



A thematic approach to identifying the theory-practice gap in relation to dyslexia:
The learning support workers' voice

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ABSTRACT

It is thought there information guides are primary resources for learning support workers (LSWs) to understand their role and practice within England's education system (ES) today (Lowman & Mathie, 1993). Addressing the gap in literature highlighting the importance of the LSWs voice, this study offers LSWs the opportunity to express their opinions on currently available information guides, with particular focus on dyslexia, considered the most prevalent special educational need (SEN) in England's ES. This paper hopes to inform the day-to-day practice of LSWs through offering recommendations for the construction of an information resource successfully presenting a core knowledgebase of dyslexia and effective interventions. Adopting a critical realist position, a qualitative approach was taken, using one-to-one semi-structured, tape-recorded, interviews, with three learning support staff (LSS) from a primary school in the South West of England. Thematic analysis (TA) constructed five themes, three of which were judged as key to the focal topic; 'Dyslexia as a Condition', 'Power Reflects LSW's Capabilities' and 'Dyslexia Information Availability and Adequacy'. The analysis felt there was a lack of understanding, or at least security, in the LSS' knowledgebase of dyslexia. These interpretations are not thought to be a sole consequence of current information guides inadequacies, but an indirect consequence of multiple wider issues impinging upon these guides. Overall, this paper recommends the design of a new information guide meeting the requirements alluded to in this paper, combined with further research within this area, ought to transform LSW's job-satisfaction, encouraging them to engage in further understanding of dyslexia.

Key Words:	Dyslexia	Learning Support Workers	Knowledgebase	Interventions	Thematic Analysis
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Introduction

Special educational needs

The term 'Special Educational Needs' (SEN) was initially developed for schools, local education authorities and other service providers to ensure pupils with difficulties accessing the curriculum, or learning, receive appropriate levels of support (Rose & Howley, 2007). The *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice*, under the *Education Act* state;

'Children have SEN if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special education provision to be made for them'
(DfES, 2002, pp.6).

This is based on the assumption that mainstream school teaching and learning practices are not conducive to the development of some children; rather, they require some form of specialist intervention. The notion of learning difficulties suggests some children are not performing in line with the attainment of age-related peers, that there is a normal path of development outlined in the National Curriculum that all should aspire to. This label suggests some children are 'normal' while others are 'special' (Jones, 2004, pp.11).

Since the late 1990's government initiatives have placed increasing impetus towards an Education System (ES) inclusive of all children's learning needs (Hick et al, 2009). As demonstrated through introductions of multiple policies, such as, the statutory *Inclusion Guidance* (DfES, 2001a), the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act* (DfES, 2001b) and the *Removing Barriers to Achievements*' strategy (DfES, 2004). Equal opportunities are seen as essential to realising the rights of children with SEN through participation in the general ES (Kay, 2002).

Consequently, supplementary provisions are required to accommodate individual learners (Matheson, 2008). To facilitate this, the government has committed increasing funds to education (Bedford et al, 2006). Literature reveals a proportion of this funding, was allocated to increasing the ratio of Learning Support Workers (LSW) (DCSF, 2009). Figures indicate a 110% rise in Learning Support Staff (LSS) between 1992 and 2006, where they represented 25% of the educational workforce (Bedford et al, 2006).

Nonetheless, the notion of SEN is not unproblematic in today's ES (Slee, 2001). This stems from the realisation that there is considerable diversity of children within any one diagnostic category (Rose & Grosvenor, 2001). Therefore, it is argued, the concept of 'special needs' has yet to be precisely defined (Warnock, 1982), suggesting the umbrella term of SEN may be somewhat redundant (Croll & Moses, 2002). The lack of a clear and accepted definition is overlooked, it is assumed 'we all know what we are talking about' (Wilson, 2002, p.62), or it is a euphemistic device to diminish the responsibility of schools and education policy in their failure to educate all children (Barton, 1987).

Dyslexia

One of the conditions falling under the umbrella term of SEN is Dyslexia. Suggested as the most common subtype of learning disability in the Western schooling system, dyslexia's prevalence rates in England range from 5-10% (Brunswick et al, 2010). Dyslexia is commonly characterised by difficulties with literacy acquisition and thought to be a developmental disorder extending across individuals' lifespans (Thompson, 2001).

Since the first reference to dyslexia (Berlin, 1872), it has become characterised by an advanced range of 'symptoms' such as; a gap between written language skills and intelligence; delayed language development; delayed and poor reading and spelling; pronunciation difficulties; confusion of left/ right direction; sequencing difficulties (months of the year/ days of the week); poor short-term memory skills; clumsiness, putting letters and figures the wrong way round, poor concentration, takes longer to complete written work, low self-esteem and confidence (The British Dyslexia Foundation, 2010).

Originally, described as a condition of 'word-blindness' (Hinshelwood, 1895), further research began the markings of a stage for identifying dyslexia (Morgan, 1896). The early 1970s described dyslexia through features associated with the disorder, believing it to have a specific underlying cause and specific symptoms (Miles, 1974). However, later discoveries implied that it actually had a 'diversity of disabilities' associated with it, thus refuting an 'underlying pattern common to the group' (Tizard, 1972, pp.2-3). Following the 1970s, theories of dyslexia continued to flourish – observing theories of visual and reversal errors (Liberman, 1971), as well as memory problems (Naidoo, 1972). This contributed to an evolving clinical classification of dyslexia (Guardiola, 2001), with dyslexia being assumed as 'a family or cluster of disabilities rather than...a single condition' (Miles & Miles, 1990, pp.5). In 1999, the National Working Party stated;

'Dyslexia is properly described as a syndrome: a collection of associated characteristics that vary in degree and from *person to person*' (Singleton, 1999, pp.25)

Therefore, although learning to read has been considered the most prominent educational symptom of dyslexia for many years those studying dyslexia have considered a large span of possible symptoms (Nicolson, 2005).

A popular definition (Thompson, 2001) states dyslexia is;

'Evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at the 'word level' and implies that the problem is severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities. It provides the basis for a staged process of assessment through teaching' (BPS, 1999, p.64).

It seems largely that textbooks and research articles make reference to the BPS's working definition of dyslexia, however it is criticised for being far too general (BPS, 2010). There are a number of terms used that are open to subjective interpretation.

For example, at what point does reading and/or spelling development become identified as a 'great difficulty', what time-span does 'severe and persistent' represent and what is an 'appropriate learning opportunity'? Furthermore, does the notion of reading and/or spelling developing 'very incompletely' denote there's a "complete" way to develop these skills? Research does not indicate *one* 'normal' pathway of development for individuals for either of these skills.

Arguably, this broad definition could be applied to all children who are weaker readers or spellers (Thompson, 2001). Perhaps, for theoretical and educational practice to advance for those labelled with dyslexia, a uniform definition must be agreed upon (Snowling, 2000). Like the BPS's, many current definitions of dyslexia provide descriptions of children's likely behaviouristic, overt characteristics/difficulties, acting merely as 'a straightjacket' ignoring auxiliary factors (Frith, 1997; pp.1). Those interested in the area of dyslexia may like to know alternative explanations, including more about the increasing return to the notion of dyslexia as it was understood before being 'officially recognised in 1982 in Education Acts' (Thompson, 2001, pp. 47).

Explanations for dyslexia vary from the biological, neurological, cognitive and social levels (Nicolson & Fawcett, 2008) and seem underpinned by two conflicting perspectives. One suggests that dyslexia is a tangible disorder (based on the medical model) and the other, that it is a socially constructed 'myth'. Given the vast body of literature available, I have been selective in the materials discussed.

Dyslexia: A medical model approach

Dominant medical and educational approaches used to study dyslexia (Riddick, 2001) perceive dyslexia as either a biological, neurological or cognitive dysfunction (Morton, 2004). These theories purport that behavioural-level observations are the outcome of medical and/or cognitive factors (Frith, 1999), that the surface behaviours are signs of underlying problems, not the problems themselves (Frith, 1997). One dominant view held today is that dyslexia is a form of language disorder that runs in families, which can be effectively remediated if identified early (Hulme & Snowling, 1997). This belief proposes reading is the manifestation of dyslexia (Nicolson & Fawcett, 2008) - but causes are hotly debated offering a number of possible theories (Ramus et al, 2003).

Genetic research holds the assumption that dyslexia is a neurological disorder with genetic origins (Nicolson & Fawcett, 2008) and implications for a biological basis is for a genetic predisposition (Thompson, 2001). A number of chromosomes are identified as sites for dyslexia (Fisher & DeFries, 2002), currently being linked to around 13 genes (Tolmie, 2006). Vast bodies of research demonstrate similar findings, increasing the acceptance of dyslexia as a congenital condition (Spooner, 2006).

Neurological findings suggest dyslexia may be responsible for the functional difficulties that challenge such individuals (Galaburda, 1989). Disruptions of cerebral architecture during gestation create cascades of events resulting in the reorganisation of neuronal circuits and networks (Galaburda et al, 1989). It is said, this reorganised structure may not be optimal for language acquisition, nor prosper in

the typical environment/ educational system in place (Sherman, 2000). More specifically, assuming abnormalities in the anatomy of the magnocellular system (regions of neurons conveying sensory information) (Stein & Walsh, 1997). This is the basis for the visual theory of dyslexia, suggesting a visual impairment creates difficulties in individuals' processing of letters and words from text (Livingstone et al, 1991).

Cognitive-level theories bridge the gap between biological-level brain difficulties and the overt difficulties described in definitions of dyslexia, because abnormalities at a neurological-level will have subsequent affects in mental processes (Frith, 1999). Cognitive research adopted the view that dyslexia's likely to be associated with language processing (Hulme & Snowling, 1997). This brought the emergence of the phonological deficit theory, which remains the consensus view of much current dyslexia research today (Nicolson & Fawcett, 2008). The phonological module is highlighted as a central unifying thread in the word-reading process (Reason, 2001). Children experiencing difficulties splitting words into their component sounds structures are said to have a limited 'phonological awareness', leading to difficulties in learning to read and spell (Vellutino et al, 2004). The rapid-auditory-processing theory specifies that that deficiencies lie in the perception of short/rapidly varying sounds (Tallal, 1980). This deficit is thought to be the cause of the phonological deficits (Ramus et al, 2003).

Overall, biological foundations of dyslexia imply dyslexia is a consequence of a brain abnormalities and atypical brain organisation that give rise to cognitive deficits and thus the behavioural signs of dyslexia (Thompson, 2001). England's ES arguably views dyslexia through the lens of the medical model. Many government policies, designed to address dyslexia, embrace the view that it is a condition that requires diagnosis and intervention. For example, *The Disability Discrimination Act* (1995) states dyslexia is a disability when there is 'substantial and long-term effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities'. Not only is this definition from the perspective of the medical model (Macdonald, 2009) it is also open to subjective interpretation; how are items such as 'substantial', 'long-term' and 'normal' defined? Nonetheless, teaching methods are under continual reconstruction to offer better support for these children who have veered off the path of development considered to be 'normal' (Nicolson & Fawcett, 2008).

