansen, et al., 2010). To ensure this protection a pseudonym was used in place of the actual name of the research school. The pseudonyms used for the researcher participants, are indicated in the following table.

**Table 3.2: Pseudonyms and abbreviations used.**

<b>Pseudonyms Used</b>	<b>Abbreviations</b>
Researcher	R
Learner 1	LA
Learner 2	LB
Learner 3	LC
Learner 4	LD
Learner 5	LE
Learner 6	LF

The pseudonyms listed in Table 3.2 do not reflect the order in which the learners were interviewed. This ensured the protection of their identity from all, including the Educational Psychologist, who assisted with their selection.

Another ethical aspect that was considered to be important in this study was to protect the vulnerability of the participants. Researchers should make sure that their study does not harm

the research participants physically, emotionally, socially or in any other way (Christiansen et al., 2010). As a precaution and to address the vulnerability of these learners the researcher arranged with the assisting psychologist to be available to conduct debriefing sessions with the participant. The purpose of these sessions was to cater for emotions that might have been evoked during data collection. Research participants were made aware of these sessions, should they have required it.

### **3.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided a description of the research problem, aims, the research design, theoretical framework, research process and ethics observed. The methods used in the data analysis have been discussed and an in-depth account of this analysis together with the results of the research will be discussed in chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

*“We know not through our intellect but through our experience” – Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (European Graduate School, 2012).

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 3 described the methodology that was used in this study. The aim of this chapter is, firstly, to analyse and present the data that was collected so as to answer the research question of this study. Secondly, it presents a description and discussion of the results. The data is interpreted using phenomenological reduction.

#### **4.2 REDUCTION AND ORGANISATION OF DATA**

The data analysis process actually began prior to the data collection phase, in the form of the preconceived ideas that the researcher had formed from the various readings and stories. It was therefore important for the researcher to note assumptions and preconceived ideas held prior to conducting interviews with the participants (Addendum G). This was in keeping with Giorgi (2008) and Wertz (2005), who state that personal past knowledge and all other theoretical knowledge obtained from sources other than the data collected must be noted and excluded so as to focus solely on the phenomenon being presented. In phenomenology “biases must be recognized in the very process of analysis” (Giorgi, 2008, p.3).

Having done this the researcher proceeded with the first *epoché*, as described by Cohen et al., (2007, p.22) wherein the researcher puts the “world in brackets”. This allows precise descriptions that are free from bias and thus increase the trustworthiness of the findings of the study. It enables the researcher to achieve the goal of phenomenological analysis, which Giorgi (2005) indicates will clarify the meaning of all phenomena and not attempt to explain or discover the causes of it.

Groenewald (2004) cites Holloway and Hyner as stating that it is important for the researcher to repeatedly listen to the audio recording of each interview so as to become familiar with the words used, and this helps with developing a holistic sense. As indicated by Cornett-Devito

and Worley (2005, p.320), the transcriptions of the data captured by the researcher were “reduced and interpreted by reading, reviewing, bracketing, re-reading and re-bracketing the data until a chain of initial themes emerged”. Reduction enabled the researcher to identify themes that emerged from the data.

### **4.3 THEMES IDENTIFIED**

In phenomenological research, theme identification enables the researcher to give order or structure to data (Claassens, 2007). After identifying the themes, further reduction enabled the researcher to form categories and sub-categories within each theme. Four themes in total, each with categories and sub-categories, were identified by the researcher:

- 1. The learners’ experiences with regards to their educators**
- 2. The learners’ interaction with school peers**
- 3. The learners’ experiences with verbal and written work**
- 4. The learners’ experiences of challenges faced as dyslexic learners**

Each theme is discussed. Within the discussion of the themes, categories and sub-categories quotes from the transcribed interviews as well as field notes made, are included to give insight into the school experiences of the learners in the sample group.

#### **4.3.1 Theme 1: The learners’ experiences with regards to their educators**

The information provided in Table 4.1 is a summary of the learners’ experiences with their educators. Each of the categories and sub-categories are discussed in more detail.

**Table 4.1: Learners’ experiences with educators**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Sub-category</b>
1.The educator in action	Methods of teaching Work not understood Work done incorrectly The persona of the educator
2.Disciplinary methods	When learners are not paying attention Work not done

#### **4.3.1.1 Category 1: The educator in action**

A number of sub-categories emerged in this category.

- ***Methods of teaching***

It is important that suitable teaching methods are used when teaching learners with dyslexia. Burden and Burdett (2005) refer to the necessity of using correct teaching methods wherein they state that high quality teaching is essential if students with dyslexia are to make progress in their academic learning. Educators need to acknowledge that dyslexic learners might not all learn in the same way, therefore there has to be flexibility in the approach and a method found that suits the learner (Hodge, 2000). Poor educator preparation programmes are seen as the cause of educators' lack of knowledge about dyslexia as well as which methods to use when teaching (Aladwani & Al Shaye, 2012).

From the answers given by the sample group it is apparent that most of the educators were knowledgeable and aware of suitable teaching methods to use when teaching them. The participants' responses revealed that the teaching methods used by the educators at the research school, often assisted them with understanding the work taught. Learners indicated that their educators understood their challenges and attempted to assist them in the methods used, to ensure that they understood the work taught.

*LF: At my previous school I had challenges with the way that the educators spoke and the types of methods that they explained to us and the way she was talking. I didn't really pay attention because I wasn't interested because the way that she was telling me it was very complex. At this school the methods are very understandable in most subjects.*

*LC: The educators make sure to make it a little bit interesting, maybe a little bit funny now and again to get our attention so we can concentrate better.*

*LA: The Maths teacher can be funny when she teaches so it doesn't make the lesson so serious. She brings in a bit of laughing into the lesson so it's not all tensed up with everyone getting stressed. By the time we have finished the lesson you actually enjoyed the Maths lesson and you thought you would hate it when you walked in.*

*LD: If I get stuck on a word she will tell me what it is and if I don't read it a bit fast she will like move onto the next person so it keeps on rotating and rotating.*

Numerous times during the interview two of the participants stated that educators often used examples when teaching and further stated the value of these examples for their

understanding of the subject matter being taught. Taylor et al., (2009) state that dyslexic learners have difficulty with sounds, therefore educators should use pictorial and experiential learning material when teaching them. Providing learners' with access to meaningful contexts releases their strengths, curiosity and own will to learn (Nielsen, 2011).

*R: Do you understand the educators when they are teaching you?*

*LA: I understand the educators because they give us examples then it makes it easier to understand what they are trying to say.*

*LC: They teach us or read to us and explain it using examples.*

*LE: When they give us work to do they first show us how to do it then she gives us the exercise.*

However, their understanding of the methods used by the educators was reflected as being determined by the subject taught. Two of the participants revealed that they had problems with the methods used by the mathematics educators. Hodge (2000) states that mathematics has a language of its own and educators need to make sure that general mathematics terminology needs to be clearly understood before they can be successfully used in calculations. Williams and Lynch (2010) state that using traditional teaching methods to teach makes the learning process even more difficult for these learners. It is therefore essential that educators vary their teaching methods to include physical activities, practical work and include the unexpected as opposed to delivering boring lessons (Gorard & Huat See, 2011).

Some learners' in the sample group found it difficult to understand the Mathematics lessons, resulting in them often turning to their friends or family to explain the work taught. Learners in the sample group stated that family and friends were able to use easier and more understandable methods of learning. This concurs with Landers (2015), who states that peers are able to explain the work from their own personal understanding of it and hearing the explanation from peers' understanding of it is helpful in assisting the learning and understanding process. This provides an explanation for learners preferring to ask friends to assist with work not understood before asking educators.

*LF: Sometimes during Maths they give us methods that are not understandable so I have to ask my father to help me. He gives me a method that is understandable compared to the method that the educators showed me. Yet they give us the same answers.*

*LC: This year I am battling with Maths. I am battling to understand Maths and I have dropped from 60s to 40s. My marks have gone down.*

Later in the interview learner F referred twice to the methods used by the educators who taught Mathematics.

*LF: Mostly everyone in the class they don't like Maths because they put up a fight with it and sometimes the methods they try and understand it but then at the same time when they are trying and understand it they give you another method and you have to try and remember that and you have to try and do the method.*

*LF: My Maths teacher expects you to do it quickly then we have to give it to her straightaway.*

This was contradicted by two participants:

*LA: Our Maths teacher is very strict but she is the one that does a lot of examples that gives you an idea.*

*LD: My Maths teacher explains the work in small forms.*

A possible explanation for this contradiction can be found in literature wherein it is repeatedly stated that dyslexia affects people differently and in varying degrees of severity. Whilst some learners cope with mathematics and are good in it, others experience difficulty with it (Spilsbury, 2002). Brante (2013) states that it is important that educators recognize the diversity of dyslexia, identify learners' strengths and weaknesses and provide them with appropriate instruction.

- ***Work not understood***

Research indicates that teacher training plays an extensive role in equipping educators with the knowledge and skills enabling them to use suitable teaching methods for these learners (Morgan & Burn, 2000). As dyslexia often requires re-learning of work taught, and hence re-explaining, educators of dyslexic learners require a great deal of patience and understanding (Rogers, 1991). There are educators who understand the learners' abilities and challenges and avail themselves outside teaching hours to assist with extra tuition or to explain the work in a variety of ways to meet the learning preferences of these learners' (Rowan, 2012). Concurring with this view, most participants indicated that if they told the educators that they did not understand the work taught most educators would willingly explain it again. Some participants indicated that they were not afraid to ask the educators to do so.



