Clinical Depression

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Manifestations of Resilience: an Autobiographical Analysis of a Dyslexic

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Abstract

This article is an autobiographical study that relates my experiences, particularly my educational experiences, of living with dyslexia with the aim of elucidating its impact on the development of my selfhood. Examination of problems associated with dyslexia and evaluation on how my own experiences correlate to, or are disparate from, current knowledge about this specific learning difficulty (SpLD). The correlation between extreme stress, acting in a way to mask difficulties and depression is made as a negative impact upon selfhood.

This work makes an original contribution to knowledge as it is the study of the unique experiences of an individual and how dyslexia impacts upon his life. A single case can have considerable general illuminative utility. As such, the article is a link with others experiencing dyslexia, and therefore may help to inform them about ways to manage and cope with their SpLD in order to succeed in life. This autobiography may also be useful for those dealing with dyslexic individuals, such as parents and teachers, as they reflect on how they can support those in their care.

Keywords: Dyslexia; Selfhood; Knowledge; Influence

Introduction

This article is an autobiographical study of my educational journey as an individual living with dyslexia. It illuminates how dyslexia impacts upon everyday activities and shapes selfhood, and offers unique insights into my life lived as a 'dyslexic'. It notes the stressors of choosing to conceal a 'dyslexic identity', working in a 'non-dyslexic' environment as if these difficulties had no impact upon them. The culmination of stress, acting, decreased self-esteem and stigma resulted in depression, which severely affected health and wellbeing making me re-evaluate work and manifest resilience in a revised capacity.

Aim of the Research

My reasons for undertaking this study are both professional and personal. In a professional capacity, as a primary school teacher, I am acutely aware of the difficulties dyslexia can have on a pupil's cognitive and emotional development. Personally, I have experienced educational disadvantage and the stress this causes as a result of having dyslexia. Therefore, my aims in reflecting on my life are twofold: to help towards a greater understanding of the selfhood and identity of a 'dyslexic' and, as I articulate particular life experiences, I hope others will find resonance with and support those who have dyslexia or deal with 'dyslexic' students.

Defining Resilience

'Resilience is understood as having the capability to resist or 'bounce back' following adversity' [1]. Fraser [2] argues that there are three dimensions to resilience: overcoming problems against the odds, sustaining competence under pressure and recovery from trauma. Within this description resilience is, therefore, implied as managing to succeed in the face of adversity, and being resilient means that an individual will continue to do well, whether socially, academically or physically, despite experiencing difficult or traumatic circumstances. The resilient person demonstrates an ability to overcome specific problems within their life, to recover from these, and to 'move on'. This definition includes, for example, how a person with dyslexia, who encounters problems as a result of having this learning difficulty, could benefit from showing resilience. Resilience may be manifested through seeking to recover from situations in which they have 'failed', or not done themselves justice, such as in an academic examination. Ryden [3] argues that dyslexic individuals experience stress and fatigue in such situations and this can affect the quality of what is written as well as the quantity of what has been produced. Therefore, resilience may be needed to persist as a dyslexic learner may require ten times longer than a non-dyslexic individual to complete a task [4]. The toolbox of a learner with dyslexia needs to consist of both compensation strategies and resilience.

Resilience is necessary to transcend adversity, for example traumatic events, such as the death of a close friend or family member. Many of these situations are temporary and being resilient enables an individual to deal with them successfully. However, Luthar [5] cautions that resilience is complex and a person exhibiting an outward display of resilience may, in fact, be internalising their feelings and this can lead to a long-term inability to cope and depression. More positively, argues that resilience provides opportunities for reflection and consideration of how something may look from another perspective, thus enabling a person to learn more about them self [6]. A resilient individual is more likely to develop a positive view of their self and this increases their self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy [7]. The positive sense of self as a result of a resilient attitude enables an individual to accept the occurrence of difficult events, such as those that occur as a result of having dyslexia. Resilience is therefore related to notions of fortitude and endurance, which are manifestations of psychological character building and development.