Dyslexia: A social model approach

The social model of disability provides an alternative viewpoint to the medical model approach to dyslexia. Rather than interpreting dyslexia as a medical problem with medical solutions, the social model embodies the principle that while an individual may have impairments, 'it is society, that is, the social context, that disables' (Pavey, 2007 pp.7).

In adopting the medical model approach, it has been argued that those with physical or psychological impairments are subject to oppression (Cooper, 2006). The social model of disability makes significant distinctions between the terms *impairment* and *disability* (Cooper, 2006). *Impairment* exists in the real physical world (Cooper, 2006), for example, the idea that medical or cognitive differences cause failure in acquiring literacy (Snowling & Hulme, 2005). *Disability* is a social construct existing

in realms beyond language within the organisation of shared meanings, discourses and limitations imposed by the environment (Cooper, 2006). For example, the social rationale for maintaining constructs of literate and non-literate, which are subject to change based upon societal priorities. Where currently, illiteracy is considered a negative consequence for academic performance judged English schools (Elliott & Gibbs, 2008). The overarching argument suggests societal barriers are responsible for *disabling* individuals with *impairments* (Macdonald, 2009).

The social model states dyslexia is not a *deficit* but an *experience* arising out of natural human diversity (Cooper, 2006). This diversity is apparent in the classroom. Teaching methods typical of England's ES arguably do not facilitate the development of a range of learning styles (Cooper, 2006). Therefore, could be held accountable for failing to cater for the needs of a diverse student population (Cooper, 2006). Through the medical model dyslexic students require additional assistance, whereas through the social model it could be argued students' preferred approach to learning does not match the teaching methods imposed (Cooper, 2006).

In an interview with the Daily Mail, Educational Psychologist Elliott explains that in the mid-1980s dyslexia was discounted in education as a 'middle-class myth'; and that it is still 'just a...way to hide stupidity' (Mail Online, 2007). Elliott (Mail Online, 2007) believes dyslexia is a socially constructed idea that removes impetus from children being 'considered lazy, thick or stupid' and a term used to get children 'off the hook' (Mail Online, 2007). Revealing, poor readers are just poor readers, so treatment should be the same for all children - supposing the classification of dyslexia unnecessary (Elliott & Gibbs, 2008). Theorists with such beliefs consider the difficulties said to face such children as so broad and wide-ranging that an umbrella term for their problems is unhelpful (Nicolson, 2005).

Social constructionists argue, what is understood about dyslexia is shaped by social expectations and discourse (Woods, 1998). Successful participation in Western society demands heightened levels of literacy (Stivaros, 2007) and these values and norms are reflected in the ES. It may be demands for general literacy underpin the growing concern for the rising diagnoses of dyslexia (Riddick, 2001). It could said, different societal values would alter the social consequences and multiple disadvantages of illiteracy currently held in Western culture (Riddick, 2001).

Dyslexia and orthography

Nature and prevalence differences of dyslexia across languages continue doubts for the universality and specificity of a medical syndrome of dyslexia (Landerl, Wimmer & Frith, 1997). The incidence of dyslexia in English-speaking countries may not only reflect Western focus upon general literacy (Riddick, 2001), but highlight difficulties in learning the 'extremely complex writing system' (Brunswick, 2001, pp. xvi). It is important to recognise that learning to read is constrained and determined by the nature of the written-code and writing-system (orthography) in place (Brunswick et al, 2010).

Medical and educational approaches to dyslexia fail to acknowledge the importance of social and cultural ideologies underpinning discriminatory practice (Barton & Armstrong, 2001). Movements toward a more social model approach, acknowledging

the importance of disabling societal barriers for individuals with impairments (Riddick, 2001), consider the effects of the rise in a text-based information society (MacDonald, 2010);

'...it is not that dyslexia is unusually common in England, but rather that dyslexics are identified more readily and more early by dint of their failure to master our odd spelling' (Critchley, 1970, pp.14).

Implying, English-speaking children take longer to become literate than speakers of other languages, reflecting the complex orthography and irregular sets of rules and exceptions within the English language (Brunswick, 2010). Orthonography research supports the idea that dyslexia prevalence rates are not universal, differing from society to society, fluctuating depending upon the complexity of the language being learned (Stewart, 2001). Yet bizarrely, while neuroimaging studies suggest a universal basis for dyslexia (Paulesu et al, 2001), behavioural studies suggest the nature and prevalence of dyslexia differs between orthographies (Landerl et al, 1997).

Historically, dyslexia was believed to exist only among children who used alphabetic languages emphasising phonological skills, because it did not exist among the Chinese population, whom learn characters as logograms (Malatesha & Aaron, 2006). However, growing consensus and developments of assessment tools (Ho et al, 2000) has meant diagnoses of Chinese students have increased in recent years (Lee, 2002). Yet, it is argued, the fewer cases of dyslexia in China reflects their lack of knowledge about the condition, often attributing children's poor reading performance to laziness and poor learning motivation (Malatesha & Aaron, 2006). Therefore, the lack of a universal definition of the disorder may be due to there being no universal pattern of deficits established by each dyslexic reader.

Overall, prevalence of dyslexia in different countries may reflect differences in orthographic complexity (Stewart, 2001). It seems dyslexia is more widespread in countries where orthography is irregular with complex rules, which can be ambiguous and difficult to learn (Brunswick, 2010). Dyslexia may not then exist as a universal disorder, but fluctuate depending upon the complexity of the language being learned. Therefore, dyslexia's variable and culture-specific manifestations refute assumptions of the medical model (Paulesu et al, 2001).

Labelling: the advantages and disadvantages

Labels can be considered a stigma (Woolfolk, 1998), often referring to concepts full of ideology, as believed true for the term dyslexia (Frith, 1999). Each child has talents, abilities, and limitations because everybody's 'exceptional' (Woolfolk, 1998). However, some children are considered 'exceptional' because they are thought of needing additional educational support to help them reach their full-potential (Woolfolk, 1998).

The application of labels, which carry deficit connotations or could be perceived in a negative way, could be a significant factor in lowering expectations, contributing to a failure in learning (Rose & Howley, 2007). Furthermore, it can create stereotyping

that leads to discrimination in respect to the education they are given (Rose & Howley, 2007).

Debate remains over how to define the conglomerate of features suggested to represent dyslexia, the term 'specific learning difficulty' is often applied to demonstrate the differences between these children and the way that the difficulty manifests itself at different variants between individuals (Blackley, 2009). This questions whether such a label, based upon a condition that is wide-ranging and great continuum with 'no clear cut-off points', has any use in any diagnostic sense (Blackley, 2009, pp.5).

The *Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties* paper (Rose, 2009) advocates that Government wants every child to succeed, stating 'it hardly needs to be said that the ability to read well is key to success in education and an essential 'life skill'' (Rose, 2009, pp.1). The paper focuses upon early identification and direct response to counter effects of dyslexia on literacy (Rose, 2009). The paper also demonstrates that the identification of dyslexia can offer schools additional provisions (Rose, 2009). For instance, Local Authorities (LA) become responsible for providing necessary support services through identifying and meeting the training needs of staff, deploying additional and sometimes specialist staff to support the child - all of which is typically paid for by the central support service (Rose, 2009). This indicates labelling children with dyslexia is beneficial to schools in terms of the financial incentives available, as well as the support the pupils and their parents receive.

Furthermore, a diagnosis of dyslexia means individuals can be eligible for special academic arrangements that take into account their difficulties, such as eligibility for extra time in exams and a reader and/or scribe may be given (Frankel, 2009). However, arguments suggest; such academic arrangements "should be conditional, offered only upon a clear description of an individual's needs, rather than the provision of a diagnostic label" (Frankel, 2009, TES Online), which might reduce disadvantaging children with profound reading difficulties not diagnosed as dyslexic.

It seems that a diagnosis of dyslexia can offer children privileges to additional support, information and financial assistance (Woolfolk, 1998). However, this exclusive nature of labelling individuals with 'dyslexia' could itself contradict the ethos of England's inclusive ES, or alternatively offer certain children necessary resources they require to function within their given society (or learning environment).

Psychology in education

Combining psychological and educational fields helps to raise the standards of teaching (Galloway & Edwards, 1991). Children's learning processes and the factors that influence them are likely to remain the central focus for both psychologists and teachers, because both are interested in the influences on children's educational, personal and social development (Galloway & Edwards, 1991). The contribution of educational psychology has been defined as;

'to promote child development and learning through the application of psychology by working with individuals and groups of children, teachers and other adults in schools, families, other LEA officers, health and social services and other agencies' (DfEE, 2000, pp.5).

A key objective of England's ES is to provide an educational environment permitting each child to attain literacy skills necessary to function well in today's society (Nicolson, 2005). Psychology's role in education is said to be a source of ideas and understanding about how to best support children's learning, more specifically those children who experience difficulties in accessing learning in schools (Hick et al, 2009). Educational psychologists (EP) play a central role in this development of an inclusive educational system and practice in the ES (Olohan, 2004). Thus, the application of psychology in education gives a means of appraising children's similarities and differences, enabling a more efficient learning environment (Child, 1993).

Learning Support Workers (LSW)

There are a number of titles applied to the role of LSW, such as; 'classroom assistant', 'learning support assistant', 'teaching assistant', 'childcare assistant', 'support workers' among many others (Kay, 2002; Hancock & Colloby, 2005). It is suggested, those staff members working with individual or small groups of children, in a way to support their academic achievement, are under the realms of support staff (Robson et al, 2006). The term 'LSW' is used in a generic way throughout this paper to include all the titles recorded above, and the term learning support staff (LSS) to represent the combination of SENCO and LSWs.

LSWs find themselves engaged in varying duties with varying levels of responsibility (Hancock & Colloby, 2005). Research identifies eight central categories of involvement for LSWs – administrative duties; out-of-class assistance (e.g. school-tips); setting up and maintaining equipment; health and safety tasks; curriculum and learning-support; management (e.g. leading teams) and servicing (e.g. tidying away classroom activities) (Hancock and Colloby, 2005). Findings suggest, duties of learning-support with individual or small groups of children, in and out of the classroom, takes the majority of LSW's time (Hancock & Colloby, 2005).

LSWs are also responsible for reviews of these children with multiple professionals, teachers, and parents (DfEE, 2000). Although there seem 'no common patterns' to LSWs work (Lee, 2003, pp.25), it is important LSWs are equipped with adequate knowledge to support the variety of children they may come in contact with (Groom, 2006). It is said to be essential for LSWs to be aware of the challenges faced by views of difference, which define some students as 'lacking something' (Trent et al, 1998). Hence, LSW training provisions is a topic of growing interest (Groom, 2006).

The Code of practice on the identification and assessment of educational needs (DfEE,1994) identified the majority of children with SEN already in mainstream schooling system, highlighting that the mainstream sector required new and specific roles and responsibilities towards a greater diversity of children (DFEE, 1994). This reform resulted in a lot of LSWs providing assistance to children with SEN, who receive very little, if any, training (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2000).

LSWs are not expected to have prior knowledge of SENs (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2000), which could be of benefit for the implementation of strategies to assist with understanding and intervention when working with these children (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2000). Nonetheless, research suggests it is 'reality' that often LSWs least equipped, through training or education, are made responsible for the most difficult and needy pupils (Lorenz, 1993, pp.28). This lack of induction, training (Hammett & Burton, 2006, pp.303) and any entry level qualifications in this sector is under scrutiny, and highlights a greater need for some form of 'on the job', or professional training (Groom, 2006, pp.202).