*LD: I feel comfortable going to the educators to tell her that I don't understand. LF: Whenever a child is very confused the teacher doesn't mind helping the child out.*

However, it was also indicated that it was sometimes a challenge to make the educator re-explain work not understood:

*LE: If I don't understand and I ask the educators to explain it again they sometimes get angry and upset, 'cause they start shouting at you then they tell you and then they explain it to you.*

Four participants indicated that educators explaining work not understood depended on whether the learners were paying attention:

*LF: She will explain it again or but like if we don't pay attention she will not explain it again.*

*LA: If I wasn't paying attention during the lesson when I go to her and tell her that I didn't understand she will say "not my problem because you weren't listening". That obviously shows that it was my fault but if I didn't understand them in the beginning then I know that I have lost everything so I usually stare out of the window.*

*LB: If we ask her the same question she understands that we are in school and she will tell us again and then the person will understand. If we are not paying attention she won't say it again but that mostly happens to the other students who don't pay attention.*

*LC: They would explain it sometimes or they would probably say that they won't explain it again. It depends on whether the class is making a noise. If people are talking.*

It became evident that each participant's personality played a role in how they went about asking the educators to explain work not understood:

*R: What do you do if you don't understand the educators?*

*LF: I walk to the educators and tell her personally because I am too scared to say it out aloud but if it's a reasonable question I can lift my hand in the class or while I am sitting down. I don't want to feel like a buffoon. I'm scared I might be the laughingstock.*

*LE: I get up and go ask them or I just sit in my place and put up my hand and ask them.*

*LD: I go up to the educators and tell her that I didn't understand.*

*LC: I raise my hand up but sometimes I don't because I don't want to get embarrassed because they will say you didn't pay attention.*

Most learners, however, indicated that asking the educators to explain work not understood would be their second option and that they would rather ask a friend first. Learners A and E showed me a page in their school book indicating the steps that they had to follow with regards to written work. For work not understood, asking a friend is step 6 and asking the educators is step 7. Friends are to be asked for assistance before asking an educator. Nalavany et al., (2011) state that specialist schools are viewed as providing a community of support, possibly viewed as coming from educators, fellow learners and/or family. All participants indicated that they actually preferred asking a friend first and provided reasons for this preference:

*LB: I ask my friend... to explain and not the educators because she [the educator] still says it in the exact same way which I don't understand. Like Maths talk.*

*LD: I ask my friend to explain a little bit better.*

Learners further indicated that they were mindful of the mood of the educator if they were going to ask her questions. They judged the look on the faces of the educator which conveyed to them if the educator was in a good or bad mood:

*LF: I first look at her before I ask. You can tell it by the look on her face and you can tell it by her reaction.....if she is happy or not if she says something nice to us or she says something that is comical.*

*LA: Usually I wouldn't go and ask if I feel that she is not in a good space.... 'cause maybe she will shout at me or something and then I'd rather not ask her. Her body language.... you can see when she walks into the classroom and it's pretty obvious she will be in a bad mood and you just ask a simple question and she will snap. Then I know that I mustn't irritate her.*

▪ ***Work done incorrectly***

All participants indicated the same method used by all educators to correct work that is wrong. Corrections were made with the class as a whole and learners asked individually for the correct answers which were then written on the board. Learners copied the correct answers from the board alongside their incorrect answers, in pencil. Thereafter books were collected by the educators and checked or marked.

*LD: They'll talk to us about the work done, write it on the board then we have to mark it and if we didn't do it correct they will tell us to rewrite it in pencil.*

*LB: They will say you have to do corrections. I have to mark it wrong then write the exact answers on the board beside it.*

*LE: The teacher writes down the answer on the smart board or on the normal board and we have to use pencils to write the right answer.*

*LC: The teacher writes the correct answer on the board and we have to copy the answer with a pencil.*

Participants further indicated that if these corrections were incorrectly done the correct answer was either filled in by the educator or they had to copy it from another learner's book. The necessity of making sure that corrections were correctly made will be discussed under theme 3.

*LD: They always do a double check of our books and if the pencil is incorrect they might just fill it in. Sometimes there will be a note in your book or someone writing something in your book saying you did your corrections wrong. Redo your corrections.*

*LE: If our corrections is wrong then she will tell us to get it from a friend properly. She will say copy from a friend correctly.*

▪ ***The persona of the educator***

Whilst literature repeatedly states the value of having educators who are positive, much is written about both the positive and negative experiences that adult dyslexics have had with educators. Long et al., (2007) state that educators can enhance the learners' self-confidence by encouraging them and conveying that they care for them, and by doing this learners will have positive learning experiences. Most of the participants were complimentary in their descriptions when asked to describe their educators. Their facial expressions corroborated their verbal descriptions given, smiling when describing their educators and appearing to enjoy answering the researcher's question.

*R: Describe the educators when they are teaching you?*

*LB: They are confident. They stay on track and never lose their place. They are patient, they are nice and they just never lose track.*

*LA: The educators are energetic, they are loud, they are strict but can be funny and they are very loving and comforting as well and they are very patient.*

*LD: They are kind.*

*LF: The teachers are friendly when they teach. Especially when they give us work they try to help us.*

However, two of the participants included negative descriptions and positive descriptions when asked to describe the educators:

*LC: The educators are loving, caring, kind, irritated, stressed and angry.*

*LE: They are understandable but sometimes they also get angry and sometimes a bit upset and they start shouting at you.*

*LB: They don't get irritated with me but they do get irritated with other kids.*

In spite of a few negative descriptions, all research participants indicated that the educators were encouraging, rewarding and did not humiliate the learners in any way. They stated that educators were accepting of all learners, in spite of their various challenges. This concurs with the findings of Hellendoorn and Ruijssenaars (2000) and Beattie (2003), wherein despite negative recollections of educators, dyslexics were able to recall some of their educators who understood their challenges and praised them even when they were unable to read and write like the other learners in the class. When educators understand the nature and characteristics of dyslexia they are able to address their learner's needs (Williams & Lynch, 2010):

*LE: If our work is done well she will say excellent or good and give one big sticker. LA: If I was paying attention but gave the wrong answer she will say "ok it's not the correct answer but I am glad that you were listening and then you would feel a bit happy that oh I was listening even though it was wrong. She gets kinda proud of me that I was actually paying attention even though I wasn't understanding. That support is nice 'cause she is also encouraging you.*

*LB: They know their surroundings but they are understanding of what is happening.*

*LF: If the answers right they mostly jump for joy. It depends mostly if the question they gave us is hard or not and whether we got the right answer or not then she says something like good job, wrong but that was a good try. Sometimes they say excellent that was right and then if it was wrong but close enough then she would say no but in a glad way that he was paying attention.*

*LC: If we do our work well they will say well done, keep up the good work or excellent.*

#### **4.3.1.2 Category 2: Disciplinary methods**

Sub-categories were as follows.

- ***When learners are not paying attention***

Participants described various methods used by the educators to regain the attention of learners who do not pay attention during lessons. Methods used by the various subject educators differed. Hodge (2000) states that it is important that educators use different methods and strategies to assist the dyslexic learner to be successfully integrated into the classroom environment.

*LA: The EMS educator who is my favourite educator is always very strict because she is wanting us to understand what she is talking about and she will sometimes stop and look who is paying attention and who is not. If we are not paying attention she usually snaps at us and then she says “fine I’m just teaching those who want to learn”. My Maths teacher will look at us when we are making a noise, keep quiet, drop her pen, sit down at her desk and say guys I’m still in the classroom.*

*LB: If someone talks they say shhh to tell them to stop talking.*

*LD: Sometimes the teacher will blow a whistle or something in the class to get their attention. If a kid was not paying attention she might ask them a question to like give them a wakeup call. Then she will move onto the next person and say that you should have paid attention.*

*LC: If the class is not paying attention she will raise her voice or tell the class to pay attention or she would say if you don’t pay attention you will fail and I cannot help you in the exam.*

Participants further indicated that if educators did not succeed with these methods they were sent to detention after school on a Friday. Detention was a form of punishment for learners where they are supervised for two hours by an educator. They could write or read but whatever work they did was not checked afterwards. The aim was to keep them busy as well as quiet whilst the other learners were able to go home.

*LA: If we carry on making a noise you find yourself in detention. My Maths teacher has quite a bit of patience but she can get irritated. But we try not to get her to that point ‘cause she gives them detentions very quickly.*

*LD: If the class is very out of control she gives out detention.*

*LE: In detention I wrote on an exam pad page. I wrote two pages on both sides. And then I was finished and I just had to read and I said yeah. I didn't want to read so I was looking at the book and took it home.*

- **Work not done**

Most participants indicated that they always did their work and therefore did not get into trouble for not doing it. If they were unable to do the work given to them, they turned to others within the school or at home to assist. They did, however, indicate that learners who did not do their work were punished by the educators.

*LD: If you don't do your work you get detention which is on a Friday afternoon after school.*

*LE: If we don't do our work she gives us break detention but now there is no break detention. Now it's after school on a Friday.*

One of the participants indicated that some educators were more flexible than others concerning work not done:

*LA: Her reaction will be either upset. She will say it's ok leave it on my desk or she would snap at me and say that's no excuse you know you should have done it. But it's never like a straight punishment.*

#### **4.3.2 Theme 2: The learners' interaction with school peers**

The information provided in Table 4.2 is a summary of the learners' interaction with their school peers. Each of the categories and sub-categories are discussed in more detail.

**Table 4.2: Learners' interaction with school peers**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Sub-category</b>
1.Role of peers	Support with school work Support to survive Peers as friends
2. Experiences of peers	Positive experiences Negative experiences

#### **4.3.2.1 Category 1: Role of peers**

Sub-categories were as follows.