Development of the Self

The self is

A conceptual system made up of one's thoughts and attitudes about oneself. It encompasses one's thoughts on their physical being, social roles and relationships, and spiritual or internal characteristics [8].

From a symbolic interactionist perspective the study of the self and its development involves looking at a range of factors such as the impact of personal values, the relationship the person has with other people and the broader social picture and includes asking questions about who a person is and their role within society. The development of an individual's self-concept is, therefore, determined by the interactions they have with others in a social environment and their interpretation of these encounters in order to find meaning in their experiences. However, the interpretation or 'twist' the person gives to the reaction they receive from others is subjective. Cooley's [9] 'Looking glass self' indicates that this perception is based upon how the individual perceives they are treated by those within their social circles. These perceptions derive from self-ideas of the imagination of our appearance to another person, especially significant others. As Soler et al. [10] state, 'our self-evaluations are determined by our beliefs about how others see us'. Goffman [11] discusses how individuals can feel stigmatised by a disability because they perceive that others may look upon them unfavourably. As a result, the person often seeks to hide their disability from other people [12]. Furthermore, the response they perceive they prompt in other people may disadvantage their relationship and lead them to seek friendships with specific individuals or a limited number of people that they feel comfortable with, or even to develop a solitary self. From a positive perspective, Jopling [13] argues that the 'solitary self' allows opportunities for self-reflection. In private reflection a person can ruminate and consider their specific experiences and, as they seek to attach meaning to them, they are enabled to develop their sense of self.

However, individuals with dyslexia may wish to preserve their sense of self by covering up their problems in order to be regarded as coping with the demands of life. Goffman [14] considers that individuals present particular aspects of the self in different situations, which he regards as front and back stage presentations that involve a person presenting a different public image to the one they hold internally. Individuals with dyslexia may present a front stage performance of a person who is coping, for example being academically able, whilst concealing or suppressing feelings of insecurity and inability to cope.

The management of feelings to create a publicly acceptable persona is described as 'emotional management'. Emotional management is the regulation of the emotions through the alteration or modulation of behaviour that an individual undertakes in response to the demands of either public or personal situations in order to maintain a publically acceptable persona. Hochschild believed that people altered their emotions, body language and verbal cues as a fundamental part of human behaviour when in situations that require conformity to social norms. Hochschild also differentiated between the management of emotions within the public and private spheres of a person's life discussing the former as 'emotional labour' and the latter as 'emotional work'. Emotional work is the regulation of emotional responses the self makes towards situations in their private life. Hochschild writes:

By "emotion work" I refer to the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling. To "work on" an emotion or feeling is, for our purposes, the same as "to manage" an emotion or to do "deep acting." Note that "emotion work" refers to the effort-the act of trying-and not to the outcome, which may or may not be successful.

Managing feelings through concealment of actual feelings is a pertinent feature of emotional work and includes acting in a way which may be seen as culturally or stereotypically acceptable. This will cause temporary distress for the individual, for example feeling ashamed at not being happy at a wedding, but if this alteration of external appearance is a constant feature of their life their selfhood will be affected.

Emotional labour refers specifically to the management of emotions of a professional within paid employment, especially in occupations such as, nursing or teaching where there is an expectation of a particular mode of behaviour towards the people they deal with in the course of their daily work. The impression management required to maintain acceptable working relationships is a key feature of emotional labour. In exhibiting a particular outward appearance individuals may hide specific details of their life which do not fit the societal expectation of how they should conduct themselves in their professional role. As a result, the individual puts on an 'act', which is different to how they really feel. As Burns [15] states emotional labour is 'more than simply producing some ideal performance or copying an expert performer', it is the toil of a person within their work who struggles to conceal their identity and / or true feelings behind a false identity. Despite the differences between emotional work and emotional labour both forms of emotional management may create dissonance within an individual's selfhood when the individual aims to normalise their overt responses to a situation, for example when the front stage performance does not correspond to their inner self [14].