The Plowden Report (1967), supported by *The Warnock Report* (1978), suggests LSWs should have training through courses covering child development and relevant educational material, with the majority of the training 'on the job'. This training and professional development was said to be the responsibility of both LA and school (Gerschel, 2005). Nonetheless, research still demonstrates an eminent lack of training for LSW's responsible, dynamic roles (Merriam et al, 2007). There are 'strong desires' among LSWs for more structure and uniformity in their realms of training and qualifications, as well as on-the-job professional development (Dew-Hughes et al, 1998, pp.179).

Current research, looking at the nature of LSW's work and perceptions of their value, crucially demonstrates a lack of standard job role, title or description (Robson et al, 2008). The research also investigates accessibility of 'in-house' training and development materials, which show; 'some [institutions] have produced useful handbooks or manuals for LSWs', yet, the opportunities for training and staff development for these staff members are 'patchy' (Robson et al, 2008, pp.3). In a large sample of LSWs, only 8% were provided with material to read and 65% stated they required further training within the area of dyslexia (Dew-Hughes et al, 1998). The need for professional development for LSWs is recognised 'if staff are to have the skills, knowledge and understanding to make reality [the] proposals of raising standards' (DfEE, 1997, pp.4).

It is apparent that guides, offering implicit models of what is valued in teaching and held as an ideal, as well as explicit rules and regulations school staff may need to be aware of, is at the core of many LSWs training programs (Lowman & Mathie, 1993). For those LSWs with access, a manual becomes a primary resource for helping them understand their role and good practice with the children they work (Lowman & Mathie, 1993). Yet, many LSWs are unaware of such manuals, or do not have access to them (Lowman & Mathie, 1993).

It seems in today's' economic climate, government have axed the already very limited opportunities of LSW training, indicating a lack of improvement and certainly a rise in the number of unqualified staff working with school children in England (Garner, 2010). It is thought these decisions will have enormous impact upon children's' education (Garner, 2010). Given this, and the lack of coherent training, it is evident many LSWs are already deployed in roles they are ill-prepared for. Current parliamentary changes may indicate a greater need for improvements to in-house training for LSWs, which could be economically beneficial to schools and LSWs. On

reflection, ensuring information guides for LSWs are accessible and adequate in providing necessary information could be essential.

The LSW manual

There are a large number of publications designed specifically for LSWs (Farrell et al, 2000). However, most of these publications tend to consider only elements of the LSW role, ignoring other subjects that may be relevant to the occupation (Farrell et al, 2000). Content analyses demonstrate these manuals vary greatly, with some being 'comprehensive and ambitious; others limited and focused' (Lowman & Mathie, 1993, pp.88). Lowman & Mathie (1993) state, these manuals are important reference material, which LSWs should be aware of.

A thorough literature review suggests it is unknown whether or not LSWs are using these information guides and if they feel these provide sufficient information required for their job. On the whole, there appears to be a gap in literature addressing the LSW's voice in this area. Hence, the proposed study hopes to highlight the importance of talking with these staff, offering LSWs an opportunity to express their opinions about these currently available guides.

The present study

Despite the vast body of literature addressing dyslexia, the voice of LSWs is notably absent in the area of the information guides designed for them to use with these children. The present study seeks to address this gap. The research aims are fourfold:

- To explore LSW's knowledge and understanding of dyslexia and how this has emerged
- To understand how LSWs knowledge and understanding impacts on their day-to-day practice
- To explore the use and content of current resources aimed to inform practitioners about dyslexia
- To establish whether current information guides are effective in meeting the needs of LSWs working in schools alongside children with dyslexia

It is hoped the research can offer recommendations for the construction of an information resource that successfully presents a core knowledgebase of dyslexia and facilitates effective interventions to facilitate the day-to-day practice of LSWs.

I have given considerable thought to identify my epistemological position, as I am aware this will shape the entirety of the research process. It seems the present study is rooted in contextualism, sitting between the two poles of essentialism, which reports objective 'reality' (King & Horrocks, 2010), and constructionism that examines various ways individuals construct their social reality through the role of language (Landgridge, 2004). Contextualism adopts the idea that individuals construct a view of the world based upon their perceptions of it in a state of continual change (King & Horrocks, 2010). Contextualism is characterised by theories like critical realism (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is the theory I refer to when indicating my epistemological position. Critical realism understands there is reality independent

of our thinking (*realism*), but individual perception of this reality acts as a function of the way it's perceived, therefore acquiring knowledge of the external world requires critical reflection of both perception and the world (*critical*) (Langdrige, 2004), which is the aim within this study. [Greater detail of the researchers' epistemological positioning and its formation can be found in appendix two].

A qualitative research approach is considered most appropriate for this paper. This is deemed suitable as it seeks to obtain an in-depth understanding of interviewees' knowledgebase of dyslexia, how this impacts their practice and the current resources aimed at informing them. The semi-structured interview is a key method to explore individual's experiences and gain understanding of their world, lending opportunities to describe activities, experiences and opinions (Kvale, 2007). It is implemented to acquire a detailed picture of individuals' or group of individuals' beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic (Smith, 1995). It allows more flexibility than conventional structured interviews, giving the interviewer the ability to follow or probe into interesting avenues that emerge during the interview, allowing for a fuller picture (Smith, 1995).

The data will be subjected to thematic analysis (TA), a widely used qualitative analytic method within psychology (Boyatzis, 1998). TA is a useful tool for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes identified should reveal important overarching issues raised within the LSS' interviews (Langdrige, 2004). TA is the most appropriate form of qualitative analysis to be utilised in this paper because of its theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Method

Design

A qualitative, semi-structured interview method of data collection was used. The adaptability of this interviewing format (Langdrige, 2004) aptly meets the complexity of education and the embedded role of LSWs (Kay, 2002), permitting variation of items, their sequence and participant responses (Smith, 1995).

The transcribed interviews were subjected to thematic analysis (TA). TA's intrinsic flexibility allows it to be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is appropriate given that I have been able to locate my epistemological position in critical realism, acknowledging the impact of context. Additionally, this approach is appropriate given the nature of the research aims and allowing for the identification of themes or codes not necessarily predicted.

The ambiguity and uncertainty of the analysis code resulted in a grey area with regard to the approach adopted to TA. A somewhat hybrid line of inductive and deductive approach to TA was selected. Where, research questions were predefined, thus mapping onto a more deductive, theoretical approach (Boyatzis, 1998). Yet, a data-driven, inductive approach of reading and rereading the data for *any* themes related to dyslexia, irrespective of previously identified themes or theory surrounding the topic, was applied (Boyatzis, 1998). This approach was considered appropriate given the closeness to the raw material means the process of coding the

data will not be trying to fit it into pre-existing coding frames, or the researchers' preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, this approach is said to enhance the appreciation for 'previously silenced voices or perspectives inherent in the information' (Boyatzis, 1998, pp.30).

Participants

Guidelines for 'best practice' for qualitative undergraduate dissertations recommend 3-4 hours of interview material to generate sufficient data for TA (Gough et al, 2003). This study collected 3.5 hours of semi-structured interview material from three LSS working alongside children aged between 7 and 14 years old, in a private preparatory school, in the South West of England. This school was considered ideal because the researcher worked there as a LSW, therefore knew LSWs were employed there and knew the school would be accommodating for the research to be conducted.

A homogeneous sampling variation of a purposive sample was employed to recruit the specific sample of individuals able of providing personal perspectives upon their; role in school, knowledge of dyslexia, current resources aimed to inform them about dyslexia. Two of the participants were LSWs and one was a SENCO.

Pauline is a married female in her mid-forties, with two and a half years experience working as a LSW. Judith is also a married female in her mid-forties and has one years experience working as a LSW. Sue is the school's SENCO, she is in her early fifties and married, she has worked as the SENCO at the school for five years. Including the school's SENCO was decided to facilitate access to a wider perspective on the focal topic - Sue's responsibility as SENCO requires her to work closely with the school's LSWs. Overall, this sample was thought proficient to address LSS' beliefs, perceptions and accounts of dyslexia in England's ES today (Smith, 1995).

The researcher worked alongside the participants also as a LSW at the school, therefore the relationship between researcher and participants could have been of benefit to the investigation because of the honesty they might offer and the possibly increased level of ease in comparison to an unknown interviewer (Langdrige, 2004). Conversely, it must also be considered that participants could answer in a particular way to perform the interactive function of being 'a good interviewee' (Smith, 1995, pp.10). For the purpose of this study, the researcher takes the position that what interviewees say has significance for them which encapsulates, at least in part, some of their beliefs or psychological constructs that they hold (Smith, 1995).

Materials

Background literature on the design and use of semi-structured interviews uncovered a number of factors to address when devising an interview schedule (Robson, 2002). Firstly, it was important to frame questions in a neutral, unloading way; using language interviewees are comfortable with (Langdrige, 2004). Secondly, each question should be phrased in an open-ended way, allowing respondents to speak openly about their thoughts and feelings (Smith, 1995). Therefore, the set of 18 items comprising the final interview schedule [see appendix three] were open-ended

questions offering participants flexibility in their responses. The items reflected topics identified as pertinent to the research questions/aims.

The course of constructing the interview schedule included significant redrafting. It was useful to get feedback on the questions' tone and difficulty from friends and colleagues (Smith, 1995), which highlighted that the effects of question-wording are fraught with complexity (Robson, 2002). A number of questions were redrafted, for instance: "*Do you proactively seek information regarding the difficulties that the children you have worked with have...?*" – It became clear, not only was this question closed, and 'proactively seek' was leading, but I was asked multiple times by colleagues - 'does this mean "look for information?"'.

To ensure a 'logical sequence' (Robson, 2002, pp.274) the current interview schedule followed the structure of Robson's (2002, pp.274) 'commonly used sequence'. This consisted of an; *introduction* - where the interviewer introduces themselves, reiterates the purpose of the interview, discusses confidentiality issues and ask permission to tape-record. A *warm-up*, asking non-threatening questions to ease interviewees into the main body of the interview. The *main body* of the interview, covering the main purpose of the interview in a logical progression. Finally, a *cool off*, used to defuse the interview with a few straightforward questions; and *closure*, where the participant is thanked. Additionally, to encourage interviewees to elaborate further in particular areas of interest a list of probes was devised [see appendix four] (Zeisel, 1984).

Prior to the interview, participants were asked to read a three page extract on dyslexia from Males' (1997) *Children First: A guide to the needs of disabled children in school* [see appendix five]. The extract was used as a seed for discussion during the interview, intended to encourage participants to generate questions of their own for the interview and to re-engage their thoughts with the topic of dyslexia. This particular manual extract was selected by recommendation of an Educational Psychologist (EP) who the researcher had contact with [see appendix six]. The EP highlighted that it was an 'old manual' that she had recommended to many LSWs over her career because of its 'ease' to understand.