- ***Support with school work***

All participants indicated that learners in the class who were their friends or learners that sat close to them helped them with work not understood. Peer tutoring, wherein peers tutor each other, has proved successful in that there is a greater understanding of work, an increase in focus, improved class behaviour, enjoyment of the work and higher marks in subjects (Romano, & Walker, 2010). Peers are an integral part of assisting learners to understand the work taught, therefore the school recognises that other learners are paramount to ensuring that successful learning occurs. Educators, however, sometimes restrict this by not allowing learners to walk around in the classroom:

*R: Do the learners in the class help one another?*

*LF: Yes we do. It's mostly the people who are grateful after what you did and who knows that this person is a very nice person so I think that I should return the favour.*

*LD: Most of the time yes.*

*LB: Most of them yes. Some kids don't help because they don't like getting into trouble so they sit down and do their work and just wait for corrections. If you stand and you go and help the other kids you might get into trouble for walking around. If I lose my place in reading I ask my friend where we are or where we at.*

*LE: If we need help they sometimes come to a friend or if their friend doesn't understand they go to someone else and if that person doesn't understand they go to a person that understands.*

*LC: I mostly ask my friends in the class or the people in the class that I am close to.*

*LA: Most of the time yes. They are very open with helping us. We all run to one another especially when its homework time. They are very helpful especially the ones that do well.*

However, it was pointed out that assistance with work not understood came from learners within the class of the learner needing assistance and not from learners in other classes. This concurs with Rowan (2010), who states that peers who are friends and part of a group are more accepting of each other's challenges and more willing to assist when asked.

*LA: If my class doesn't understand and you ask other classes they will be like 'no we don't know we don't know don't ask us', and then you will feel like...*

Although participants stated that educators do not usually avail themselves to questions about work not understood and often educators will explain work not understood, all indicated that they preferred to ask a friend first and the educator only as a last resort. Participants gave various reasons for this but also showed me a “work map” that indicated that peers should be asked before educators. The “work map” provided by the school can be seen as the school recognising the role of peers in ensuring that learning takes place. The other possibility is that educators are unable to assist all learners who need extra help because of time and work constraints. It is the duty of the school to provide them with the necessary support, the lack of which in the study of Davies and McNeil (2005) was stated as being the cause of dyslexics not achieving their goals. Most participants indicated that peers were more successful than educators in their ability to simplify work that was taught and not understood. This concurs with the study of Romano and Walker (2010) on the success of peer tutoring as an instructional strategy:

*LE: You have to ask a friend first and then you ask the teacher. But in Afrikaans we can't even whisper hey I need your help 'cause then she will say shhh or you will get detention after school.*

*LD: I ask my friend X first as the teacher might be busy at her desk doing something. X sits next to me in most classes.*

*LF: If the teacher says something that is so simple she doesn't want to say it again .....I mostly ask someone who is reliant and also pays attention. Someone who I can actually trust to do the work.*

*LB: I first ask my friend. He simplifies it. My friend doesn't know then I go to the teacher.*

- ***Support to survive***

The role of friends as a means of survival within the school was highlighted by participants during the interview. Friends are essential and beneficial for the emotional and moral development of school-aged children as interaction with friends assist with social skills such as how to communicate, cooperate and solve problems (Ferrer, & Fugate, 2010). Each participant indicated that they had one very good friend, with whom they had been friends for some time. It was that friend who assisted them with work not understood. They further



indicated that their best friend accepted them with their challenges and did not make fun of them. Rowan (2010) states that friends were more accepting of each other's challenges:

*LD: I only have one good friend in my class and one in another grade. If I need help I ask X. If I can't do my homework I go to X in the morning to try to finish off my work. The others judge you more.... I just couldn't see myself getting in with them. The others laugh at me.*

*LA: I've got one good friend...very very good friend for five years and five other good friends. They are close to me especially because they understand me.*

*LB: X is my best friend that I have ever had. He is my best friend. We may make jokes of each other but not like we don't make them to be mean, we just make them for fun.*

*LF: Most of my friends support me because they know that I can rely on them and they can rely on me because that what friends do.*

Learner F was the only participant who did not indicate that he had one good friend, instead referring to the group to which he belonged. He was also the only participant who stated that he often felt used by his peers for what they could get from him:

*LF: I have five good friends. If I accidentally forgot to listen to an activity I ask one of the five members. They are reliant and they can rely on me..... I can trust them.*

*LF: Some friends see me as somebody who can actually give him some lunch if he doesn't have any but sometimes they are selfish.*

It appears that learners in the sample group are not able to cope or survive in the school without having at least one good friend. Participants showed a sentimental attachment to their one good friend, whom all participants continually referred to at various times during the interview. Learner B inquired if his very good friend could be present in the interview. A good friend becomes a part of them and helps them to survive in the school.

#### ▪ *Peers as friends*

Participants often contradicted themselves during the interview when naming their friends and indicating how many good friends they had. It sometimes appeared that they were not willing to give a true indication of the actual peers that they had as friend:

*LB: I've got tons of friends. I am friends with ten people in the class. I can't name them all.*

Learner B then indicated one very good friend, (*.... he is the first friend that I ever had. He is my best friend*) and later in the interview indicated seven good friends, giving seven different

names. Further on in the interview the friends' names were listed again, but each friend had the same name:

*LB: The new K I have been friends with for two weeks maybe. The other K I have been friends with about a month and the other K I have been friends with for about five months.*

Later in the interview a name of a very close friend not mentioned earlier was given:

*LB: I have a group that mostly everyone in my group are friends. There is J.... he is such a close friend to me.*

It became apparent to the researcher that this learner displayed a strong desire to be accepted by his peers. He moved a lot in his chair when giving this information, was hesitant when answering and appeared uncomfortable.

Learner E indicated that the learners in the class treated each other "mostly badly" but then indicated that he had 12 good friends in the class. There was a contradiction in the information given by the participant. The questions asked by the researcher were in succession of each other:

*R: How do the learners in the class treat you?*

*LE: Sometimes mostly badly and sometimes friendly?*

*R: Which is more – badly or friendly?*

*LE: Badly.*

*R: Of the eighteen learners in your class how many are you friends with?*

*LE: I think I have about twelve very good friends.*

When asked by the researcher to give the names of some of these good friends it was stated that it was hard to give these names and then this participant slowly gave nine.

Learner C continually referred to being a very shy person who did not like to talk in the front of the class and who wanted to work on overcoming being such a shy person. In the interview he indicated that he was very good friends with half the class. During the interviews most participants contradicted themselves when discussing friends.

Learner A indicated that relationships with peers can be tumultuous:

*LA: We are good friends but then you fight of course. It's like once a week.*

The school has a psychology department with more than one psychologist based at the school and it was indicated to me during one of my visits that maintaining good peer relationships as stated by learner A was a constant challenge for these learners.

#### **4.3.2.2 Category 2: Experiences with peers**

Several sub-categories emerged.

- **Positive experiences**

All participants indicated that some peers at the school provided them with positive experiences. Positive facial expressions displayed when indicating these experiences corroborated what they were saying. Nugent (2008) states that special school settings provide learners with positive peer experiences as they recognise and realise that they are all in the same situation regarding learning challenges. This view, however, is not shared by all researchers. Hellendoorn and Ruijssenaars (2000) are of the view that bullying is a persistent problem in special schools as a result of their having various learning and behavioural problems.

*LA: But some of the other learners in the class are very very comforting and we try and give nice encouragement sometimes. You become so close it's like your brother and sister.*

*LB: My friends treat me well. They might make jokes and we might have a laugh and like me and T, he bumps me on the shoulder and I bump him on the shoulder like that.*

*LE: Some children in the class help me with work, speak kind to me, help me if I'm hurt.*

*LC: The majority of the learners treat me well. They are kind to me. They will say good morning or they will say 'how was your day?'*

*LA: There are some learners that are very nice and humble and loving.*

- **Negative experiences**

All participants indicated that they had encountered negative peer experiences. Facial expressions indicated their unhappiness with the negative experiences encountered:

*R: How do the learners in your class treat you?*

*LD: I would say a little bit of a joke. They can sometimes be a little irritating. Play a bit of jokes and sometimes it gets on my nerves. Otherwise most of the time they pretty much leave*

*me alone. The popular people are normally the most..... they judge you more. They are more mean and I just couldn't see myself getting in with them.*

*LE: Sometimes mostly bad and sometimes friendly. They sometimes say shut up; they sometimes punch you and slap you. There's a learner in another class that irritates me. He punches and teases me. I want to report him but I can't. Whenever I go tell the teacher he says don't tell them and when I come back he starts again.*

*LC: Some of them will look at me in a funny way, some of them will talk behind my back which I don't like, some of them will push me.*

*LF: Some treat me like a piece of garbage and then they still want me to do stuff. I have to do it because...I have to be caring but still they want things their way. If you don't give them they start swearing. You try and help the person out because you feel that you have to have pity on them but it backfires..... but he's not grateful. They mostly try and steal you stuff, beat you up and push you.*

*LB: They are mean. There are kids that bully me. They punch, they kick, they trip, they tease. They are bullies basically.*

### 4.3.3 Theme 3: The learners’ experiences with verbal and written work

Table 4.3 depicts a summary of the learners’ experiences with verbal and written work. Each of the categories and sub-categories are discussed in more detail.

**Table 4.3: Learners’ experiences with verbal and written work**

Category	Sub-category
1.Coping with work given	Understanding what is required Not understanding what is to be done Unable to do the work
2. Challenges that dyslexia present with regards to verbal and written work	Own challenges The challenges of other learners
3.Homework	Role of homework Role of the family Role of the educator
4.Testing	Exams Tests

#### 4.3.3.1 Category 1: Coping with work given

Sub-categories were as follows.

- *Understanding what is required*

Participants indicated that after teaching them the educators gave clear precise instructions for tasks that had to be undertaken by the learners. Tasks given are based on the work taught, which often assisted them in understanding what the educator required and what they had to do:

*R: When the educator gives you work to do, do you understand what must be done?*

*LD: Well they will tell us clearly to like what page to do to maybe we need to write like say there is a spelling mistake they will tell us.....if there’s a letter cut off they will tell us to put*

*it in or to make sure that we read over it again before we ask the question and to look on certain pages to find the answers.*

*LF: The teacher would mostly read the work out in the booklet and then she gives us examples gives the definitions in the simple form and the she gives us activities.*

*LD: They first tell us how..... They first show us how to do it then she gives us the exercise.*

▪ ***Not understanding tasks to be carried out***

In spite of the educator giving clear and precise instructions about the task needed to be carried out by the learners, participants indicated that sometimes they were confused and needed further explanations. From the responses it can be seen that educators, when asked, will assist learners with work not understood. Attentive learners seeking assistance are not ignored or chased away.