In summary, the self can be strengthened or diminished by an individual's perception of the reactions of others. It is how an individual responds to reactions and the challenges thus encountered that determine the development of a resilient individual. Developing resilience also requires opportunities for solitary times when an individual can reflect on their experiences in tranquillity. Reflecting in this manner allows the individual to come to know themselves more profoundly, and as a result their selfhood is transformed enabling the person to flourish.

The Use of Biography

Biography is an interpretative method involving collecting a person's narrative and sometimes personal documents [16]. This type of research includes studying accounts of people's lives with a view to seeing how, for example, childhood and other experiences have shaped the person they have become and the person they seek to be. Biography is becoming more used, recognised and acknowledged within educational research [17]. The evolution of this approach has rapidly progressed due to the inspiration that reading about other people's lives can bring. The research method employed in this study is an autobiographical narrative and this type of research is, by virtue of its nature, small-scale, local and in-depth. This approach therefore produces substantive, thick description about a person's life. Lieblich et al. [18] state: 'The use of narrative methodology results in unique and rich data that cannot be obtained from experiments, questionnaires or observations'. More specific to my research, Macdonald [19] suggests that the biographies of those with dyslexia can be a rich source of data about their life, and their specific difficulties and successes that also illuminate issues that are of general interest. Within my biography I address how having dyslexia has caused me specific problems, such as

difficulties at school with written work and accessing the curriculum fully, and how this has led me to manifest resilience when I have found tasks difficult.

Analysis and Discussion of my Autobiography

This section selects particular themes that illustrate dimensions of my selfhood as a person living with dyslexia. The rationale for selecting the three selves is that each demonstrates an aspect of part of my life affected by experiences in specific situations and contexts and interactions with others. Within this analysis I reflect how self-identity has been formed and developed through circumstances and interactions with significant others.

Academic self

Near the end of my junior school education my parents decided to have my eyes tested. I had explained to them about the difficulties I had in concentrating when reading and tracking the words; when focusing upon a text I would use my finger in a vain attempt to focus on each word on the page and to follow the text as closely as I could. This was a problem that I experienced every time I attempted to read a book. My visit to the opticians led to me being diagnosed with a 'lazy eye' (amblyopia), in which the vision in one eye is underdeveloped and requires more extensive use of the eye that is more developed. As a result of this diagnosis, I was required to wear a black patch on one eye and a prescription lens on the other eye, with a view to strengthening the weaker eye. I disliked the term 'lazy' as it was not something I felt applied to me. On the contrary, despite monumental efforts on my part I was still facing difficulties in learning to read. During this time I was found to have visual tracking difficulties in which my eyes would not work together to converge equally to focus on the words and letters of each line. My eyes would not track across a page from left to right without missing words and lines [20]. As a result I was instructed by the optician to complete a number of eye exercises, which involved looking down a set of coloured beads on a string and seeking to focus my eyes upon each bead. This was to help the focus of the pupil and to strengthen the muscles in my eyes, with a view to helping me to track and focus upon words.

Having to stare at a set of beads was something I could do in the privacy of my own room, but having to wear a black patch to manage muscle strength within my eye was something altogether more public and caused mixed but very overt reactions from my classmates. To my peers I appeared as Captain Hook and I can recall the many remarks about being a pirate on a voyage. For some children, this provided an opportunity to taunt, ridicule and scoff at the patch on my eye. This made me feel both foolish and vulnerable. However, for others in the class the image of Hook created almost a celebrity status for me. These reactions had a positive impact on my sense of self because I was able to bathe in the reflected glory of the image of Captain Hook as a famous pirate that I held in my mind. At that age I thought Hook was a champion, a mighty conqueror, like other fictional characters such as Long John Silver who was feared by others and therefore not the subject of ridicule. This meant that I was able to wear the glasses with a sense of pride and this made it possible for me to continue to use them. The adoption of this outlook helped me to be more optimistic and increased my resilience to overcome the taunts and jibes of some of the others. Reivich et al. [21] argue:

Resilient people are optimistic. They believe that things can change for the better. They have hope for the future and believe that they control the direction of their lives.... Optimism, of course implies that we believe we have the ability to handle the adversities that will inevitably arise in the future. And, of course, this reflects our sense of self-efficacy, our faith in our ability to solve our own problems and master our world, which is another important ability in resilience.