To record the interviews, an Olympus Digital voice recorder was utilised because of its ease to implement, high quality recording and playback. Good transcripts depend upon quality recording equipment to later aid transcription (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Procedure

Two months before approaching participants for the study, permission to carry out the research was sought from the school's Head Teacher via letter [see appendix seven]. Subsequently, both LSWs and SENCO were informally approached and asked whether they would participate within the study. Once each accepted the invitation, an interview time and date was agreed upon individually for each of the three participants.

Five days prior to their interview, participants were emailed a cover letter [see appendix eight], detailing the research intentions and outlined the nature of participation. A broad list of research questions [see appendix nine] that would form

the interview schedule, to help put participants at ease (Robson, 2002) and allow them the opportunity to further prepare for the interview. Plus, a copy of the dyslexia chapter from Males' (1997) *Children First* information guide was included.

Interviews were conducted individually, on a one-to-one basis, during the summer vacation. Each interview was scheduled to last a minimum of forty-five minutes, no longer than one hour, suggested as a good duration to achieve a more intense and involved interview (Smith, 1995). The LSW's interviews took place in the staff common room and the SENCO's interview in a learning-support classroom where she was most familiar talking with LSWs and having general meetings. Conducting the interviews in participants' typical place of work, where they would usually talk at ease with colleagues was important. The environment where interviews are held is said to have an impact upon respondents and their answers, people are more comfortable in a setting they are familiar with (Robson, 2002).

Participants read and signed a consent form [see appendix ten] prior to the interviews. Once the tape-recorder had been switched on and "small talk" came to a natural finish the researcher worked through the interview schedule [see appendix three]. On completion of the interview interviewees were thanked for their time and fully-debriefed [see appendix eleven].

Ethical Considerations

Prior informed consent was negotiated in writing [see appendix ten]; ensuring participants knew the full nature of the research and their participation in it. In addition, the consent form also made clear participant's rights to withdraw from the interview at any time, and withdrawal of any data that they provided by the 1st October 2010. Withdrawal of data was date limited to ensure the researcher had time to meet paper deadlines. Standardised instructions were read to each interviewee [see appendix twelve] before the first question was asked.

Protecting participants from psychological or physical harm is a primary responsibility in research (Langdrige, 2004). It was felt that this investigation's risk of harm is no greater than ordinary life – as recommended by the BPS guidelines (Robson, 2002). Nonetheless, participants were fully-debriefed following participation [see appendix eleven], and offered the contact details for both researcher and research supervisor if they required them at a later date.

From the outset, participants were informed that whilst steps would be taken to address anonymity and confidentiality, these could not be guaranteed because dissertation examiners have full access to the entire interview transcripts and, if required, recordings. Additionally, extracts from the interviews would be included within the write-up of the paper, which is available for staff and students within the University of Gloucestershire. In an attempt to protect participant anonymity pseudonyms were used both in place of the participants' real names, and for any additional parties or locations mentioned within the transcripts and excerpts, that could place participant or school anonymity in jeopardy. Moreover, throughout the research process, all collected material was held securely by means of password-protected files on the researcher's personal PC and paper documents in a secure filing cabinet.

Analytical strategy

Research suggests there are no universal systems for transcribing tape-recorded material from interviews into written form (Langdridge, 2004). It was decided that a very complex level of transcribing, including great detail within the speech, was unsuitable as it would not be used in this analysis (Langdridge, 2004). Therefore, although a time-consuming choice (King & Horrocks, 2010), transforming the recorded interview in verbatim seemed appropriate and the 'preferred option' for TA (King & Horrocks, 2010, pp.143).

Transcription of one hour's interview took approximately ten hours, however this process was a valuable one – often considered the first step in the analytic process, it enables familiarisation with the data set (Riessman, 1993). An idiographic approach to analysing the transcripts was adopted where one transcript at a time was looked at in detail - a slow process that worked up to generalisations between the transcripts (Smith et al, 1995).

Coding of the interview material was developed following the work of King and Horrocks (2010), which has been derived from the earlier work of Landgridge (2004) and Braun and Clarke (2006). Further reading was addressed to broaden understanding of the theory and process of TA, but King and Horrocks' (2010) approach was considered the most up-to-date and encapsulated the key assumptions underpinning TA. Their approach involves a three-staged process (King & Horrocks, 2010), which is not prescriptive, so 'carrying out [the] analysis [did] not progress in a purely sequential manner' (King & Horrocks, 2010, pp.152) but a more cyclical approach between the stages.

The foundation stage of the coding process recommends attaching brief comments to significant parts in the transcript (King & Horrocks, 2010). This was omitted as a separate stage in this analysis because the level of detail attached to each of the descriptive labels ascribed to the data [see appendix thirteen] is sufficiently transparent to the reader. The first stage in the process, descriptive coding, required identifying parts of the transcript useful for addressing the research questions, which were underlined, in pencil [see appendix seventeen]. In the right-hand margin descriptive labels were attached in the form of acronyms [see appendix seventeen] according to meaning in the text. All the information was coded, reflecting the critical realist position assumed, where context is considered crucial. This process required a great deal of moving back and forth between the transcripts modifying, merging and adding codes as appropriate until it was felt no more could be modified (King & Horrocks, 2010, pp.154).

During the second stage in the process, interpretive coding [see appendix fourteen], the focus here was more on the interpretation of meaning (King & Horrocks, 2010). This process was completed through combining descriptive codes that shared common meanings, while rereading through the transcripts to ensure clarity in meaning of the material. Interpretive labels were attached in the left-hand margin [see appendix seventeen] in the form of an abbreviation.

Finally, defining the overarching themes [see appendix fourteen]. This required building upon the developed interpretive codes, with a view to identify patterns and themes capturing the key concepts in the analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010). To construct these themes a hands-on approach was employed; using printouts of each of the interpretive codes they were reviewed and rearranged into connected clusters [see appendix fifteen]. This process was time-consuming, requiring a great deal of interpretation and decisiveness as to which particular interpretive codes would fall under which overarching themes, a total of 5 main overarching themes were constructed [see appendices fourteen & sixteen].

Analysis

Overarching themes were produced from the data set [see appendix fourteen]. The five central, sometimes overlapping, themes are: 'Dyslexia is a Condition', 'Dyslexia Information Availability and Adequacy', 'Power Struggles Reflect LSW's Capabilities', 'Labelling Effects', and 'Educational Customs Restrain Children', each with sub-themes [see appendices fourteen & sixteen].

To ensure a thorough discussion within the word confines of this paper, three of the five themes have been selected for focus within this paper; 'Dyslexia as a Condition', 'Power Reflects LSW's Capabilities' and 'Dyslexia Information Availability and Adequacy'. These three themes are selected not only because they each permeate all transcripts, but it is felt they each encompass a broad range of issues pivotal to answering the questions of the research paper. Each of the themes will be discussed through the discussion of their comprising sub-themes with reference to their significance to the current research questions. Particular focus was held upon understanding participants' knowledge and understanding of dyslexia and how this impacts their day-to-day practice, as well as exploring their perspectives of the use, content and effectiveness of current dyslexia information resources.

Dyslexia as a condition

This theme demonstrates how participants characterise dyslexia as an ongoing multifarious condition, through the lens of the medical model, offering insight into LSW's understanding of dyslexia. 'Dyslexia as a condition' has three comprising sub-themes; 'dyslexia is a medical condition'; 'dyslexia is a complex umbrella term'; and 'prevalence of dyslexia'. Due to word constraints, the sub-theme 'prevalence of dyslexia' has been omitted from the analysis to allow thorough discussion of sub-themes pertinent to the research questions.

Dyslexia is a medical condition

The data set reveals that all participants instinctively allude to dyslexia as an accepted 'condition'. When considering the ways each participant constructs dyslexia it becomes apparent that they each perceive it as a medical condition – implying those with dyslexia have abnormalities that produce symptoms, which can then be identified and strategies can be used to help overcome their symptoms. Examining these perceptions help to build a picture of how LSW's knowledge and understanding of dyslexia may impact the way they work.

Sue implies that dyslexia is a 'is a medical situation' (T1: p.26: 852-856), more specifically a genetic brain difficulty:

S: Well, I-I think it-I think it's something genetic myself

I: Okay

S: Because-mainly because it's a sort of erm like a-a neurological er difference or deficit caused by a genetic difficulty because mainly I think because often happens in families, is passed through families I feel there must be something genetic there at the root of it

(T2: p.11: 356-361)

S: Erm, I felt that it reinforced my thoughts that it was a difference in the way that the brain has been-been developed, was the root cause of it

(T2: p.24: 783-784)

Judith mirrors this argument, saying:

J: constantly reinforce that it was noting to do with you being thick it's just to do with the fact that your brain's not processing it easily, and that's quite sad really

I: oh, yeah

J: and it's quite-digressing really- but it's quite suited because I mean his there is a history of it within his family, which I think is quite common often with dyslexia so you would have thought in some ways he'd would have, you know, it wouldn't have been such a problem for him, but it was at times definitely

(T3: p.4-5: 132-138)

Judith seems to feel that a 'family history' of dyslexia should transcribe into an assured attitude that an offspring *should* inherit the difficulty; therefore she is unable to understand why the child has difficulty coping with his diagnosis of dyslexia. In a similar way Pauline states:

P: Erm, its genetic

I: Okay

P: It's a life-long (3.0) um, condition that can be helped but not (..) cured,

I: Uh huh

P: Errrm, and it's, erm, is it the left-side of? I can't remember of it's the left-side of the brain

I: Uh hu

P: Um, it's, um, the- I've read loads of different things some say it's the formation of the one part of the brain which (.) affects the reading and the visual,

I: Yeah

P: um, and its sort of all to do with the neurons in the brain and the-the-the sort of wiring isn't correctly

(T1: p.10: 329-340)

Pauline's suggestion that dyslexia is a 'lifelong' condition that 'can be helped but not cured' could reflect her belief that dyslexia is a medical condition that can only be relieved. The idea that dyslexia is 'incurable' may lend to the idea that LSWs are merely helping a child in the present time that they are with them, as opposed to looking toward future aspirations for the child. Thus, it could be suggested that such

short-sighted views may influence the approach LSWs take to their role with dyslexic children.

Theories of self-efficacy suggest 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the course of action is required to produce given attainment' (Bandura, 1997, p.3). Thus, suggesting behaviours of a person are a consequence of their belief they can influence an outcome (Tobin et al, 2006). Therefore, the belief that dyslexia cannot be cured, only alleviated, may restrict the level of belief LSWs have for the hopes of the child for the future, which may shape the child's own level of self-efficacy.

On the whole, it seems that when describing dyslexia, participants' explanations run somewhat parallel to the popular BPS's (1999) working definition of dyslexia, focussing upon 'literacy', 'persistent', and 'need[ing] appropriate learning opportunities'. There are many references to dyslexia 'impact[ing] on [dyslexic children's] literacy' (T2: p.6: 178).

Judith affirms that children with dyslexia have a 'general difficulty with writing' (T3: p.4: 101):

I: That's good. Erm, and in your own words could you provide an overview, a description of what dyslexia is?

J: And it just means that they have difficulty processing erm reading-some or all reading, language, erm spelling, erm number work, erm and quite often reading sort of instructions erm and concentration

(T3: p.6: 183-190)

In this passage Judith supports that children with dyslexia experience difficulty reading, spelling and writing, which may suggest she believes dyslexia is evident when 'word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely' (BPS, 1999, p.64).