*R: What do you do if you don't understand the task?*

*LA: If I don't understand they'd come to me. They wouldn't go stand afar. They would come to me she would like say open the page and she would try and give me an example while she is standing next to me. Like she would say that is the sum and then I would be like 'maam I'm not sure what you mean', and then she would open my text book for me and then say see it's the same thing. It's just different ways of doing it and then instantly I understand what she means. The support is nice when she is there.*

*LB: Sometimes I get a little confused just a little bit. I just ask my friends. I first ask my friend. My friend don't know then I go to the teacher. My friend sits right next to me. I just ask him do you understand and if he says yes I say ok then tell me how to do this and he tells me. If he doesn't understand I go to maam.*

*LD: If I was tasked let's say my Maths teacher she would like make me show her my book and see what I have done so far and then explain how I must do it like in small forms. How I start with, where I begin and how I end it off.*

*LE: She tells us again.*

*LC: I would ask a friend what to do..... what did the teacher say.....I don't understand. If my friend doesn't know then I would ask the teacher.*

*LF: I would mostly talk to the teacher to ask her to explain it again but if she doesn't allow it I will rely on one of my friends. I mostly do my work because I pay attention a lot in school.*

The researcher then asked the participants the following question:

*R: If the educator explains the task for the second time and you still don't understand what do you do?*

*LE: She will come to my desk and then show me where to write. Or my friend tells me then I get what he is saying.*

*LD: I would probably go to her desk and ask her if she could maybe draw an example or something or do an example with you.*

*LA: Then I usually tell her and then she goes onto the board and then she goes back to her previous work and you find that the work the we previously did is the same as the work that you are doing now and then instantly like oh wow.*

*LF: I would ask the educator. I wouldn't go too far. I have to be responsible for what she says. I can't let her keep saying it again and again and again.*

▪ **Unable to do the work**

Triangulation becomes evident in the participants' methods of seeking assistance for work that they were unable to do. Educators, peers and family all assisted participants when they were faced with work not understood, which inevitably became work that they were unable to do.

*LC: I would try to do it by myself and if I couldn't I would probably leave it out or I would take it home and ask my granny or an older person to help me with the work.*

*LA: Sometimes if I can't do it I don't even bother trying. But then if I know that something is going to come out in the exam or a test then I make sure that I understand. I would ask a friend. My last option would be to go to the teacher after the lesson so I don't get embarrassed or I would ask my mom when I get home.*

*LE: I have to figure it out on my own. If my parents don't help me then I just have to do it on my own. If I don't then my friend J will help me if he is by me.*

*LD: If I try to get help at school and I eventually don't get it then I'll obviously bring the books home and I'll ask my mom for help.*

Participants indicated that educators were very strict regarding work not done irrespective of the excuse provided by them.

*LF: My Maths teacher doesn't accept an excuse. "I expect every single person to do the homework and I'm afraid I will have to give you a detention.*

*LE: If I told my teacher then she would try and help me or detention.*

*LA: I will be in trouble. If I told my teacher I honestly did not know how to do it. It's not like I intended not to do it she will either be upset. She will say leave it on my desk or she would snap at me and say that's no excuse you know you should have done it or she would punish us. But it's never a straight punishment.*

*LC: I would try and do it by myself but I wouldn't go to the teacher 'cause sometimes I am scared of the teacher because they will shout.*

#### **4.3.3.2 Category 2: Challenges that dyslexia present with regard to written and oral work**

Sub-categories emerged as follows.

- ***Own challenges***

The participants were questioned about the challenges they faced as a result of being diagnosed with dyslexia and how these impacted on their ability to do the work required of them. This question related to Lawrence's (2009) finding that dyslexia is multifaceted and affects people differently. Responses were varied and proved interesting, showing avoidance to which literature alludes. Some learners with dyslexia indicated that from a young age they learnt how to avoid lessons by offering to do certain classroom chores or give elaborate excuses (Bennett, 2008; Melia, 2008; Melia, 2009). Dyslexics may decide to hide their problems, as the possibility of them admitting that learning problems exist could be disempowering and increase the risk of being negatively labelled as lazy, stupid or careless (Pirttimaa et al., 2015).

*LB: Writing because I broke my wrists twice. I broke this arm twice and then I dislocated my hand and couldn't write properly.*

*LA: I am able to do all my work.*

*LF: I am able to do all the work because I use sharp pens and it's very simple for me to write.*

Only two participants claimed dyslexia-related symptoms affected their ability to successfully complete written work:

*LD: It depends on if I can actually understand the words that I am reading or if I get a little stuck on the meaning. So it really depends on if I can understand what I'm reading.*



*LC: I need to learn to write faster.*

- ***The challenges of other learners***

At no stage in the interview did the researcher pose any questions on the other learners in the school. It was, however, noted that a few participants eagerly addressed the challenges of others. In so doing it became apparent that they were willing to accept common challenges as also being a challenge of theirs. This might be indicative of an impetus to be like others or the gregarious nature of people that encourages them to identify with others.

*LF: Everyone's least favourite subject is mostly Maths.*

*LA: We all battle with Maths.*

*LC. Many in the class find Maths difficult.*

A participant, after stating that Mathematics was a challenge to all learners, spoke about other challenges that some learners faced. These were seen as difficult to understand, as it was so easy to do what other learners could not do. Of interest is that the stated challenges of others fall under the umbrella of dyslexia:

*LF: I feel nice because I'm reading something and most of the children in my class they can't seem to read properly even the simplest words. I'm the one who feels that I have a good reading skill but the others I don't understand because it is so simple to read and yet they still can't read properly.*

LF experienced early intervention with his dyslexia. This concurs with Allen (2010) who states that early identification and intervention are essential to enable the learners with dyslexia to keep up with their peers and read at or near grade level.

#### ***4.3.3.3 Category 3: Homework***

The following sub-categories emerged.

- ***Role of homework***

Homework in the research school differs considerably from homework in mainstream schools. Most of the participants indicated that homework in most subjects was seldom given. Homework in the research school was the work that the learner had not completed in the classroom. The practice of the school with regards to homework concurs with Hodge (2000), who states that by the end of the school day the dyslexic learner is more tired than his or her

peers, because most schoolwork requires more thought and tasks take longer to complete, therefore only homework that will be of real benefit to the learner must be given.

*LA: Homework is the work that you didn't finish in the class or unless you finished and she finds that you are making a noise and then she gives us more homework or like that.*

*LB: I don't get homework cause I always finish at school.*

*LD: In this high school, no we don't get homework. Sometimes in Maths we get homework if we didn't finish our work in class.*

However, participants indicated that occasionally they were given homework in Mathematics apart from the work that was not completed in the classroom.

*LD: We do sometimes get Maths homework. Only if it's Maths or a project.*

*LB: We might get homework like normal homework like an activity.*

*LF: It's mostly Maths that we get homework for.*

Learner A was the only participant that indicated that learning for a test was homework.

*LA: We don't get homework for Afrikaans unless it's learning for a test.*

#### ▪ **Role of the family**

Parental or home support is of extreme importance for the dyslexic learner (Donawa, 1995; Gunnell Ingesson, 2007; Hellendoorn, & Ruijssenaars, 2000; McNulty, 2003). Parents and caregivers of these learners are often able to provide additional support, thereby assisting and encouraging good literacy development and literacy acquisition (McCray et al., 2001; Wearmouth, 2004a).

Triangulation (educators, peers and family) is evident when the participants seek assistance for work not understood or work that they are unable to do. All six participants stated that they often turned to their families to explain work, if further explanations from educators or peers failed to assist them to understand the work taught. The family also assisted the learners with homework and played a crucial role in ensuring the academic success of the learners. Therefore, the school, parents and learners should be seen as a partnership that must be able to meet the needs of the dyslexic learner (Long, et al., 2007).

*LD: If I am unable to do the work I ask for my mom's help. My last option is my dad.*

*LB: I ask my mom for help.*

*LE: If my parents don't help me then I just have to do it on my own. I sometimes ask my brother or my cousins for help.*

*LA: I usually go to my sister 'cause she is one grade higher than me so she knows what I'm doing then she will explain it to me but if I find that she can't either then I'll leave it for the next day. I sometimes ask my mom and she would explain it to me or I would either Google it and then ask my mom to give me an explanation in words and I will then try the examples. Sometimes my mom will write a letter to the teacher and ask her to help me with work that I can't do or she will tell her on parent's day. It's better maybe coming from another adult and if maybe I'm a bit scared of the teacher. Maybe she might probably shout at me or something.*

*LC: I would take it home and ask my granny or an older person to help me with the work.*

*LF: It's Maths that my father helps me with all the time. When I don't understand the methods used by the teacher. Gladly he gives me a method that is understanding compared to the method that the teacher showed me. But my father says that he would rather come home to a child who tried rather than coming home to a child who didn't do his work. If he can't understand it he goes to the internet and tries to figure it out. He Google's it.*

▪ ***Role of the educator***

Homework given must be done and completed by all learners, however, this does not always happen. Hodge (2000) states that it is important that educators set a limit on the time spent with homework as it must be borne in mind that a dyslexic learner might take much longer to complete the work because of the challenges posed by dyslexia. Whilst educators are strict with the completion of homework they sometimes assist learners who are unable to complete it as a result of not knowing how to do it. Most participants indicated that they could turn to the educators for assistance if family and friends were unable to provide it.

