

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

0127

D10 | Cardiff

Chaired by Clare Jones

Wed 11 Dec 2019

15:00 - 15:30

Mapping the Disparate Landscapes of University Students' Experiences with Dyslexia

Lorraine A. Loveland-Armour¹

¹*Newman University Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom*

Research Domain: Student experiences (SE)

Abstract: Dyslexia is an often misunderstood and misidentified phenomenon. For purposes of this paper, dyslexia is understood as a neurobiological difference acknowledging atypical language processing abilities combined with a myriad of cognitive strengths (Reid, 2016). This phenomenological study explores the extent to which heuristic dialogical relationships inform how dyslexic university students understand and communicate their dyslexia following late identification. It employs four distinct methods: concept mapping (Novak, 1990), photo-elicitation (Tinkler, 2013), photovoice (Latz, 2017), and photoautobiography (Loveland-Armour, 2019) to provide an in depth exploration of student experience. Initial findings suggest that participants: seek external sources for affirmation of abilities; consciously develop and apply strategies; and value the role that space plays in university studies. Monthly critical dialogues provided opportunities to deepen understanding; create a space for non-conformist research; and reveal the damage of previous educational malpractice. Transformational concepts of self emerged through reflexive interactions with photographs when reviewing how stories developed and changed in their photoautobiographies over the academic year.

Paper: This qualitative phenomenological research explored the diverse lifeworlds of university students who were identified with dyslexia after age sixteen and were purposefully selected. This study considered implications of late identification in terms of how this contributed to identity through reflexive dialogical engagement. Creative visual methods offered alternative approaches to knowledge co-construction by embracing risk and resisting conformity; thus, contributing to an innovative culture of research practice. Specifically, the objectives set out to develop new ways of knowing, understanding and communicating about experiences of dyslexia at university.

This research presented an opportunity to transform individual participants' relationships with their dyslexia and offered an outlet to contribute to knowledge in a tangible way. As such, I am exploring the possibility of developing a reflexive critical visual branch of phenomenology, which draws upon established research foundations of visual anthropology (Collier and Collier, 1990), visual methods

(Banks and Zeitlyn, 2015) and critical edu-political theory (e.g. Freire; Giroux) as they intersect with phenomenology. Consequently, by viewing university student experiences of dyslexia through a co-constructed lens, participants and I developed new ways of knowing, experiencing and communicating about dyslexia at university. Multiple methods ultimately revealed transformative epiphanies and, to varying levels, horizontalisation where participants and I found commonalities through shared reflexive activities contributing to a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, [1975]2013).

Concept mapping is a graphic organiser that presents a visual means of representing relationships and corresponding connections (Meier, 2007). This method provided both a temporal footprint and a visual representation of key themes reflected through heuristic analysis. Photo-elicitation is a means of inviting participants to use photography to capture or create an image that created a visual aid to support subsequent conversations. By visually capturing lived experiences through personally selected photographs, photo-elicitation (Bates, et al., 2017) relied on autonomous individuals to decide which photographs to share. Photovoice invited participants to speak about the stories/meanings of their photographs as they reflected their lived experiences, flexibly deciding how they wanted to represent their stories (Latz, 2017).

The fluid relational dialogue that was nurtured through photovoice activities (following photo-elicitation) opened gateways to paths, often as yet undiscovered (Tinkler, 2013). Participants recognised and reflected on their personal insights into the role dyslexia played in forming foundational approaches to how they communicate, learn and transform. Photographs supported reflexive engagement with lived experiences; consequently, participants categorised and spoke about their dyslexia openly. Following photovoice conversations, participants determined which photos they wished to include in a repurposed library book to create a photoautobiography. Photoautobiography is a creative method that I have constructed to provide a space for participants to write a series of chapters over the period of an academic year using photographs to tell their life story individually. Furthermore, creating photoautobiographies contributed to cultural capital, resisting social reproduction that often frames the structure of education (Bourdieu, 1996).

We collaboratively discussed thoughts and feelings heuristically as part of the research activities (Moustakas, 1990). We engaged in multiple temporal re-visitations of the photos, which we independently reflected upon in between monthly research meetings. Critical reflection and perspective transformation contributed to the reflexive evaluation of the photos, discussion and chapters constructed (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018). To facilitate deep reflection and reflexivity, we revisited the research activities both independently and collaboratively by reviewing transcripts and video recordings of the sessions alongside our individual notes. These multiple encounters contributed to the process of agreeing research findings.

Initial findings suggest that participants have found the research therapeutic, although they did distinguish research activities as not therapy. Additionally, the photos reflect echoes both in imagery and in message. For example, participants in this study frequently contributed photographs of affirmations or inspiring quotations (see Figure 1).

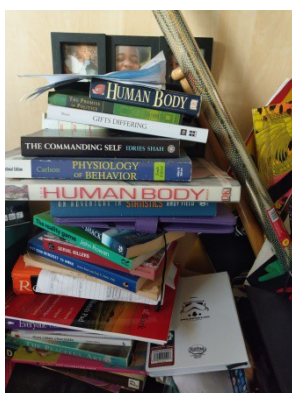


Figure 1

The experience of being a university student with dyslexia has also revealed challenges with organisation, a need to establish a study space (see Figure 2) and the challenges of retaining information from multiple texts (see Figure 3).