Moreover, Pauline says:

P: because I think its something that stays with people throughout life, that I think if you find someone that just (.) finds it difficult to read (..) that can be taught and, I mean, it can be taught to dyslexic children as well but they still always have that (.)

I: [yeah]

P: [underlying] difficulty, don't they

I: yeah

P: suppose if you get an adult that can't, well if you get an adult that can't read because they missed the-the space as a child (.) they can learn to read as an adult and be fine, but if you get a dyslexic person they're always going to struggle (..)

(T1: p13: 408-416)

In the same way Sue advocates:

S: but, it's things like persistent difficulties with their reading accuracy and their pace (T2: p5: 155)

Both Sue and Pauline's assumptions of dyslexic children's reading difficulties supports the notion of these children having 'persistent ['word level' problems] despite appropriate learning opportunities' (BPS, 1999).

The participants' view of dyslexia could arguably be said to be through a medical model lens, which are inline with the multitude of government policies that have been developed for England's ES, which express the view that it is a 'condition' that requires diagnosis and intervention (MacDonald, 2009), for example, the Disability Discrimination Act (1995).

Nevertheless, the data set does suggests participants are aware of the opposing social model approach to dyslexia, but appear to have little to say on the issue, other than disregard it:

P: No, I don't think it's a myth, I think that it's a very real (..) condition, I think it's very (..) can be (..) come out in different ways in different children and (..) but no I think it's- I think it's very real
(T1: p12: 391-393)

S: No, I don't I think it's a myth, I think it's the real thing because I mean I'm a parent of a child who's-has mild dyslexia but there's definitely something there, it's not just made up, it's not just the fact that they're (..) delay-delayed in their development there's something very specific there that's holding them back and they can't help it
(T2: p12: 382-385)

J: Well, I certainly don't think it's a myth, I think when you work with children that do have dyslexia it's very obvious that they have specific difficulties that are different-makes them different to other children erm and there is nothing that they can do about it, it's not behavioural, or laziness, or upbringing, or anything else, you know, they-they it's something that they have that has to be worked with and worked around, but I don't think it's society or anything else that's causing it, or just the fact a child is being particularly lazy or disobedient or erm any other reason, I think there is definite dyslexia yes an I think, you know, the more that you work with it the very obvious it is that there is and it does exist
(T3: p8: 244-252)

There could be a number of reasons for the rejection of the 'myth' idea by the LSS. In this instance, it may be due to a lack of understanding of the concept. As the quotes demonstrate, participants appear to approach the question from the angle that 'myth' suggests there is *no* impairment, which is not the actual suggestion in the theory.

Moreover, the participants' interpretation of the theory must be considered with some caution. It seems 'every day [the LSWs] work with children, and it's mainly dyslexia' (T2: p5.144) that they work with. Therefore, it would not follow logically for them to them to support the idea that there is no such 'condition' as dyslexia because it could have a significant impact upon the value of their role.

In response to the question of whether dyslexia can, or cannot, be considered a myth, none of the participants directly acknowledge that although such impairments

may exist - said 'difficulties', such as illiteracy, may in fact be a consequence of the academic performance judging English school system, which views illiteracy as a limitation (Elliot & Gibbs, 2008).

That said, both Sue and Pauline do, in different points during their interviews, make reference to the overarching idea that schools' focus upon reading and writing may be responsible for dyslexic children's observed difficulties in school, but when they are in the 'real world', hence not in school, such difficulties will diminish:

S: and can often, you know, are very good spatially and can think in 3D and see things just in a completely different ways, so I think they've got many talents often, some of them, it's not just those that you should see as necessarily a difficulty, it is often seen as a difficulty in school because we are measuring things like literacy (.), you know that's what the focus is, you know, to read, to write, to spell correctly, but actually once they're out in the big wide world they'll use computers more and some of those difficulties will disappear

I: yeah

S: will not be so important, you know, and they can perhaps hopefully, you know, achieve their potential more

(T2: p10: 309-318)

P: I think A it gives them the problems throughout life because everything is based on reading and er er well writing

(T1: p13: 424-425)

P: too much by (..) and I sometimes wonder how, the things soo-sometimes bothers me is (..) that a lot of the attention is put to (.) how the piece of work looks or (.) how the-the words are [spelt]

I: [ah hu]

P: rather than (.) the overall content of it and I think that's a very - should be a very positive thing to a dyslexic child, that the ideas are great and the fact that they are spelt wrong,

I: yeah

P: I-I think often the emphasis isn't often enough put onto the content

(T1: p.14-15: 464-472)

Overall, these suggestions may impact the way LSWs construct their level of responsibility for the academic progress of the children they work with. If defining the 'problems' a child faces in school is a struggle, then defining the goal that is to be reached will also be a struggle (Ebersold, 2003). For instance, the medical model may suppose dyslexic children's difficulties are consequence of their impairments and lack of necessary capacities. Yet, LSWs may surreptitiously consider the problems these children are experiencing lie in the lack of flexibility within the school system. Thus, such different approaches to the definition of dyslexia in the child may be leading to tensions affecting their cooperation within their job role (Ebersold, 2003).

Overall, findings under the sub-theme of 'dyslexia as a medical condition' may indicate that a greater awareness of alternate constructs of dyslexia, for instance the social model approach, which addresses the distinction between *impairment* and

disability (Cooper, 2006), may offer LSWs and other stakeholders alike the position to offer better quality 'know-how' to the children they work with (Ebersold, 2003; pp.105.)

Dyslexia is a complex umbrella term

This sub-theme aids a better understanding of how dyslexia is understood by the participants, drawing attention to any gaps or weaknesses in their knowledgebase, which may help to identify areas for improvement. It becomes apparent in the data set that there are a multitude of overt behavioural characteristics attributed to dyslexia, with over 20 different symptoms mentioned throughout the transcripts, for example 'general poor organisational skills' (T2: p6: 171); 'bit clumsy' (T1: p11: 360); and 'concentration can be very bad' (T3: p7: 203). Within the interviews each participant refers to the advantage of having checklists of symptoms to look out for:

P: Erm, it had lots of (..) erm (..), useful-well it had lots of things to look out for
(T1: p21: 703)

S: some like erm, say some-some books have got like a check list for symptoms of dyslexia
(T2: p22: 730-731)

J: oh and what to look for as well
(T3: p14: 471)

Such a list of symptoms reflects the evolving clinical classification of dyslexia (Guardiola, 2001). Supporting that dyslexia includes a 'diversity of disabilities' (Tizard, 1972, pp.2-3), that is 'a family or cluster of disabilities rather than...a single condition' (Miles & Miles, 1990, pp.5), which 'vary in degree and from *person to person*' (Singleton, 1999, pp.25). Accordingly, it seems that although learning to read can be considered the most prominent educational symptom of dyslexia, for many years those studying dyslexia have considered a large span of symptoms representative of dyslexia (Nicolson, 2005):

P: well, there are a ver-there are, there are different lots of different things aren't there, that can effect, not-not not any one dyslexic has the same,

I: no

P: group of things that, um, but I mean things like erm
(T1: p11: 357-360)

I: But I mean through your experience, maybe you er know of signs and symptoms that you recognise?

S: yes, I mean I think that they're quite wide and varied and they do change, there's-there's not a specific set that you can say 'cause it does vary I think between a lot of different dyslexic children
(T2: p5: 149-153)

Not only does this support a notion of dyslexia as a medical construct – but implies a level of ambiguity - possibly reflecting the confusing nature of the many debates around dyslexia. The idea that dyslexia extends beyond the commonly recognised

difficulties with reading, writing and spelling, encapsulating many other varying difficulties that may be experienced (Davis & Braun, 1997), transcribes the ways such children should/could be helped. This idea suggests that each dyslexic child will require bespoke assistance and therefore those working closely with them, such as LSWs, need to have the knowledge and understanding to both recognise, and cope, with each potential varying difficulty.

Power reflects LSW's capabilities

This theme suggests that power struggles between LSWs and teaching staff reflect the knowledge and understanding LSWs possess and the level of responsibility attributed to their position held within school. This theme helps to address LSW's knowledge and understanding of dyslexia element, as well as the implications this has for the LSW's role.

The theme of 'Power reflects LSW's capabilities' comprises the sub-themes; 'struggles with teaching staff'; 'LSWs lack knowledge'; 'no demand for LSWs to further their knowledge of dyslexia'; and 'communication difficulties'. Due to word constraints, the sub-theme 'communication difficulties' has been omitted from the analysis to allow thorough discussion of sub-themes pertinent to the research questions.

Struggles with teaching staff

The data set revealed some apparent tensions and difficulties faced between the LSWs and teaching staff, which helps with recommendations for how these can be resolved to improve LSW's day-to-day work. Previous research alludes to LSSs' feelings of being 'spare parts', where their know-how is not utilised appropriately (Collins & Simco, 2006, p.204-206). Similarly in this study, it seems there is a sense that one of the LSWs would prefer to work alone with the children and constructs the classroom as a constraint:

P: um (4.0) if, a, it's frustrating that it's so class led, actually on a day-to-day basis (..) other than the handful of things that we all do like helping them with spelling an read questions for them an write for them occasionally an (.) what have you um, it's not like being (3.0) you know, having them for a half an hour one-to-one lesson with them where you could do all sorts of wonderful things with them-with resources (.) you don't get that opportunity

I: no, and would you (.) find that (.) of benefit to you, would [you find it]

P: [TO THEM and to teach them]

(T1: p17: 557-562)

Although only appearing in one of the interviews, this point is considered a crucial one because the interviewee makes many references to this argument. This may be a reflection upon the level of responsibility and trust the LSWs feel is attributed to their role of working with children. Moreover, constructing the classroom as a constraint may reflect LSWs' level of contentment and the experiences they have within the classroom. For instance, the beliefs teaching staff hold about the roles of LSWs could impact the way they lead or manage them. It has been proposed by teachers that support staff can in fact act as a hindrance to the children they work

with because they isolate a child from many learning challenges and social interaction (Moran & Abbot, 2002). Such beliefs will almost certainly affect the way teachers interact with LSWs.

Such suggestions may reflect findings that few schools have procedures for LSWs to follow, which will enable them to know what is considered appropriate, and inappropriate, as considered by each individual class teacher (Ainscow, 2000). Therefore, reflecting poor management of the LSWs by teaching staff (Rose, 2000). LSWs and teachers working in unison would be beneficial (Ainscow, 2000), yet it is apparent that there are barriers that appear to have led to feelings of exclusion:

P: And I think how the-maybe the teacher could (..) put more in place for the person working with (2.0) I don't know in what way (2.0)

I: Hmm

P: So, working with, you know, for the person working with the child

I: So, can you say, can you elaborate on that? Heh

P: Maybe them setting more time aside f-f-for us as individuals

(T1: p.30: 980-985)

It may be that such concerns hinder the support the LSWs offer the children they work with.