Being resilient meant that I thought of the eye patch as something positive: I imagined that I was really a pirate and my peers ought not to mess with me or they might face the order to 'walk the plank'. As a result what might have been used as something detrimental to my self-esteem became something positive to enhance it and thus my self-confidence grew. As a result I continued to wear the glasses and this helped in my endeavours to improve my reading which, in turn, improved my sense of my academic self.

As well as learned optimism, I recognise that it is possible to feel ridiculed for being an individual with special needs. This experience has enabled me to be more mindful of how I perceive and react to others with all kinds of differing needs and has given me an enhanced sense of empathy towards those with special needs in my teaching role. During my work as a teacher in 2011, whilst sitting in the staffroom I felt uncomfortable as members of teaching and support staff criticised a child for his lack of aptitude towards a task, suggesting he was 'slow' and incapable of doing anything he was asked. This made me feel uneasy as I listened, as it made me think about how some staff still views those with a SpLD as 'thick'. This superficiality of knowledge of SEN concerned me, because judgements were being formed due to lack of understanding. Sagmiller [22] writes that people's lack of awareness can mean that they can misjudge you for being dyslexic and treat you in a way which is detrimental to self-esteem. Throughout my time as a student and a teacher with dyslexia, I have found that some teachers and lecturers can be intolerant of individuals who are different. Unguarded and sometimes unsolicited conversations about pupils or other staffs in their absence makes me feel uncomfortable and, I believe, highlights the misunderstanding of dyslexia and SEN that some practitioners still have.

Personal Self

In October 2007, encouraged by family members, I embarked upon the Master of Arts (M.A.) in Education at the University of Reading. The influence of significant others' approbation, especially those closely related to me, was crucial in my decision to fulfil my desire for postgraduate study. Gabb [23] suggests that there is a strong desire for individuals to seek parental approval for the decisions they make. On the one hand I wanted the autonomy to decide to extend my professional development by undertaking further academic study, whilst on the other I sought parental support for my actions. My selfhood was shaped by its interactions and dealings with other people, especially significant others. These interactions with my family were certainly important in persuading me to decide to return to university, because I wanted to maintain the status quo by retaining cordial relations with them.

After finding some difficulty in writing my assignments I reluctantly decided, with parental support and persuasion, that I should take a dyslexia assessment. This decision was based upon interactional and practical decision making: interactional because I sought to make the decision based upon deliberation with my family, seeking their approval; and practical in the sense of agreeing with the family and therefore arranging the appointment and participating. After two months of anxiously waiting, the appointment came through to see the

dyslexia assessor. This would become an epiphany moment that trumped other experiences and, as Denzin [16] describes, it was the 'main event'. This event would alter my sense of self as I realised over time the impact of the outcome of the assessment. At the time of my appointment my emotions were mixed. I wanted to be formally assessed but I felt that a positive diagnosis might impact negatively on my selfhood. I felt that if I was found to have dyslexia, it might leave me vulnerable to people's unguarded comments and I would be stigmatised as an individual with dyslexia [11,12]. My mind went back to the 'residues of emotional experiences of childhood' Thomas [24], for example being laughed at by my peers for the difficulties I had when reading a text aloud or trying to produce a piece of writing at the standard for age-appropriate expectations. During my school years I had been seen as incapable of achieving and was made to feel unsuccessful (see the 'academic self' below).