Figure 2



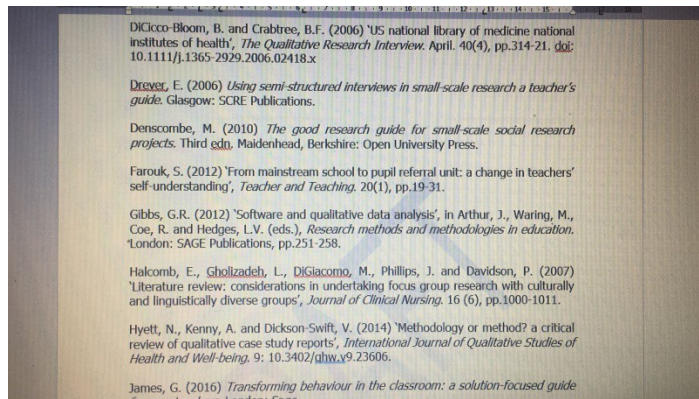


Figure 3

Photographs and photovoice suggested that participants' relationships with space restricted, contributed to or directed approaches to learning (e.g. see Figure 2). This recognition of the role that space plays in studying was significant in that participants made connections between their difficulties with organisation and prioritisation as part of their dyslexia providing habitus in which to consider changes to space. Participants recognised that changes to space would also create spaces for visual imaging. This is particularly interesting as research recognises that individuals with dyslexia do effectively internalise information in images prior to associating information with words (Eide and Eide, 2012).

Critically, participants consistently presented images that suggested they understood dyslexia as difference and as an element of identity (Heidegger, [1957]2002; Burden, 2005). They indicated that there were multiple factors contributing to how they understood dyslexia and that the photographs offered them progressive means of considering how their past perceptions developed and changed throughout this academic year. We collaboratively discussed and re-evaluated the messages participants raised regarding self-perception, realisation of how dyslexia contributed to self-understanding, and subsequently self-efficacy developed.

Other findings specifically suggest that dyslexia is a different way of learning and that these differences require additional time, rely on creative problem solving and applied strategies (See Figure 4).

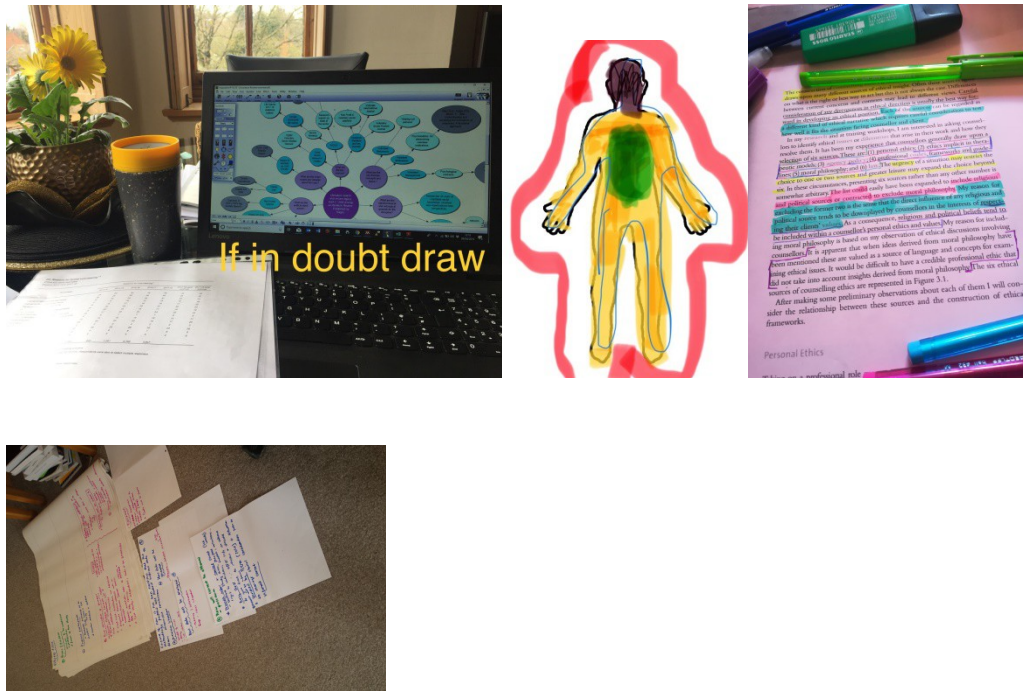


Figure 4

The learning strategies that participants presented in their photographs (e.g. Figure 4) often relied on visually distinctive components that were developed and redeveloped. Consistently, participants indicated that they were surprised to observe that they created a wide range of strategies to manage academic work differently. However, they also reflexively recognised that each new academic task led to an alternative approach inevitably requiring an innovative interpretation to inform the development of an applicable learning strategy. This lack of consistent application and replication of learning strategies created barriers to self-efficacy. Nonetheless through this research, several participants began to recognise and reflect upon how their relationships with their studies changed as well as how self-understanding of dyslexia contributed to a growth in confidence.

There are a number of implications for the emerging findings from this research. Many of these have been directly developed with participants through reflexive dialogue. In particular, the need for university lecturers to initiate conversations about how learning and communication happens from both perspectives would be a helpful means of fostering inclusive practice and engaged learning.