Overall, such struggles with teaching staff may be a consequence of the rapid shift of the LSW role from an ancillary role to a more direct one in the learning process (Clayton, 1993). A shift like this may have been thought to require accompanying training and/or qualifications, and in the least some experience, however it is noted that such expectations have not presented in reality, therefore resulting in LSWs undertaking duties they 'receive little preparation and advice for' (Clayton, 1993, pp.33). This could be a factor in such unresolved dilemmas (Moyles & Suschitzky, 1997a). It is plausible that teachers are unsure of what to expect of each individual LSW, thus how to implement their individual capabilities to the best effect (Moyles & Suschitzky, 1997b):

P: t-t-to use different strategies with the children

I: yeah

P: I think it's all very rigid erm, (2.0) sometimes, but it's very difficult

I: hmm, no, I understand

P: and it's a-as we said at the beginning, it's a very difficult line to make the child the best use of the time without making the child stand out from everybody

I: yeah

P: but I think that there are so many resources out there (..) that could help here

I: uh hmm

P: but because we're constricted by the (2.0) having to write the essay or-you know, often I think it would be so much better with Jacob to not have to (3.0) at that age I appreciate that they have got to do it later on at school, but to write out a whole essay out that we could do a storyboard for instance

I: yeah

P: all because-his ideas are great

I: hmm

P: I just think it's, you know, it's things like that that-that could be much more, that-you know, things could be better done
(T1: p.30: 987-1007)

Furthermore, research suggests the responsibility of the management and supervision of LSWs within the classroom falls largely upon the class teacher, yet such training for this role is also under supplied (Fletcher-Campbell, 1992). Therefore, the tactful and skilful management by the classroom teacher may be lacking, hence this existence of potential difficulties (Farrell et al, 1999). Therefore, this may well reflect a need for teaching staff to improve their capabilities for managing support staff (Moran & Abbot, 2002), which could be facilitated through the development of a universally agreed upon policy outlining the nature of the LSW role, including expectations of both LSW and teaching staff, which is currently absent (Lee, 2003):

LSWs lack knowledge

This sub-theme identifies possible weaknesses in the participants' knowledge and understanding of dyslexia, a possible consequence of wider political considerations towards LSWs knowledge investments. Therefore, this sub-theme further facilitates appreciation of how knowledge and understanding of dyslexia effects the way LSWs operate.

The data set demonstrates a notable anxiety surrounding the level of knowledge and understanding of dyslexia, on the behalf of the LSWs':

P: they're hard (.) for them to er, to er, but er, but er, but often it is concentration isn't it? Um, letter formation, reading, spelling it's only a combination of things isn't it?
(T1: p12: 370-371)

When asked what difficulties she thought dyslexic children encountered, Pauline looks to the researcher for reassurance of her answers. This could be said to reflect insecurities in her knowledge of dyslexia. Pauline goes on further to reveal;

P: =I don't feel that I do, when you asked me to do this I-I thought I don't really know very much at all
(T1: p15: 479-480)

Again, reflecting the insecurities Pauline has with her level of knowledge of dyslexia. Judith also appears to feel as though she lacks knowledge about dyslexia;

J: I'm trying to sort of approach the problem, I don't know if I'm doing this right, but I'm trying to approach it as if I don't know a tremendous about-well I don't know a tremendous lot about it
(T3: p18, 577-580)

This clear void of security in knowledge the LSWs have surrounding dyslexia could be thought to reflect the often supposed confusing nature of dyslexia, but when considered at a deeper level, could possibly reflect the deficiencies of training/learning materials offered to support the LSWs in this area. The topic of

equipping LSWs with adequate provisions to allow them best support the children they work with, has been of growing interest in research for many years (Groom, 2006), these data extracts suggest further training within the area of dyslexia may be of benefit.

Crucially, it seems that when there are gaps in the LSWs knowledge they turn to the SENCO for advice:

J: Yeah, well I-I, there were certain occasions erm, you know, throughout the year I mean last year where things would happen or I didn't feel perhaps I was-as if I-I was doing as much as I could so then I would perhaps talk to Sue who might recommend something to read or a strategy to-to particularly help
(T3: p10: 316-319)

S: Erm, I mean I talk to them a lot about erm...if I can about the child they're working with and suggest things they can do and talk together erm.....yeah
(T2: p19: 613-614)

Although this reflects the respectable job support LSWs receive from the school SENCO, it on another note, highlights that LSWs rely on the SENCO to advise them on aspects of dyslexia that they needed help with, because they lack this understanding themselves. Additionally, none of the LSWs acknowledge having any form of training with regard to their role. Broadly speaking, this lack of disclosure and reliance upon SENCO for information could be interpreted as LSWs receive information third hand from more senior staff because they do not individually get training provided for.

While research suggests there are direct improvements on the knowledge and understanding of LSW's job responsibilities (Cajkler et al, 2007), it is the attitudes of the teaching staff and the school overall that are key to the success of LSW training and capabilities (Wilkins, 2004). Therefore, it may be perceived that the LSWs are not considered worthy of training investments, which may be an extended reflection of a wider governmental influences and consequent availability of funding (Garner, 2010). Furthermore, research suggests this lack of training signals the diverse nature of LSWs role within schools and deem it the responsibility of the:

'whole-school team, led by the SENCO, [to] assume responsibility for ensuring that LSWs understand their role in school...and become increasingly knowledgeable in ways of supporting pupils'
(Dew-Hughes et al, 1998, pp.183)

Therefore, the lack of perceived knowledge and understanding demonstrated by the LSWs may not only imply that they are undersupplied with the necessary information to feel confident with their awareness dyslexia, but also reveal deeper connotations to the government's, and so school's per se, value of LSWs and the subsequent investment into informing these staff of dyslexia.

No demand for LSWs to further their knowledge of dyslexia

This sub-theme illustrates that there is a possible lack of encouragement for LSWs to further their knowledge and understanding of dyslexia, which holds connotations to the way in which LSW's work.

On the whole, the data set implies a level of "LSWs discretion" whether or not they further their understanding of dyslexia:

I: So, erm, other than (.) inc-woa- any additional reading you've done recently (..) and including that, umm, what-what (.) where-how much would you say'll, or to what extent would you say you do look for information, or-an-a you've just mentioned the inset days, after the inset days you like to look up stuff they suggest, but to do you find, do-do you find yourself doing it often? Or (..)

P: umm, fairly oft-, w-but not, I wouldn't say I did it regularly,

I: [no]

P: [I] tend to do it more if-if something (.) in class or with-with Jacob-with Jacob's comes up and I think o-o I could actually try and help a bit, I tend to do it more on that, um

I: yeah

P: situ-in that-in that situation

(T1: p.16: 512-522)

J: Yeah, well I-I, there were certain occasions erm, you know, throughout the year I mean last year where things would happen or I didn't feel perhaps I was-as if I-I was doing as much as I could so then I would perhaps talk to Sue who might recommend something to read or a strategy to-to particularly help, so I think that I tended to sort of-it was usually prompted by something that didn't perhaps to be working very well, or perhaps fitting a particular problem

(T3: p10: 316-321)

J: Erm, so, I haven't really sort of, which I probably should have done, looked to understand more about

(T3: p.13: 410-411)

There does not appear to be expectations for LSW candidates to possess appropriate qualifications for supporting children with dyslexia within a school, with there being many LSWs not appropriately prepared for working with learning difficulties (Moran & Abbot, 2002). Respectively, the current data set demonstrates both a lack of requirement for any formal qualifications or even understanding of dyslexia to be a successful candidate:

J: Oh yeah right, I think you're right. Erm and then I downloaded, what I download first of all when I was coming for the interview, huh, quite a lot of stuff erm then again as I said once I got the job

(T3: p.14: 440-442)

P: =I think it would for somebody that just want-wanted to-to (.) start working with, you know, you-you would hope that somebody would then have-maybe have more

interest to then go away and find out more, but as a-as a (..) as a-as an introduction, I mean it erm yes it's very basic but it-it (..) it gives you the basics doesn't (T1: p.27: 882-885)

This apparent lack of a basic prerequisite of knowledge could be said to set the tone for further requirements of the LSW role. For instance, LSWs may feel it necessary to only look for further information regarding dyslexia on a "need to know" basis;

J: as I said, I've to be honest there wasn't a lot of general reading last year it was generally prompted by sort of something (T3: p.10: 325-326)

What is more, it becomes apparent that the LSWs are not paid for spending time researching dyslexia:

S: Well, this is my point earlier, I don't think it is possible to ensure that they'll seek [further information] it because-partly because of they way that LSWs have been funded up to now, parent funded only – so you're only paid for the time you're in school any extra time you have-you're not paid, so I can't say to staff, go an-go and read that book upstairs for an hour, you won't get paid for it, you can't do that, you can't expect that of staff (T2: p.29: 951-955)

S: But (..) unless they showed an interest in that [further information], I wouldn't want to make them have to it, if you see what I mean because they'll be doing it in their own time. (T2: p.20: 638-639)

Overall, such lack of knowledge, interest and direction to further knowledge around the topic of dyslexia could be perceived as a significant contradiction to the medicalised approach ascribed to dyslexia, as previously discussed. It is likely that a "medical condition" would expect a rigorous and regimented approach to ensuring thorough knowledge and understanding of the condition for those working with these children.

Furthermore, the lack of financial funding holds significant connotations on the whole, by the government and inexorably school alike, towards the importance of LSW's role and the level of knowledge and understanding that is expected of them. Lack of compensation may impede LSW's understanding of dyslexia in a direct sense, whereby they do not look to further their understanding because they do not want to do it in their own, unpaid, time, or in a more indirect sense, whereby the fact this responsibility is unpaid degrades the position of LSW in general.

The National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN) states the success of LSWs falls upon their willingness to develop their existing skills and acquire new ones, recognising that 'they can only do this if they are supported in their place of work and in particular if their responsibilities and the boundaries of their role are clearly defined' (Wall, 2001, p.8). That said, it may not be the responsibility of the school per se, because their policies and practices are shaped by government policy.

It seems this lack of requirement, by the school, for LSWs to further their knowledge base gives rise to the SENCO's inability to request support staff to read information that she feels they would benefit from;

S: And then that's absolutely fine, but I don't like to-to pressurise them into, you know, you know, but if they show an interest and say look I want to find out more about it then, you know, I'd point them in the direction of the library or there might be often I'll say well if you-if you're in maths and a child's, I don't know, the child's having problems with times tables or a book, I can lend you one on that and I've done that, so we do, you know, I've got some books I can, but nothing in particular of you see what I mean
(T2: p.20: 643-648)

S: Erm, but I can't-I'm very much tied by the way the LSWs are used it will be more flexible next year, this next year, I think, but so far I haven't been able to I can't, this is why I said it is very reliant on-if LSWs show an interest and want to learn more I can lend them books and point them in the right direction, but it's very much up to them to do it
(T2: p.29: 963-967)

Therefore, it seems the knowledge of LSWs may be an indirect consequence of the importance of the role held by the school, which is in conflict with what the SENCO believes is required for the LSWs to further support the dyslexic children they work with. This compromise appears to work against the DfEE's 1997 paper, which states LSW's require proficient knowledge and understanding if they are to 'have the skills...to make a reality of our proposals for raising standards' (DfEE, 1997, pp.4).