The negative impact of my perceptions of significant others' evaluations of me are relevant to the development of my personal self. Although my peers were not being malicious, they made me feel inadequate when openly discussing how well they had done and with so little effort. This made me feel disappointed and unhappy with myself and the mark I had obtained, especially when I considered the amount of time it had taken me to complete the work. Cumpsten [25] writes about the anguish caused by peer comparisons, which resonates within the development of my emotional self, and thus the personal self. Finally, as a consequence of my negative feelings, when I compared myself to my peers and of working to excess with little reward I began to feel the impact of the emotional labour of trying to maintain a confident public persona. I felt it was necessary to act as if I was unconcerned that I had merely obtained a pass grade again, when others had a merit or distinction. In so doing I was performing a role, a staged performance that I did not believe in. Consequently, this had a negative impact on the development of my personal self.

Professional self

During my school years I had my mind set on one of two options for higher education, to train to be a nurse or a teacher. Knight [26] describes these types of careers as caring professions and suggests that people choose these jobs to make a difference to others. I desired to help others and enter a profession which supported people, either seeking to make them well or to educate them. Inherent within a caring profession are emotional challenges that can affect the self. Henderson explains that the emotional labour attached to nursing is significant. Similarly, Hargreaves [27] has noted that teaching is an emotional practice and that 'emotional hazards' are an inevitable part of the profession. Isenbarger et al. [28] argue that teaching can be emotionally draining and the investment required in sustaining good student-teacher relationships can create significant levels of 'emotional labour'. This was an aspect of my chosen profession that I was aware of and I felt I would be able to manage. The decision to train as a teacher was based upon my enjoyable experiences of working as a volunteer with the children at the local primary school I had attended, and I considered that the Bachelor of Arts in Primary Education with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) would be my most suitable training route.

After three years of teacher training, in September 2005 I entered the classroom as a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT). My first job as the person with sole responsibility for teaching a class of children was a significant transition from being a student teacher, where responsibility lay with the qualified teacher, and I felt my lack of experience keenly.

During my first year of teaching I became acutely aware that I had problems with spelling, handwriting and especially dyscalculia (maths difficulties). My role involved writing words and numbers on the board in front of the class or marking exercise books was an added complication in my professional development. The children, their parents, and the teachers who came to observe me were all potential sources of criticism if I misspelt a word or worded a sentence awkwardly. Being exposed in this way was a constant worry and I feared that signs of my (as yet undiagnosed) dyslexia would be manifest not only in class but in the quality of my marking of the children's work. Russell et al. [29] note that underlying difficulties for those with dyslexia can include incorrect spelling, writing words backwards, writing in an inconsistent size and having to take a significant amount of time to plan or write a sentence. These were all challenges I faced and had to deal with.

An additional stress was caused by having to act spontaneously when I had to write on the board with a class of children looking at what I was writing. This created pressure and anxiety to get it right, especially when being observed by senior management. This meant I was always on my guard about how to spell particular words and structure my sentences, especially in literacy lessons. To avoid potential embarrassment I referred to a dictionary that I kept beneath my desk, to check a spelling, in case, like Ellis [30], I spelt something irregularly. However, this was not always practical as the head teacher often showed parents around, teaching assistants walked in and out and sometimes other staff came in to my room. Additionally, in the normal flow of a lesson there was rarely time to check whether I had spelt something correctly. Often I would have to go with my initial thoughts, which at times could be wrong. I also felt there was a stigma attached to having to look up spellings. However, when time allowed I would check a spelling surreptitiously, feeling guilty like a thief in case I was caught out. Consequently, I was tense and this meant that I was continuously listening for the door to creak open and for someone to come into the classroom. I was hyper-vigilant, wondering what they wanted and what they were looking for. This continual nervousness meant that I felt uneasy and anxious about what someone might discover and make me feel I was some type of liability or fraud. Bradshaw [31] suggests that feelings of shame can be a pertinent response to the feeling of being out of one's depth in a situation.