*LB: We might get homework... like normal homework like an activity or something. If I got time at school I go to the guardians. I just finish it. A guardian is a teacher that you go to for a period when the teacher is absent.*

*LA: Those ones that I don't understand I leave out and then I go to my teacher during the lesson and then she will explain it. Not all of them of course.*

*LD: If I can't get help with my homework I go to the Maths teacher in the Maths period and I say that I didn't know what to do and she will explain it.*

*LE: If it's a Thursday I will always get help but if it's not a Thursday then I am doomed.*

Learner C indicated that he would not ask the educators for assistance with homework that he was unable to do and provided his reason.

*LC: I would try and do it. If I don't know how to do it I would probably just leave it out but I wouldn't go to the teacher. Cause sometimes I am scared of the teacher because they shout. I would just try and do it the next day.*

Learner F indicated that he did not turn to educators to assist him with homework not understood because his father helped him:

*LF: My Maths teacher doesn't accept an excuse. She will say I don't accept an excuse. I expect every single person to do the homework and I'm afraid I will have to give you a detention.*

#### **4.3.3.4 Category 4: Testing**

Sub-categories were as follows.

- **Tests**

Crisp et al., (2007) state that it is the duty of the school and educators to ensure that dyslexic learners are given a fair opportunity to show their knowledge and understanding of the work being tested. Participants indicated that the typed words in the test questions were often challenging. Educators assisted sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly with words not known. Osborne (1999) indicates the various technologies that can be used to assist these learners such as electronic spelling aids, and audio tapes instead of a question paper.

*LE: If I don't know a word in the question I ask the teacher. She might give me an example. My English teacher helps me with words that I don't know.*

*LA: If there is a word in the test that we don't know then we can put up our hand and the teacher wouldn't tell me the word but she will give an example of it in a sentence.*

*LD: If I can't understand the words then I have to ask. The teachers are not allowed to give you the answer but they can give you the words in the question.*

Learner E was the only participant who made reference to the Annual National Assessment, tests that are standardised national assessments for Languages and Mathematics in the intermediate phase (grades 4 – 6). The question papers and marking memoranda are supplied by the National Department of Basic Education and the schools manage the conduct of the

tests as well as the marking and internal moderation (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Crisp et al., (2007) suggest that providing textual information using different font styles and text boxes in question papers as well as the use of bullet points could assist dyslexic learners. The British Dyslexia Association (2015) states that some dyslexics experience visual stress and it is important that dyslexia friendly text is used wherein the thickness and colour of the paper, as well as the font is taken into account and made suitable for dyslexic learners.

*LE: The ANAs tests are long. Very long and very very hard. I battle with them.*

- **Exams**

As a result of the reading challenges that learners with dyslexia face, the school allows such learners the use of MP3 players in the exams. The question paper is verbally recorded by an educator and learners who need this equipment collect it prior to entering the exam room. The choice to use it is made by the learners. It was indicated by a staff member that learners do not want to use MP3 players as it makes them feel different from those who use written exam question papers. They fear being ostracised, noted by Hodge (2000) who states that dyslexic learners can be made to feel different from their peers because of the challenges that they face. No mention of this choice was made by any of the participants. They did however indicate that they sometimes had difficulty with reading some words on the question paper:

*LD: Sometimes if I can't understand the question in front of me if I can't understand the words then I have to ask.*

*LE: If I don't know the word in the question then I leave it out. Sometimes I ask the teacher and she might give me an example.*

*LA: If I don't understand a word I will either put up my hand and then the teacher will come to me and then she will sit next to me and I will tell her that I don't understand the word (said in a whisper) and then she wouldn't tell me the word. She would give me an example of that word in a sentence. Then instantly I will know.*

Participants indicated that educators would often tell them what to study for both tests and exams. Exams and tests are based on the written work in their books for each subject. Therefore it is important that the learners' corrections are done correctly as it becomes their study material.

*LA: As soon as I go into the exam room we are already prepared 'cause they are very nice. They tell you what pages to learn so by the time you are in the exam room you know exactly*

what's going to come out. It's not a surprise unless they say "there will be a trick question and I won't tell you what to learn but then just go over your notes". Then we know that you should just go over everything.

*LF: If you copied the corrections wrong from the board then it's actually a huge problem because you actually study from that correction and then you are going to get it wrong again.*

Learner D was the only participant who referred to the challenges that exams presents.

*LD: Exams are hard and a bit easy. I always take longer than expected out of all my classmates to finish my exams and tests 'cause I like go over it and over it. Sometimes if it's like break and we only get like five minutes to finish before the teacher goes.*

#### **4.3.4 Theme 4: The learners' experiences of challenges faced as a dyslexic learner**

Table 4.4 is a summary of the learners' experiences of the challenges they face as dyslexic learners. Each of the categories and sub categories are discussed in more detail.

**Table 4.4: Learners' experiences of challenges faced**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Sub-category</b>
1. Attending a long term remedial school	The reasons for being in a long term remedial school My feelings about the school
2. Challenges that dyslexia presents for the learner	My strengths My difficulties

##### **4.3.4.1 Category 1: Attending a long term remedial school**

The following sub-categories emerged.

- ***The reasons for being in a long term remedial school***

The participants in this study had been informed of their diagnoses of dyslexia. In spite of their low reading and spelling ages only two indicated that reading and spelling were contributory factors to their placement in the research school. The following question was asked by the researcher:

*R: Why are you attending this school?*

*LA: It because of my Maths. Maths just brought me down extremely a lot because I couldn't understand it and being in a mainstream school I had like a lot of children in the class who couldn't get the attention that you could say "maam I don't understand." Here you can say I don't understand and he or she will come to you.*

*LF: I am in this school because the methods here are very understandable and the way the teachers say the information or the methods its very understanding. I can understand it just like that and I can write my work.*

*LC: Improving to write faster.*

*LD: I have problems with reading. I wasn't so good in Maths. I was just passing Maths.*

*LE: I have a problem with understanding you know where the words go and the sounds.*

*LB: There are a few things that I am battling with in Maths.*

▪ ***My feelings about the school***

Most participants indicated positive feelings about attending the research school. The following question was asked by the researcher:

*R: How do you feel about this school?*

*LB: I'm fine with it.*

*LA: I find the school very very helpful. I enjoy being here. It feels like a support group. It is a shoulder to lean on. The teachers support us in everything.....just supportive. It's a warm school. I find it very warm here for me. I find everything extremely nice. I enjoy the people.*

*LD: It depends what day I am having. It all depends. Most of the learners in most of the classes can't really feel comfortable with everyone you know.*

*LE: How long are we going to be here for? (question was evaded).*

*LC: It's ok. I enjoy this school.*

*LF: I am very happy at this school. But I have to wake up very early in the morning and that's not easy. I get so tired from work at school.*

The learners attending the research school travel between school and home in a marked school bus. Adults recollecting their schooling experiences at a special school stated that they found it humiliating to go to a special school with a special bus as this caused loneliness and

a loss of friends (Hellendoorn & Ruijsenaars, 2000). Learners in the sample group did not express this.

#### **4.3.4.2 Challenges that dyslexia presents for the learners**

The following sub-categories emerged.

- ***My strengths***

Dyslexics are articulate and intelligent and dyslexia is also found in gifted learners (Kokot, 2005; Morgan & Burn, 2000; Mortimore, 2003). It occurs across the range of intellectual abilities (IDA 2012; Pienaar, 2013). Dyslexics' are imaginative, make up wonderful stories, are good at drama, sport, and 3-D constructions, and enjoy the challenge of computers. Some are creative and highly mechanical (Gunnel Ingesson, 2007; Rogers, 1991), as attested to by the list of successful dyslexics found in Table 1.1.

Bearing this in mind the researcher was of the view that it was important for participants to discuss and indicate not only the challenges they face in school but also their strengths. The facial expressions of the participants when discussing their strengths showed that they enjoyed the questions and being able to answer and discuss it with the researcher. It was also enlightening to hear what the participants discussed as their strengths. Some participants proudly discussed subjects they felt they enjoyed and in which they achieved good marks.

*R: Which school work do you enjoy?*

*LB: I like to answer questions that the teacher asks in Technology, Natural Science and Arts and Culture.*

*LE: NS [Natural Science] is my favourite subject. We haven't got our marks. I got seventy six percent for LO [Life Orientation]. EMS [Economic and Management Science] I know it. I don't ask for help.*

*LF: I love to do orals. I imagine that I'm like a presenter and when I do the oral I just stand in front of the class and I imagine that the class is the audience and I am the presenter who says all the information on my cue cards. One time when I was in grade six I was doing this one oral..... and my teacher said "absolutely brilliant." You have a good vocabulary.*

Participants included reading and writing as strengths:

*R: What school work are you able to do without asking for help?*



*LF: It is very simple for me to write. I use sharp pens.*

*LA: I find reading to be very easy. I'm very good at English.*

*LA: Writing is very easy*

*LB: I can understand a lot in reading. I can read like for hours on end but then I might make a few mistakes but I still read. I have tons of books at home.*

*LC: I enjoy reading.*

*LF: Words that I am used to that I am able to read then I can just fly through it. I feel nice when I'm reading something in the class. Most of the children in my class they can't seem to read properly even the simplest words. The information that they gave to us in ..... (previous school), the reading skills its basically stuck in my head so I'm the one who feels that I have a good reading skill but the others I don't understand because it's so simple to read and yet they still can't read properly.*

▪ ***My difficulties***

Difficulties with reading and spelling were addressed by a few participants, and this possibly contradicted their indicated strengths listed. These difficulties were addressed by the participants at various stages of the interview.