This highlights the importance for LSWs to be regarded in their own professional right, where the importance of their role is highlighted and rewarded (Moran & Abbot, 2002). This endeavour ought to translate into better job satisfaction for LSWs, ensuing them to take time to engage in further understanding of dyslexia (ScER, 2005) and allowing the SENCO to direct LSWs to what she believes they need to pursue in order to offer the children they work with improved support.

Dyslexia information availability and adequacy

This theme indicates there is a lot of dyslexia information available, yet there appears to be an absence in current information guides that are specific to LSWs, offering all the information they require. This theme is vital to pursue the perceptions of the content and adequacy of currently available dyslexia information resources.

'Dyslexia Information Availability and Adequacy' comprises the sub-themes; 'lots of dyslexia information available'; 'resources inadequate for LSWs'; 'need for more practical resources'; and 'sources of dyslexia information'. Due to word constraints, the sub-theme 'sources of dyslexia information' has been omitted from the analysis to allow thorough discussion of sub-themes pertinent to the research questions.

Lots of dyslexia information available

There is the suggestion that there is information regarding dyslexia unquestionably available to LSWs:

P: but it's (..) there is so much out there it's being selective as to what you read, isn't it

(T1: p.15: 497)

P: I just often feel when I'm going in to look for something there's a heck of a lot=

(T1: p.19: 629-630)

I: And how was the-the accessibility of the stuff that you went to go to find?

J: Erm, not too bad, it much better when I was, either Sue would recommend something really it was much better, It I found sometimes it was quite confusing there was a bit too much almost

(T3: p.10: 327-330)

Suggestions that there is 'an awful lot' of dyslexia information 'to wade through' (T1: p.18: 596) not only reflects the large corpus of information about dyslexia but alludes to the notion of quantity over quality. This idea hints toward the need for the aggregation of up-to-date, relevant information that LSWs can make use of.

It is important to note here that there appears to be a gap in literature addressing both quantity and quality of information available about dyslexia. To have research in this area could be of great use to those working with children with dyslexia for the purpose of informing them what material is worthwhile and beneficial for use.

However, more specifically to this paper, it is crucially, as already noted, the lack of LSW funding for further research in the area of dyslexia that denotes that LSWs require prompt access to information that is pertinent to their needs.

Resources inadequate for LSWs

Despite the above suggestions of 'an awful lot' (T1: p.18: 596) of dyslexia information available, analysis of this sub-theme suggests the available information for LSWs may be inadequate to meet their requirements, addressing perspectives of both the content and effectiveness of current dyslexia information resources.

Research supposes that information manuals act as the staples in LSWs training (Lowman & Mathie, 1993). However, in the interviews it becomes apparent that there are feelings that current information resources are not tailored to the needs of LSWs:

P: [I think] more on-more on how-how it, erm, why it happens and how it effects, I-I think the sort of medical side of it is very technical

(T1: p.20: 641-642)

S: I'm not sure that there's erm (..) many books that are available that, for example, tell LSWs how to best support children with specific difficulties

(T2: p.19: 615-616)

J: was often quite difficult to do erm you tend to get a of technical data back or whatever which wasn't necessary-it might tell you exactly why he was doing it but I'd want some help about what to do to rectify it so that's why I've found Sue's probably more beneficial in sort of channelling, oh this is good, or this is a good website, or whatever

(T3: p.11: 339-342)

The LSWs even feel as though some information available to them lacks in the level of depth that they require:

P: I think you would walk away knowing (3.0) having learned something and having have a (3.0) of course all of it could be in-in-in (..) in more depth, but I think as an insight I thought it was concise and clear (..) umm (3.0) an-and pointed you in the right direction to then go and be able to find out more

I: And so for a new-um you say a new-comer, but for'um someone who's been working here, well in this-in this sort of field for-for two years plus, was it everything *you* expected?

P: No, I thought it would be in more depth

(T1: p.28: 921-928)

These findings may indicate neglect in the providers of such informative guides, as well as echoing overarching opinions on the importance of the LSW role, the expected levels of knowledge and understanding they *should* and *do* possess, and the restricted funding available to the provisions of support staff in general.

Of greater significance, it seems the interviewees feel currently available information guides overlook the contributions of in-class support LSWs provide in schools:

I: was there so-stuff which you thought was unnecessary for you to look at at that particular time, is that what you meant, or?

P: Erm, o-no, it wasn't unnecessary for me to look at, cos' it was interesting but it wasn't stuff I could of used on a day-to-day basis in-class

(T1: p.23: 751-754)

S: I'm not sure that there's erm (..) many books that are available that, for example, tell LSWs how to best support children with specific difficulties

I: Okay

S: There's quite a number of books on how to be a TA or a learning support worker in general, but there's not many that actually say, that I've found certainly, that say this is how you can best support a dyslexic child in class from a LSW perspective

(T2: p.19: 618-620)

The attention drawn to this oversight suggests a need for more information that can offer LSWs ideas they can implement with the children within the realms of the classroom. This is of particular importance when LSWs spend the majority of their time supporting children's curriculum learning within the classroom setting (Hancock & Colloby, 2005).

Additionally, these thoughts further support the idea that teaching staff may be incompetent and under qualified in their abilities to manage and adequately apply LSWs in-class (Fletcher-Campbell, 1992), reducing LSWs to seek guidance from information guides.

Due to the nature of the current political climate, it seems obvious that there little plans, by way of funding, to enhance training offerings with regard to LSWs, including that of teaching staff for people management skills in the classroom. Consequently, an information guide offering advice in this area could be an ideal contribution to the way in which LSW's operate within the classroom.

Need for more practical resources

This sub-theme finds that participants feel they would like more practical resources available to them, furthering addressing the question of content and effectiveness of current dyslexia information resources.

It seems that the participants hold practical resources, which they are able to implement with the children they work with, very highly:

S: then so much practical ways for the LSW to work with that child in-class because the way erm an LSW works with a child in-class might be able to be different to how a teacher will work in-class, because an LSW could-could work with a small group, or could work one-to-one or-and can see a lot more and can often see things from a child's perspective as well.

(T2: p.21: 684-688)

P: but I think that there are so many resources out there (..) that *could* help here

(T1: p.30: 997)

I: but are there any areas by way of resources in you opinion that you think require more focus?

S: I think erm, it's having books that have-are jam packed full of practical strategies that you can use with children with specific difficulties, especially dyslexia, erm that you could just pick up and-and think right they're having trouble with reading what could I do and here's a list of lots ideas that you can-can do, something like that that's just got images that you can just go away and do something or make up a sheet or there's a sheet there that you can just photocopy, take into class and you're addressing their needs immediately, erm an I think we need a very practical manual like that would be the main thing for staff but also for LSWs as well

(T2: p.30: 973-982)

The SENCO repeatedly refers to the importance of practical resources and the call to 'have more of [them] collated together in one place' (T2: p.23: 761-762):

S: =yes, yeah I-I, yes-yea definitely, because erm I spend hours trawling through internet sites huh, looking for things or making things-resources up myself to do things, you know, practical resources to make erm, and it would be good to have more of those collated together in one place as it were but there's so many of them now on the internet that, you know, it's finding the right thing for what you need really

(T2: p.23: 759-763)

Similarly, it seems the participants feel as though current guides available to LSWs are deficient within this area:

J: Erm, information yes-a bit more information but also perhaps a bit more erm some ideas perhaps on specific strategies, resources, you know, 'cause it's a bit vague sort of- 'association techniques'-well perhaps to have a better understanding of what those-those are or whatever, I think-I'd just like a bit more- a bit more about, I'd have to go away and find a bout more about that I think really

(T3: p.17: 549-553)

This is a significant weakness in current available resources given that the collection and development of resources and ideas to implement with children is a common time-consuming role carried out by LSWs (Hancock et al, 2002). What's more, research supports the effective use of practical resources, whilst noting that relevant training are useful for helping select suitable resources and generate ideas to use with specific children (Hancock et al, 2002).

Moreover, research has also observed that these 'sources do not cover...resources specific [to the LSWs needs]' (Lowman & Mathie, 1993, pp.1). Again, these suggestions run parallel to the feeling that current guides designed for LSWs are not adequate for their needs and therefore may need addressing and considerations put in place to improve upon these currently available provisions that LSWs so often depend upon (Lowman & Mathie, 1993).

Overall, discussion of the themes 'Dyslexia as a Condition', 'Power Struggles Reflects LSW's Capabilities' and 'Dyslexia Information Availability and Adequacy', through the analysis of their comprising sub-themes, has helped to gain insight into the perceptions and understandings of dyslexia and the information resources available to LSWs to help with their understanding and knowledge. On the whole, it becomes observable that there may be a connection threading each of the themes together. The idea that the role of LSW is ill-defined in terms of their role and importance, may place LSWs in a state of limbo with regard to the way they are managed and utilised per se, which holds consequence for the ways in which they function both in a practical sense with the children, but in a less direct sense, where furthering their knowledge and understanding of dyslexia becomes marginalised. This may have caused a concertina effect with regard to current dyslexia information resources, as it come across that these are not adequate for meeting the needs of today's LSWs working with children with dyslexia.

Conclusion

The three themes selected for analysis in this paper; 'Dyslexia as a condition', 'Power Struggles Reflects LSW's Capabilities' and 'Dyslexia information Availability and Adequacy' hoped to offer light on the five research questions:

- i) To explore LSW's knowledge and understanding of dyslexia and how this has emerged

- ii) To understand how LSWs knowledge and understanding impacts on their day-to-day practice
- iii) To explore the use and content of current resources aimed to inform practitioners about dyslexia
- iv) To establish whether current information guides are effective in meeting the needs of LSWs working in schools alongside children with dyslexia

To help address the overall aim of contributing recommendations for improvements to LSW information guides.

Through the theme of 'Dyslexia as a Construct', the analysis indicates the LSSs may view dyslexia through the eyes of the medical-model. This coincides with government policies, such as The Disability Discrimination Act (1995), and behavioural-level definitions, such as the popular BPS's (1999). Yet unpredictably, it seems they lack clarity and understanding of the now popular social construct model concept of dyslexia.

In the same way, the theme 'Power Struggles Reflects LSW's Capabilities' also identifies possible lack of understanding and knowledgebase, or at least security, in LSS's answers regarding dyslexia. This theme looks at issues of LSW's funding, which alleged the idea there is a lack of financial funding for LSWs to engage in further understanding of dyslexia. Such a finding could reflect the importance, by both the government and then unavoidably the school, placed on the role of LSW as well as the level of knowledge and understanding expected of them. Such a "if you would like/need to" impression expressed towards LSWs gaining more knowledge about dyslexia is considered a significant point in this paper, particularly when the LSS idealise dyslexia within the medical-model. Maintaining a 'medical' viewpoint would be thought to suggest a thorough approach in ensuring superior knowledge and understanding of this condition.

Although solving funding issues is beyond the realms of this paper, overall the fact the LSWs are unpaid for their time spent researching dyslexia, and presumably other conditions they come into contact with, can help comprehend the stringent time restraints LSWs work under. Thus, an information manual supplied for LSWs would almost certainly need to cater for both the 'in the moment', immediate requirements, as well as offering enough depth for them to attain a greater understanding if they chose.