My teaching career as an undiagnosed dyslexic began in this way; I felt shame at my perception of being a fraudulent teacher, unable to spell, read, write, plan or teach effectively. I felt as though I was living on borrowed time, surmising that soon the classroom door would swing open and I would be found out to be the charlatan I actually felt I was. My feelings are succinctly summarised by Haigh as he writes: 'All in all, it is exhausting, depressing and makes me feel like a giant fraud'.

As well as feeling like a criminal, committing daily acts of fraud, I had now recognised that I had to spend a considerable additional amount of time planning and structuring my lessons. This added significantly to my workload but I found this to be necessary in order for lessons to run smoothly-because of the organisational problems many dyslexic individuals have. Moody [32] notes that having dyslexia can also impact upon productivity at work: 'Dyslexia affects efficiency in many workplace tasks'. I learnt that if I did not spend time planning meticulously, the lesson would not go well. And these more unsuccessful lessons always seemed to be the ones that would attract the attention of the head teacher as he undertook a 'walk through' of the school. The additional time I needed to spend on scrupulously planning lessons meant that I may have been less effective in

developing myself professionally, as I had little time to reflect on my lessons in order to improve my teaching. The repercussions of this were that I did not have much leisure time and was continually exhausted from overworking, meaning that I went home early and avoided socialising. Sometimes my colleagues would ask me to join them for a drink or to go out for a meal at the end of the day. I would often decline due to being over-tired and also afraid that they might ask me educational, pedagogical or praxis-based questions that would highlight my academic and professional shortcomings. Drew and Heritage argue that organised social settings shape self-construction through institutionalised conversations. The potential of having to deliberate on professional matters made me fearful and I therefore sought to avoid these informal gatherings, consequently limiting my professional development.

A further difficulty I faced was planning lessons in line with the requirements of the school. This involved submitting lengthy explanations of what I intended to teach and what I expected the pupils to learn; furthermore, all lessons had to be self-evaluated. These were then regularly checked by my line manager and often external persons, as the school was undergoing intense LEA intervention, following several unsuccessful inspections. I was concerned that my lesson plans and evaluations would not be adequate and that my poor spelling might be observed and 'found out' and I would be called to give an account of my credentials for teaching when dyslexic. These fears were very real to me and I frequently felt that I would fail classroom inspections and end up being dismissed because of my ineptitude. Leary suggests that individuals can act a part in order to avoid detection of professional ineptness. These sentiments are pertinent to my experience of self-presentation and the formulation of an external image of professional success.

During one lesson observation by the senior management I could see that the children were excelling during the mental maths part of the lesson, so I sought to maintain the pace of the lesson by asking some quick-fire questions, which were not scripted within my planning or preparation. This led to complications for me. When I asked unscripted or unrehearsed questions I could not work out rapidly enough whether the children had answered correctly or not. Like many other dyslexic individuals, I had difficulty in learning times tables, number sequences and patterns, as well as rapid computation, and this was noted during the observation. When the head teacher was giving me her feedback after the lesson she stated that when I had asked one child a question I said that they had answered correctly when they had not. With this type of feedback it was important that I tried to be composed and to appear shocked that I might have made a mistake, maintaining that it was a slip of the tongue rather than a calculation issue. She graciously stated that it was probably me trying to maintain a rapid pace to the lesson or I had misheard the child. I remember nodding and agreeing with her outlook, thinking that I had narrowly escaped being found out again.

When trying to deal with professional challenges I learnt to employ compensation strategies and coping techniques; for example, by using similar word and number problems and changing the numbers slightly in order to reduce the mental calculation load required. In my planning and preparation I also wrote out extension questions for most lessons, with the answers, to avoid being 'caught out'. In addition I selected a child who I knew would often get the answer right to come up to the board and explain what they had done to solve the problem, thus hopefully giving the correct answer and allowing me time to think through the problem myself without losing face. However, there was no

guarantee that the child could answer the problem correctly and I was highly conscious of not giving everyone in the class an opportunity to display their mathematical ability. These were issues I had to contend with whilst teaching and were problematic for the professional I wanted to be.