Learner B:

- *I just lose my place....I don't use a ruler but I have eye contact on one sentence when I lose that sentence I go to like the 5<sup>th</sup> line and then I start from there even if they are on line 10. If I lose my place in reading I ask my friend where we are or where we at.*
- *When we get a question more people put their hands up before me. It's like that. They are quick because mostly everybody understands except for a few kids.*
- *Writing is a challenge because I broke my wrists twice. I broke this arm twice and then I dislocated my hand and couldn't write properly.*
- *Spelling is a problem for me cause once I learn then I forget, 'cause if I learn over time I forget. That's why when my mum says I must learn, I learn, I learn, I learn. Three hours I will learn and within after a while I get so irritated I just leave it and later on I play a few games and later on I have forgotten every single word. That's why I like learning it at the last bit of time I have left.*

- *I battle with a few things in Maths. I understand fractions most of it but I just figured out how to work a pie graph and I figured out how to do divide.*

Learner D:

- *I have problems with reading and Maths. I need the most help in Maths, Afrikaans and English.*
- *In Afrikaans it's how to understand, how to read and that and how to you know write the words. In English it is the reading and spelling basically.*
- *Doing my written work depends on if I can actually understand the words that I am reading or if I get a little bit stuck on the meaning. So it really depends on if I can understand what I'm reading.*

Learner E:

- *I keep forgetting to do my work and then sometimes I get it wrong. I have been to detention 2 or 3 times.*
- *ANAs test is my biggest challenge.*

Learner C:

- *Sometimes I have a challenge with spelling but my main challenge is with writing. Improving to write faster.*
- *I have difficulty with speaking in front of a crowd. In the class I can but if I had to do it in front of the whole school then I wouldn't be able to do it 'cause you never know what people might do. They might say bad things about you or they might say comments and laugh at you.*
- *I'm battling this year in Maths. I have been getting forties this year and even though 40 is a pass mark but cause last year I used to get like sixties and seventies. Now I went down. Mostly I don't understand the work sometimes.*

Learner F:

- *When it comes to big words that I am not used to I do have a challenge.*
- *Obviously everyone's least favourite subject is mostly Maths.*
- *I also have a challenge with Afrikaans.*

Learner A:

- *My main challenge is math, EMS and technology. There is some stuff in EMS that I feel like I really can't do this. If we have a sheet like a CPJ [cash payments journal] that we have to fill in in Accounting I find that extremely difficult. I feel like I obviously can't do it.*
- *Some words are difficult to spell.*

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

Using phenomenology as a framework this chapter has provided a detailed discussion of the data analysis procedure and interpretation of the data collected. Reduction enabled the researcher to reduce the data and place them into four themes with categories and sub-categories within each. Research results were discussed within the identified themes using exact quotations from the interviews conducted with the selected participants. This discussion provides an in-depth view into the reported school experiences of learners diagnosed with dyslexia and reflects the research participant's personal views and experiences.

In chapter 5, summaries of the literature study and the empirical study are discussed. The chapter will include a discussion of the limitations of the study and concludes with recommendations for further studies.

## CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

*“In order to be able to teach, as far as possible, according to each child’s educational needs, it is essential to see him or her as a whole person, complete with individual strengths and weaknesses” (Hodge, 2000, p.1).*

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter draws conclusions, makes recommendations and lists limitations of the study. A summary is provided of the literature study conducted in chapter 2 and the findings of the empirical research are discussed within the themes identified in chapter 4.

### 5.2 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE STUDY

Even though a fifth of the general population experiences some of the symptoms of dyslexia it remains a learning disability that is plagued by controversy and lack of consensus. History reveals that it has confused medical professionals, as many persons with dyslexia experienced literacy challenges in spite of them being of at least average intelligence. Terms such as *word blindness* and *word deafness* were first used, then replaced with the word *dyslexia*, which to date is the name commonly used for this learning disability.

Whilst being acknowledged as one of the most common learning disabilities that is not outgrown, controversy surrounds its origins, causes and characteristics. Dyslexia presents a cluster of symptoms that vary from person to person, has similar characteristics of other learning disabilities and sometimes an overlap with other learning disabilities. Controversy has resulted in there being numerous definitions of dyslexia and therefore lack of a universally recognised definition. This study chose the definition adopted by the International Dyslexia Association in 2002. The continuous debate surrounding the definition has impacted and effected diagnoses as various tests and methods are used. It has also therefore affected statistics for its occurrence.

Without a diagnosis, these learners are often misunderstood by educators who cannot understand the challenges that learners face. This often leads to these learners encountering negativity in the classroom and school from educators and peers. The value and necessity of diagnoses and hence labelling is debated with research showing that diagnosis is imperative for these learners. It enables early academic intervention, thus providing the necessary support needed which is viewed as enhancing and enabling academic success. It further enables these learners and relevant others to understand the reason for the challenges experienced.

Dyslexia causes academic challenges that are varied and could include difficulty with reading, writing and/or spelling as well as general classroom challenges. The difficulties that they encounter are often not understood by others who think that they are lazy and stupid. The value of acquiring these skills, which is seen as a necessity for most spheres of life, is frequently repeated in literature.

As school is a challenge for these learners it is the role and duty of the school to assist them and provide effective tuition and support. The lack of doing so impedes academic success and therefore has a marked negative effect which is carried into adulthood. Research shows that subject choice, school parental communication, parental involvement, technology and educators that are knowledgeable are essential components in assisting these learners. It is important that the school acknowledge and bear in mind that the challenges faced can negatively affect test and examination results. Therefore, fair assessment and opportunity to impart their knowledge must be afforded.

It is imperative that their educators are knowledgeable about dyslexia, enhancing an understanding of the challenges faced and equipping the educators with suitable teaching methods that they can use to teach these learners. Literature, however, repeatedly states that many educators lack knowledge about dyslexia because it is not being addressed in pre-service training and very little in-service training is provided. This is especially true for South African educators and this, together with a lack of facilities and resources, could impede the successful implementation of the 2001 White Paper 6 policy published by the DoE. This policy provides plans for an inclusive education system and the strengthening of special schools for the education of learners with learning disabilities. Research findings indicate that South African learners with dyslexia benefit more from education received in LSEN schools in which educators are more knowledgeable about dyslexia.

Little research has been conducted into the school experiences of these learners as told by them. Most research herein has used the voice of others or adult dyslexics who recall their school experiences. The value of using the voice of these learners to gain insight into their school experiences is repeatedly stated. The rights of these learners and the use of their voices to be part of the decision-making processes in schools are referred to. Studies and writings using the voice of adult dyslexics address the emotional scars carried as a result of the negative school experiences inflicted on them by the school, educators and peers. Whilst many recall the humiliation endured as a result of the actions of their educators, some also highlight the positive role that some caring and knowledgeable educators played in their lives which led to enhancing their self-esteem and success.

School experiences as well as experiences of peers are both negative and positive and appear to be affected by the type of school attended. Positive experiences are found more in specialist schools than in mainstream education. Peers and the support that they give plays an important role in the lives of dyslexic learners in spite of the negativity sometimes metered out to them by their peers. Factors enhancing positive school experiences and thereby increasing these learners enjoyment of school are addressed as well as the value of specialist schools for these learners. Family support and assistance are invaluable for the success of dyslexic learners, therefore, school parental communication is important and parental involvement must be encouraged by the school.

Dyslexia not only affects the academic life of those who have it but has life long lasting and far reaching effects. Self-esteem is negatively affected and feelings of failure and hopelessness haunt adult dyslexics who describe what it is to live with dyslexia. They do, however, have special skills and talents such as being mechanical, creative and excelling at sport, music and drama. This has resulted in many of them achieving success in spite of the challenges posed by dyslexia.

## **5.3 SUMMARY OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

The empirical research came up with a number of themes.

### **5.3.1 Theme 1: The learners' experiences with regards to their educators**

Findings reveal that the educators in the research school are knowledgeable about dyslexia and understanding of the challenges faced by dyslexic learners. Most endeavour to do their best in enabling them to understand the work taught, using various methods to ensure that they understand and concentrate during lessons. Educators often encouraged and rewarded learners and no incidents of humiliation from educators were reported. They were therefore mindful of the personal and emotional needs of the learners and did not focus only on their academic needs. They were supportive and willingly re-explained work not understood provided that the learner was paying attention during the lesson. Educators, however, encouraged learners to first ask a friend to explain work not understood and then themselves as a second resort. A possible explanation for this is that educators are aware of the power of peer tuition for dyslexic learners.

A positive relationship between most educators and learners was revealed by most of the participants. This could be seen in the response given by a learner who asked if he could include an educator in the number of friends that he had in the school, as he enjoyed talking to the educator mentioned. However, the persona of each individual educator as well as the persona of each learner could possibly have an effect on educator learner relationships. They indicated that they were mindful and aware of the mood of the educators and this determined if they would approach the educator for assistance. In most subjects, suitable teaching methods were used. Educators often used examples when teaching and the participants indicated that it was of great assistance to their understanding of the work taught. Educators in all subjects used the same procedure for correcting incorrect work. They wrote the correct answers on the board and learners copied this in pencil above the incorrect answer.

Contradictions were found regarding the participants understanding of the methods used by the Mathematics educators. A possible answer for this is the characteristic of dyslexia wherein the challenges presented varies from person to person. It therefore appears that educators need to relook methods used for teaching Mathematics as it was the main subject wherein most problems with understanding the work taught was indicated. Research participants mainly relied on peers and family to explain the Mathematics work taught.

Detention as a dreaded disciplinary method was referred to by all research participants. This took place every Friday at the end of the school day. Here learners were supervised for two hours by an educator, however, they indicated that educators used this as a last resort. All stated that it was only a means of punishment and that the time spent in detention had no academic value. Learners could silently do whatever they wanted to during this time and work done was not checked.

### **5.3.2 Theme 2: The learners' interaction with school peers**

Peers played a significant role in the life of the learners in the research school. Class peers were an essential component in assisting learners to understand the work taught. Learners were encouraged by educators to first ask their peers to explain work that was not understood and only if this failed was an educator turned to for help. Participants indicated that they preferred peer tutoring as peers were able to simplify the work taught, which often assisted understanding.