Another important issue observed under the theme of 'Power Struggles Reflects LSW's Capabilities', were the struggles between LSWs and teaching-staff. This sub-theme emphasised that LSWs felt as though they are not being made the most of, parallel with previous research findings (Collins & Simco, 2006). Such hostility faced between LSWs and teaching-staff, as previously observed in research (Moyle & Suschitzky, 1997), perhaps result from the absence of a universally agreed upon policy outlining the nature of the LSW role, including expectations of both LSW and teaching-staff. This absence of guidelines has also been previously recognised in earlier research (Lee, 2003). These possible tensions may be alleviated through the development of a set of guidelines educating LSWs in the expectations of how they should operate within the classroom; such guidelines could be incorporated within an information guide. Such guidelines could also help ease potential managerial

pressure faced by teaching-staff per se, who are undersupplied with people-management training (Fletcher-Campbell, 1992).

In addition, the theme 'Dyslexia information Availability and Adequacy', demonstrates LSS uphold there is 'an awful lot' (T1: p.18: 596) of dyslexia information available to them, but discordantly feel these current materials are inadequate to meet their specific requirements. More specifically, the LSS expressed that current information overlooks the role in-class they provide in schools, illuminating their desire for an information guide pulling together lots of practical resources to implement with children they work with. These findings support existing research, which assert current 'sources do not cover...resources specific [to the LSWs needs]' (Lowman & Mathie, 1993, pp.1). Such an oversight may be resultant of the rapid shift from ancillary role to a more direct one in the learning process that LSWs now undertake (Clayton, 1993). Current information guides may have not evolved as quickly as the modernising roles and responsibilities of LSWs.

In all, the shortfalls in the information guides designed for LSWs and the possible lack of understanding and knowledgebase, or at least security, in LSS's answers regarding dyslexia are surmised through the analysis; however, it seems that a combination of factors may contribute. Perhaps, these constructions stem from wider political issues operating in a cyclical fashion. For instance, the role and responsibilities of LSWs are ill-defined (Hancock & Colloby, 2005), which possibly influences schools' judgements around LSW funding. This lack of funding may affect LSW's levels of self-efficacy and overall job-satisfaction, thus reducing their interests to further their knowledge of dyslexia. Additionally, perhaps the ambiguities around the position of LSW create a further knock-on effect, shaping the way teaching-staff view these individuals. The views held by teaching-staff could affect the way they manage the LSWs within the classroom, and therefore the level of responsibility they credit them with. Overall, again leading to upset levels of self-efficacy and overall job-satisfaction, again reducing LSW's interests to further their knowledge of dyslexia, and so forth.

Further to this, explanations in the analysis hint that current information guides designed for LSWs need re-examination and considerations put in place to improve upon them. This paper's suggestions that LSW information guides are negligent in catering for today's LSW, may echo the discussed overarching opinions on the importance of the LSW role, the expected levels of knowledge and understanding they *should* and *do* possess, and the restricted funding available to the provisions of LSWs in general. However, with previous research indicating that information guides act as the staples in LSWs training (Lowman & Mathie, 1993), it must be considered vital to ensure they are sufficient.

Overall, the analysis findings help address the central aim of this research of contributing recommendations for possibly improving LSW information guides. In particular, emphasising some important issues to take into account with regard to a manual specifically for dyslexia. For example, offering LSWs a broader scope of approaches of dyslexia (e.g., social constructionist model) may be of interest to LSWs. Providing LSWs with a greater knowledge in this area would allow them to make their own judgements regarding the disabilities observed of dyslexic children. Moreover, greater awareness of current arguments surrounding dyslexia may go

some way to increasing LSW's level of responsibility for the academic progress of the children they work with, which could give them greater understanding of the goals of which they are striving to meet (Ebersold, 2003).

However, with the exception of LSS's request for more information and practical resources to use with children in-class, future research is required to shine light on specific content that LSWs feel is valuable for inclusion in an information guide. Furthermore, it is important to take into account that these identified recommendations for improving LSW information guides are based upon a small-scale study following how a particular group of LSS constructed their views of dyslexia and currently available resources on a particular occasion, in a particular setting, in response to a specific set of questions. It should be taken in to consideration that the interpretations presented here are the interpretations of the researchers, whom adopted a critical realist position, therefore only represent one possible version as other researchers may have chosen to pursue different themes, selected different excerpts as, and reached alternative conclusions. This paper itself could have followed a different thread, weaving a different interpretation of the data set.

The inexperience of the interviewer in this paper was a limitation, in that the interviews could have been utilised to probe deeper into areas of interest. This limitation is highlighted when listening back through the audio-tapes, there were points where asking for further clarification may have revealed more material of interest. That said, the interviews did address the crucial information they set out to, hence this limitation does not jeopardise the research quality.

Speculation on the nature of today's political climate implies increases in LSS funding is improbable, thus little improvements to expand opportunities for LSW's to further their knowledge is probable. Therefore, through the design of an information manual meeting the requirements LSS alluded to in this paper, combined with further research within this area, ought to transform LSW's self-efficacy and job-satisfaction alike, possibly inspiring them to take time to engage in further understanding of dyslexia (ScER, 2005). This could anticipate a positive influence on the ways LSWs help such children in today's classroom.

Reflective analysis

Within my reflexivity I hope to make transparent my 'position as the researcher' (Banister et al, 1994, pp.13), making explicit the research process, as well as my role in producing the research findings, which is inevitable in the process of qualitative research (Langdridge, 2004). I have outlined my reflexivity in chronological order from beginning to end.

My motivations for this research paper mirrors the interest I had in working as a LSW for two years while studying Psychology. Whilst working as an LSW, I felt this was a job-role with restricted time in which to engage in additional reading, a difficulty often furthered by the obstacle of finding *single*, "easy" to locate and read information manuals. Issues surrounding the time to read, or talk with other staff, about the children LSWs worked with typically arose in school when someone would find a child problematic to work with or if they felt as if the support they were offering was

not aiding the child in the way they had hoped. The school's SENCO is distinguished for the fantastic support she offers, but there were sometimes feelings amongst LSWs that they did not want to have to rely upon someone else to answer their questions, particularly their manager. This led me to think there may be a call for an improved LSW manual offering a "quick, easy" section to read and then possibly a further section that gave more detailed information to access when more time was available [see appendix six].

Despite my personal beliefs regarding the reality of dyslexia [see appendix two], I have tried to present a broad and thorough literature review. I believe I held a fairly indistinct outlook toward the approaches to dyslexia before engaging in this piece of research. I was somewhat aware of the competing medical model-social model arguments but felt uneducated enough to place myself in either basket. Nevertheless, throughout this paper my assumptions and preconceptions of dyslexia have shaped and seemingly reshaped as I progressed [see appendix two], which contributed to the shifting aims of this research paper and inevitably my construction and focus of the themes within the data set. Furthermore, these shifts toward dyslexia throughout this project meant locating myself within one specific epistemological approach was not without difficulty. Following a *lot* of consideration [see appendix six] I finally located myself within critical realism, however this judgment was formed fairly late within the project.

The interviewees for this investigation were colleagues of mine, which I hoped would have reduced both my nerves and the effects power imbalances. In spite of this, I did feel as though the shift from the position of colleague to interviewer/researcher imposed a swing in our relationship, which may have had the potential to induce participant reactivity and respondent bias - the withholding information or intentional obstruction of answers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although I felt as though participants were at ease during the interviews, I did sense they were vague with me at points, which I think may have been because they considered me acting as more of an "expert" in the field of dyslexia and I had come to question their expertise. This observed vagueness is important, particularly when considering the possible void of security in their knowledgebase of dyslexia, which I have alluded to within the analysis section. Such a "void of security" may have in fact been a reaction to the interviewer-interviewee situation we were engaged in.

Furthermore, I found switching myself from work colleague to interviewer/researcher was difficult. I was aware that my physical behaviour affects the interviewee (Robson, 2002), so combined with my inexperience as an interviewer I familiarised myself with some guidelines to inform my physical approach (Robson, 2002). These suggested I engaged in active listening; wording questions in a straight-forward, clear way; try not to rush in too quickly following a response; and ask one question at a time (Robson, 2002). Following these guidelines, I felt confident in my delivery of the interview agenda and the role I played as interviewer, although I could have used probes more aptly. That said, despite my efforts to conceal my nervousness, I am sure it still apparent plus because participants knew my typical mannerisms prior to the research my more structured approach may have been observable to them, possibly emphasising the change in our relationship from usual.

Conducting the interviews during the school's summer vacation, meant participants had more time to engage in additional reading around the topic of dyslexia, which may have meant they may have a better understanding/knowledgebase of dyslexia than they typically would have had before the interviews. Conversely, the timing may have meant they were in "holiday mode" and more disengaged from the issues compared to usual.

Overall, I felt as though topics of the power struggles LSWs face with teaching-staff would have been revealed more prominently within the interviews, my experience as a LSW meant I knew this was usually a popular topic of interest amongst LSWs. Although this topic did not initially appear key to the aim of the research paper, as the analysis unreeled it seems the staff relationships may hold a greater bearing over the focal topic than anticipated. It seems the realms of the interview situation hindered a greater divulgence of this topic, which I had not expected. Nonetheless, Pauline and Sue's interviews offered as sufficient depth of information as I had hoped to answer the research questions, my final interview however, with Judith, was not as successful in producing personal accounts, thoughts and feelings. I am unsure why this occurred, but this resulted in a lot of prompting from me for Judith to further divulge in her answers.

During the analysis process, themes did not passively 'emerge' or become 'discovered' - I played an active role in identifying, selecting those of interest, and reporting (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). My inexperience of thematic analysis meant defining overarching themes was fraught with complexity. I often found it difficult to decide which of the interpretive codes fitted under which overarching theme. This conflict forced me to printout the interpretive codes and physically shift them between groups of possible overarching themes [see appendix fifteen]. At times I rather loosely drew connections between interpretive codes and overarching themes, whereas in other instances I found myself reshaping new sub-themes under an overarching theme.

Although I found the coding phase particularly troublesome, time-consuming and overall exasperating, the analysis and discussion section seemed a lot more comfortable with me. I thoroughly enjoyed this process. More surprisingly is that the theme regarding power struggles between the teaching-staff and LSWs became of significant interest to me. Sadly, this topic only played predominance in one of the interviews; I would have liked to have focussed and pursued this angle of the paper further.

This paper has given me real insight into qualitative research; I loved the almost creative nature of weaving all the information together, incorporating information from wider sources and interlacing that with your own interpretations and understanding. There is no one moulds set out for your paper, the addition of a new piece of material or mention of a particular theory has the capacity to reform your path, which I think may be why I often had to realign my work after meandering away from my research aims, sometimes completely forgetting what they were.

The materials gathered in this investigation hold a lot more valuable information that could reveal a multitude of interpretive accounts. That said, this interpretive nature maps onto my thoughts that although I have attempted to offer LSWs opportunity to

voice their opinions about information guides on dyslexia – in fact, I have acted as an “interpretive translator”; I have taken the LSS’ words and understood them and added contemplations and possibility. Therefore, I may not have given LSWs their own voice per se. Nonetheless, I think this paper has helped to address some important issues regarding LSWs and the information guides available to them.

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