From an optimistic perspective, having to work hard at planning and thinking through every permutation, I was able to empathise with learners who need additional time to think and solve mathematical problems. Burns et al. [33] argue that teachers with dyslexia are in a stronger position than those without dyslexia to educate other professionals in the manifestation of empathy towards their pupils, helping them to become more aware of dyslexic pupils' needs, thus expanding the capacity for inclusion and social equality in educational institutions. As a result, aspects of my professional self-such as an appreciation of the difficulties some children have in learning, have made me more empathetic as a teacher. Having dyslexia makes me more aware of some children's needs but does not make up for a lack of subject knowledge or rapid recall of times tables or the ability to perform calculations quickly.

Nicolson et al. [4] describe how it can take ten times as long for the dyslexic brain to process something, which would not be conducive to a fast-paced lesson. I was in a position of responsibility, possessing a dyslexic teacher identity and yet finding subjects such as maths time consuming and stressful. However, the strain of additional workload, the cumulative effect of 'surface' and 'deep acting' in an attempt to conceal my dyslexia, and pretend to myself that I was capable and competent eventually caused a sense of failure, fear and depression. Moody [32] writes: 'It will come as no surprise that all the emotional difficulties, communication problems, and conflicts that accompany dyslexia may sometimes cause a person to become depressed'. Moreover, Passe [34] forgets the link between the stress which dyslexia can bring and how this can lead to depression. In the summer of 2011 after working especially hard in preparation for the summer term I became very unwell and I was diagnosed with severe depression. This clinical diagnosis was an epiphany moment-challenging and halting me in my stride; bringing everything to a standstill.

I felt that there was a sense of stigma attached to the condition and likened it to how I was made to feel at school when directly and indirectly compared to my peers. In reality the stigma came from some members of staff and not the parents at all. I was made to feel I had placed an overwhelming burden on the school financially and practically by my absence due to being ill. It was also implied that I had been 'skiving' and had not considered the significant detriment my absence would cause. I find a similarity in Hepburn [35], as he cites an example of a teacher whose mental health was questioned as to its validity and veracity; the teacher was told to just get on with the job despite a severe anxiety attack. On my return to work after Christmas the stigmatisation continued, making me feel alienated towards the school and an imposter who was not welcome anymore. The head teacher was critical and hostile towards me in her approach and attitude and I felt completely isolated and downtrodden as she appeared to incrementally grind me down. As a result of her continual criticisms and misunderstanding about depression I felt compelled to resign, and on May 31st 2012 I handed her my notice.

This was an epiphany moment; at the same time I had a sense of relief and release from the head's stranglehold. I have been educated by having depression; realising it is not possible to dust your own self off and pick yourself up or suddenly snap out of some low mood, but that it is a serious condition which requires time off, life-style changes and

medical help. I have learned from this episode and, if I return to the classroom, I will not exhibit the extreme levels of resilience which became a destructive driving force, but use it as a positive force to overcome some of the difficulties that having dyslexia can bring. Since resigning I have focused on completing my Doctoral degree and did so in 2014 and have successfully made a full recovery and am keen to ensure individuals with dyslexia are supported not stigmatised.

This article has summarised the impact upon the personal, academic and professional selves which dyslexia can have. The stress of managing dyslexia and the associated issues makes any task considerably harder work than for those without dyslexia. The negative impact of trying to 'keep ones head above the water' and the perpetual employment of coping mechanisms can become wearing and eventually burn out can occur in the form of depression, as was in my case. It is important to be informed and it is my hope that strength for those with dyslexia can be drawn from this in an attempt to manifest resilience. However, it is pertinent to underline the nature of depression and its correlation between decreased self-esteem and stress relating to managing dyslexia in a 'non-dyslexic world'. For practitioners, it is essential to underline the feelings and issues those with dyslexia face and be aware of these needs and seek to help through being informed and targeted appropriate intervention.

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