Friendships are important to these learners and appeared to assist them to cope within the school as well as with the academic challenges. Friendships formed a strong component as a means of survival in the school. They formed close relationships with learners that were similar to them or those that they could protect. Friends enabled the learners to find solace in each other. Some participants intimated feelings of being an outcast. From the responses given friendships are deduced as being short lived with learners going from friend to friend or group to group in order to gain acceptance. The need for acceptance was portrayed in learners contradicting themselves when indicating the number of friends that they had, as well as when asked to name them.

Most indicated that they were well treated by their friends and peers but negativity from peers was also encountered. Whilst some mentioned the negative experiences that they had had with peers none of the research participants indicated that they had experienced being continuously bullied or abused by their peers. Minor negative experiences such as being tripped, incorrectly blamed and being spoken of badly to others were mentioned.



### **5.3.3 Theme 3: The learners' experiences with verbal and written work**

All oral and written work needed to be done by the learners was based on the work taught. Learners seldom had a problem with not understanding what was required as clear and precise instructions were given to them. Learners were often shown exactly what had to be done and educators could be approached for assistance if the learner was confused. Unlike mainstream education, in which homework forms an additional component to learning, homework was seldom given to these learners. Homework comprised work that had not been completed in the classroom, or when learners had to learn for a test. Sometimes the Mathematics educator gave additional work that had to be done at home. Educators, family and friends assisted, by way of explanations, with work that the learner did not understand. Learners indicated that they preferred to first ask family and friends before turning to the educator for additional assistance. Family assistance and support, peers and educators were critical factors in enabling and enhancing the academic success of these learners. It was a partnership that assisted with the completion of work given. Failure to complete resulted in disciplinary action for the learners if they had not provided the educator with reasons for this.

Tests and exams were based on the work taught and learners were told which work to learn. Occasionally, they were warned that "surprises" would occur and this informed learners that all work had to be studied. Only one participant acknowledged that time was a problem and that it was difficult to complete in the allocated time. All participants stated that the invigilator could be asked for assistance with words not understood, or when challenges with reading occurred in tests and exams. Even though MP3 players were available for use during exams learners chose not to divulge this and no mention was made of this choice by any of the participants. A possible explanation for this could be that the use of this technology is indicative of them having a learning disability that is different to the other learners in the school. Identifying with the other learners in the school was emphasised by all participants wherein they stipulated that challenges with Mathematics were not theirs alone but for all in the school.

Two participants indicated characteristics of dyslexia that posed a challenge for them with written and oral work, which included difficulties encountered when reading and understanding the instructions and challenges with writing. Avoidance was evident as most indicated that they did not have challenges but eagerly addressed those of the other learners. The challenges of others, apart from Mathematics, were stated as being easy for them. All stated

that they encountered challenges with Mathematics but also indicated that it was not a personal challenge but a challenge for all the learners in the class/school.

#### **5.3.4 Theme 4: The learners' experiences of challenges faced as a dyslexic learner**

Although their diagnoses of dyslexia were known to them none of the participants used the word as their reason for being in the school. Whilst characteristics of dyslexia were given as reasons for their placement at the research school, one of the participants avoided this, stating that better teaching methods were used at the school which assisted understanding and hence his placement. Pertinent to his avoidance was his statement that with some learners with a learning problem the educators had to repeatedly explain the work but they still could not seem to get the method. The answer and body language placed distance between him and the other learners in the school with learning problems (they have challenges not me).

No hesitation was shown by any of the learners when questioned about their strengths and confident answers were given. As a result of the limitations experienced by this study exaggerations and untruths could not be proven by the researcher. Fabrication was evident when a learner whose reading age was five years lower than his chronological age continually stated that he loved reading, did not like to stop reading and had many books at home. This learner also stated that writing was his difficulty and this was as a result of breaking his wrist twice. At times denial was detected in this participant as he later acknowledged that he frequently lost his place during group reading in the class and had to ask a friend to assist. Participants indicated that their difficulties were with reading, writing, spelling and/or mathematics.

#### **5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The following are considered to be the limitations of this study:

- As the diagnosis of dyslexia is private psychological information, the researcher, who is not a psychologist, was unable to personally select the research participants. The researcher had to request the Educational Psychologist to identify suitable research participants for the study and to release their names. There was complete dependency on the said psychologist for the selection of the sample group.

- The relatively small sample used in this study may also be seen as a limitation as it might affect the generalisation of the results of this study.
- The researcher was unable to conduct a pilot study as a trial run for the interview protocol. This may have had implications on the validity and credibility of the interviews conducted in this study. The researcher was therefore unable to make any improvements or changes to the interview protocol.
- Due to time constraints placed on the researcher so as to not disrupt the learners' lessons only one interview session of an hour was allowed for each participant.
- A semi-structured, open question interview data collection approach was followed, which allowed the researcher to conduct the interview in a relaxed and informal manner. However, the researcher was constantly aware of being restricted as a result of the sensitivity of the issues being explored and the vulnerability of the research participants.
- The ethical requirements of this study placed great limitations on deeper questioning as the researcher was mindful of the phrasing of the questions so as not to upset or evoke negative feelings and emotions in the research participants.
- Although the participants seemed relaxed it was not possible to know if they were indicating their honest experiences. The results of this study therefore may not be a true reflection of the reality facing the dyslexic learners at school.
- The researcher was not allowed to observe the sample group in their classrooms and on the playground. The ethical requirements of the school stated that this would require permission being granted by all the parents of all the learners in the various classes. The Educational Psychologist pointed out that a stranger (the researcher) could evoke negative reactions shown by learners with Asperger's Syndrome. Supplementing the interviews with observations was probably going to result with more comprehensive data that might have yielded different results.
- Data gathered was limited owing to the limited scope of the dissertation which was only confined to the learners. Interviews with parents and educators could have provided additional information on the learners' experiences in the school.

- The findings of this small-scale study are limited to a single long term remedial school, and cannot be generalised to include other long term remedial schools, short term remedial schools or mainstream education.
- The complete elimination of bias in phenomenology in spite of the steps taken does not guarantee that the findings of the study are free from bias. Steps to prevent bias included noting any preconceived ideas that the researcher might have had prior to data collection.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are made for further research towards a greater understanding and an increased knowledge regarding the school experiences of learners that face challenges presented by dyslexia, as well as recommendations for the South African Education Department:

- Early diagnosis is essential as it will assist these learners emotionally as well as academically. Learners will know that their challenges are recognised, understood and known. It will also assist the educators in understanding the causes of the challenges of these learners.
- More Educational Psychologists should be available to schools to assist with the diagnoses of dyslexia as the costs involved for a private diagnosis cannot be met by many parents. As a result many learners in mainstream schools are not being formally diagnosed nor are their challenges being fully understood.
- Early diagnoses can assist with early school interventions for these learners which is paramount in ensuring their academic success.
- Better awareness and an increased knowledge of dyslexia for both the school and the home are needed.
- Educators must be equipped with the knowledge of identifying these learners as well as be equipped with the skills to educate them based on their individual needs.
- As dyslexia is one of the most common learning disabilities, in service training and workshops are of utmost importance for all educators.

- Workshops for educators in mainstream education must be provided using the expertise and skills of educators teaching in short and long term remedial schools.
- Further research using the voice of dyslexic learners in more than one long term remedial school will provide more insight.
- Further research with a bigger sample group will provide more insight into their school experiences.
- Research into the school experiences of dyslexic learners found in mainstream education will be beneficial as little knowledge herein exists.
- Research using the voice of parents, siblings, educators together with the voice of these learners will further enhance understanding of the school experiences and hence the needs of these learners and could enable all relevant parties to assist and intervene.
- Research into educators' knowledge of dyslexia, their perceptions and handling of it is recommended.

## **5.6 CONCLUSION**

The aim of this study was to explore the school experiences of grades 6-9 learners who have been diagnosed with dyslexia and are being educated in a long term remedial school. Insight was gained into these learners' experiences with their educators, peers, written and oral work as well as into each learner's personal experiences of the effects that dyslexia poses to their academic school journey.

The school appeared to embrace the challenges presented by dyslexia. Findings revealed that the learners were content at the school and that they were being taught by educators who were knowledgeable about the challenges posed by dyslexia. The learners' academic needs as well as their social and emotional needs were met. Educators were seen as figures who not only taught the learners but also showed care and concern, with one particular educator also being seen as a friend by a participant who stated that he liked to talk to him.

Learners' contributions to highlighting their educational experiences are invaluable for schools, educators, education departments and ultimately such learners and needs further exploration. The experiences of dyslexic learners are a much neglected area of research and this study attempts to address this. Although these learners might not be able to precisely

articulate their exact experiences, their voices are invaluable. The contribution made by this study was to give insight into the school lives of learners who face circumstances and challenges that are different from those of others.

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## **Addendum A- Research Ethics Clearance Certificate**

## Research Ethics Clearance Certificate

This is to certify that the application for ethical clearance submitted by


**GA Hoskins [4648404]**

for a M Ed study entitled

**School experiences of Grade 6 to 9 learners with literacy challenges in a long  
term remedial school in KwaZulu Natal**

has met the ethical requirements as specified by the University of South Africa  
College of Education Research Ethics Committee. This certificate is valid for two  
years from the date of issue.

  
Prof KP Dzvimbob  
Executive Dean : CEDU

  
Dr M Claassens  
CEDU REC (Chairperson)  
[medj@netactive.co.za](mailto:medj@netactive.co.za)

Reference number: 2014 JUNE /4648404/MC

19 JUNE 2014

# Addendum B- Informed Consent of Department of Education



education

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Tel: 033 341 8610

Ref: 24/8/3-355

Mrs. Geraldine Ann Hoskins


Dear Mrs Hoskins

## PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF LEARNERS WITH LITERACY CHALLENGES**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 March 2014 – 31 March 2016.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mr. Alwar at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Director-Resources Planning, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to the school/s and institution/s in the following Districts of the KwaZulu Natal Department of Education:

- (i) PINETOWN DISTRICT
- (ii) UMLAZI DISTRICT
- (iii) ILEMBE DISTRICT

  
Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD  
Head of Department: Education

*dedicated to service and performance  
beyond the call of duty*

### KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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WEBSITE: [www.kzndoe.gov.za](http://www.kzndoe.gov.za)

## **Addendum C- Informed Consent of the school Principal**

Dear Sir

I am currently a registered master's student at the University of South Africa and am in the process of writing a dissertation on the school experiences of learners that have difficulty with reading, writing and spelling. The title of the research project is **“School Experiences of Grade 6 to 9 Learners with Literacy Challenges in a Long Term Remedial School in KwaZulu-Natal.”**

This study seeks to investigate the school experiences of these learners as told by them. Most of the existing literature on these experiences is based on such experiences being reported by others. Currently there exists no such study using the voice of the learner, which could assist with the understanding these learners' school experience from their perspective

The data collected will be presented in a dissertation. I wish to observe the learners' in their classrooms as well as on the playground. Thereafter semi structured individual interviews will be conducted at the school in a private area given by the school. Interview times will be given by the school so as to limit or restrict the disruption of school work.

I hereby seek permission to interview your learners at your school for the purpose of this study. The Education Department has granted permission for me to conduct this study and my Ethical Clearance certificate has been issued. I attach copies of each.

Interviews will be recorded and learners' names and the name of the school will not be disclosed. I assure you of the utmost confidentiality and anonymity. I assure you that the learners selected for this research project will be treated with the utmost care and respect. Participation is voluntary and the learner can withdraw at any time. The Educational Psychologist has agreed to be available to attend to the learners in case they show signs of emotional reaction during and after data collection.

Your cooperation in this regard will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

G.A Hoskins

## **Addendum D- Request for Assistance from the Educational Psychologist**

### **Request to assist in identifying learners in Grade 6 – 9 with literacy challenges**

Dear Madam

I am currently a registered master's student at the University of South Africa and am in the process of writing a dissertation on the school experiences of learners that have difficulty with reading, writing and spelling. The title of the research project is **“School Experiences of Grade 6 to 9 Learners with Literacy Challenges in a Long Term Remedial School in KwaZulu-Natal.”**

This study seeks to investigate the school experiences of these learners as told by them. Most of the existing literature on these experiences is based on such experiences being reported by others. Currently there exists no such study using the voice of the learner, which could assist with the understanding these learners' school experience from their perspective. Permission has been granted by the Education Department as well as the school. An Ethical Clearance certificate has been issued for this research. Copies of Departmental permission as well as my Ethical Clearance certificate will be provided to you.

The data collected will be presented in a dissertation. I wish to observe the learners' in their classrooms as well as on the playground. Thereafter semi structured individual interviews will be conducted at the school in a private area given by the school. Interview times will be given by the school so as to limit or restrict the disruption of school work.

I hereby request that you seek permission from the parents of learners suited to my study. Once parental permission is granted will you please give me the names of these learners so that parental consent can be sought by me? Interviews will be recorded and learners' names and the name of the school will not be disclosed. I assure you of the utmost confidentiality and anonymity. I assure you that the learners selected for this research project will be treated with the utmost care and respect. Participation is voluntary and the learner can withdraw at any time. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. Your cooperation in this regard will be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Yours faithfully

G.A. Hoskins

## **Addendum E- Informed Consent of Parents**

Dear Sir/Madam

I am an educator with over 20 years' of experience but am presently not teaching. I am currently a registered Master's student at the University of South Africa and am in the process of writing a dissertation on the school experiences of learners that have difficulty with reading, writing and spelling. The title of the research project is **“School Experiences of Grade 6 to 9 Learners with Literacy Challenges in a Long Term Remedial School in KwaZulu-Natal.”**

This study seeks to investigate the school experiences of these learners as told by them. Most of the existing literature on these experiences is based on reports given by others. Currently there exists no such study using the voice of the learner. This study could assist with understanding these learners' school experiences from their perspective.

The data collected will be presented in a dissertation. I will observe the learners in their classrooms and on the playground. I will also conduct semi structured individual interviews. The interviews will be conducted privately at the school in an area provided by the school. Not more than one hour is needed and this could be broken up into two interview sessions. Interview times will be given by the school so as to limit the disruption of school work.

I hereby seek permission to interview your son/daughter for the purpose of this study. Interviews will be recorded and learners' names will not be disclosed (used). I assure you of the utmost confidentiality and anonymity. Participation is voluntary and the learner can withdraw at any time. I assure you that the learners selected for this research project will be treated with the utmost care and respect. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study however, the Educational Psychologist has agreed to be available to attend to the learners should they show signs of emotional reaction during and after data collection.

Should you wish to discuss this with me my contact details are included at the bottom of the reply slip. Your co-operation in this regard will be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Yours faithfully

G. A. Hoskins

**REPLY SLIP**

**PARENT**

I, .....  
parent/guardian of .....in  
Grade..... hereby grant permission/do not grant permission for my  
son/daughter to participate in the above mentioned study.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Supervisor: Mr. Sibusiso Ntshangase  
University of South Africa (UNISA)

Researcher: Geraldine Hoskins  
University of South Africa (UNISA)

## **Addendum F- Informed Assent of Learners**

*(After receiving parental consent the school psychologist will read this to the learners, answer any questions they might have and thereafter obtain the learners signature if they are willing to participate in the study. They will be told that should they wish to discuss it with their parents prior to signing they can do so. This letter will also be read to the learners by the researcher and then discussed with regards to their willingness to participate. The researcher will also enquire if they have discussed this with their parents.)*

Dear Learner

I am an educator and also a student at the University of South Africa. I have to write a very long essay which will be like a project on the school experiences of learners that experience difficulty with reading, writing and spelling. The title of the research project is **School Experiences of Grade 6 to 9 Learners with Literacy Challenges in a Long Term Remedial School in KwaZulu-Natal.**

I would like to observe you in the classroom and also on the playground. After that I would like to ask you questions about your experiences at your present school. Not more than one hour is needed and this could be broken up into two interview sessions. I will ask you these questions in a room or classroom at your school. When I ask these questions the only people in this classroom will be the two of us. The psychologist at the school will give me the times that this will happen so that you do not miss out on important work.

I would like you to give me permission to interview you for the purpose of this project. I have already asked your parents for permission. If you are willing and sign this form I will provide your parents with a copy of it. I will record our interview and your name will not be used in my essay. If there are some questions that you do not want to answer, then you can tell me that you do not want to answer it. The educators and other learners' will not know about our interviews. If you feel uncomfortable or unhappy about taking part in my project you can stop as any time. All interviews will be confidential and private. I will treat you with the utmost care and respect.



I would greatly appreciate it if you allow me to interview you. If you have any questions that you would like to ask please do so. If you wish to discuss this with your parents prior to signing the reply slip, you are welcome to do so.

Yours faithfully

G. A. Hoskins

**REPLY SLIP**

**LEARNER**

I, ..... a learner in  
Grade..... agree to take part in the above mentioned project.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Supervisor: Mr. Sibusiso Ntshangase  
University of South Africa (UNISA)

Researcher: Geraldine Hoskins  
University of South Africa (UNISA)

## **Addendum G- Preconceived Ideas**

- Learners would not feel comfortable discussing their school experiences.
- Learners would not want to discuss the challenges that they experience as a result of being diagnosed with dyslexia.
- Learners would not be able to express their feelings and views.
- Learners might be prepped by the psychologist for the answers given.
- Learners would not be aware of their academic strengths.
- Learners would not be able to give a legitimate reason for them attending a long term remedial school.
- Learners are finding the school environment challenging and difficult.
- Learners are unhappy at the school.
- Learners are not coping with academic work.
- Learners' experience negative peer relationships.
- Learners find the school environment a lonely place to be in.
- Unsure of educator learner relationships.
- Questioned if appropriate methods were being used by the educator to teach these learners.
- Unsure of the role of the family and whether they accepted the learners challenges and assisted them.
- Questioned the understanding to the educators regarding the challenges faced by these learners.
- Unsure of the support that the educators and school were giving to the learners.
- Unsure if the school is satisfying the needs of the learners.
- The red tape involved in gaining information about the school painted a negative picture.
- I doubted the value of the school for these learners.
- I was doubtful about the academic achievements of the learners.

- Learners feel inferior to the rest of society.

## **Addendum H: Prepared Interview Questions**

### **Biographical Details**

Current Age:

Male or Female:

Length of time at this school?

Grade currently in?

The contents of the letter of assent will be reread to the learners to remind them of why the interview is taking place.

### **THE EDUCATORS:**

*What are the school experiences of learners with literacy challenges with regards to their educators?*

1. Do you understand the educators when they are teaching you?
2. What do you do if you do not understand them?
3. How do the educators react if you tell them that you do not understand them?
4. Describe them when they are teaching you?
5. Describe them when they are asking you for answers?
6. Describe them when they are discussing the work that you must do, are doing or have done?
7. What do they say to you after they have marked your work?

**PEERS:**

*What are their school experiences with their peers?*

1. How do the learners in your class treat you?
2. How do the other learners in the school treat you?
3. Do the learners in your class help one another?

**VERBAL AND WRITTEN WORK:**

*What are the school experiences of learners with literacy challenges with their verbal and written school work?*

1. Are you able to do the work that you are given?
2. Do you understand what you are asked to do?
3. What happens if you are unable to do the work?
4. Do you get help from the educators?

**HOMEWORK:**

*What are the school experiences of learners with literacy challenges with regards to their homework?*

1. Are you able to do the homework that you are given?
2. What happens if you do not know how to do your homework?

