

**COPING WITH CLASSROOM READING:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF
FOUR DYSLEXIC PUPILS DURING THE FINAL YEARS OF PRIMARY
SCHOOLING**

by

Rosemary Elizabeth Anderson

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

at

**The University of Sheffield
School of Education**

April, 2007

VOLUME I

BEST COPY AVAILABLE.

VARIABLE PRINT QUALITY

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic case study explores how four dyslexic pupils coped with classroom reading during their final two years at a large primary school in an ex-mining village on the outskirts of a northern city. The research takes a constructivist view of childhood which regards pupils as competent reporters of their experiences, and connects the psychological concept of dyslexia with a socio-cultural view of literacy development. The central tenets of symbolic interactionism and ideas put forward by the mid-twentieth century sociologist, Erving Goffman, form a theoretical underpinning and frame the qualitative analysis of the observational and interview data. The findings suggest that the pupils' dyslexic difficulties had a negative effect on their reader identity and that this resulted in low self-esteem in the academic domain. Problems with word reading meant that many texts encountered at school were beyond their independent level and the consequence was marginalisation within the classroom community of literate practice, an effect intensified by attendance at withdrawal sessions. However, the need to present themselves in a favourable cultural light resulted in the use of impression management techniques designed to enable them to appear more competent readers than they really were. The pupils also developed a repertoire of inter-person and within-person coping strategies for difficult reading which all had the effect of minimizing the amount of text they read themselves. These strategies could be viewed as positive in the short term in that they enabled them to function in the classroom with some semblance of normality, but were damaging to learning in the longer term as problems with reading were disguised. Electronic multimodal texts, especially those associated with internet use, have increased the complexity of classroom reading in recent years, and the findings of this study suggest that they may have added to the marginalisation experienced by dyslexic pupils.

CONTENTS

VOLUME I

Page number

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

LIST OF APPENDICES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

1

1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Definitions and explanations	2
1.3	Researcher stance and background to the study	4
1.4	View of childhood	10
1.5	The evolution of the research focus	12
1.6	The research aim and guiding questions	13
1.7	Conclusion – outline of the thesis	14

CHAPTER TWO : DYSLEXIA AND LITERACY

15

2.1	Introduction	15
2.2	Background information on dyslexia	16
2.3	The definition of dyslexia used in the study	18
2.4	How the term 'dyslexia' is used in this study	20
2.5	Connecting dyslexia and literacy	21
2.6	Conclusion	25

CHAPTER THREE : SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND ERVING GOFFMAN

26

3.1	Introduction	26
3.2	A historical overview of symbolic interactionism	26
3.3	Linking symbolic interactionism to this study	30
	3.3.1 <i>Pupil career</i>	32
	3.3.2 <i>Coping strategies</i>	33
3.4	The work of Erving Goffman	35
	3.4.1 <i>The presentation of self in everyday life</i>	37
	3.4.2 <i>Embarrassment and social organization</i>	40
	3.4.3 <i>Stigma</i>	40
	3.4.4 <i>Rueda and Mehan's development of Goffman's concepts</i>	43
3.5	Conclusion	45

CHAPTER FOUR : PERSPECTIVES ON DYSLEXIA AND CLASSROOM READING	47
4.1 Introduction	47
4.2 Literature which uses a sociological perspective to look at the problems experienced by dyslexic pupils with reading at school	47
4.2.1 <i>Reflections of dyslexic adults on their childhood experiences</i>	48
4.2.2 <i>Reflections of dyslexic pupils on their current experiences</i>	51
4.3 American sociological literature which has focused on the classroom experiences of pupils with reading difficulties	53
4.3.1 <i>'Struggling readers' in the middle years of schooling</i>	54
4.3.2 <i>Coping strategies of unsuccessful readers</i>	59
4.4 Literature which uses a psychological perspective to look at self-concept in dyslexic pupils	61
4.4.1 <i>Self-concept and self-esteem</i>	61
4.4.2 <i>Research on self-concept in dyslexic pupils</i>	63
4.5 Literature which uses a psychological perspective to look at aspects of motivational learning theories that have a bearing on dyslexia and identity	67
4.5.1 <i>Mastery and performance learning goals</i>	67
4.5.2 <i>Locus of control and attribution for success and failure</i>	68
4.5.3 <i>Learned helplessness</i>	70
4.5.4 <i>Self-worth protection</i>	71
4.5.5 <i>Classroom help avoidance</i>	73
4.6 Conclusion	74
CHAPTER FIVE : RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS	76
5.1 Introduction	76
5.2 Research design	76
5.2.1 <i>Ethnography</i>	77
5.2.2 <i>Case study design</i>	80
5.2.3 <i>Site access and sample issues</i>	81
5.2.4 <i>Temporal issues</i>	84
5.2.5 <i>Validity and reliability issues</i>	87
5.2.6 <i>Ethical issues surrounding the design of the study</i>	91
5.3 Techniques of data collection	97
5.3.1 <i>The observer role</i>	97
5.3.2 <i>Narrative observation</i>	102

5.3.3	<i>Systematic observation</i>	104
5.3.4	<i>Interviews</i>	105
5.3.5	<i>Document collection</i>	110
5.4	Techniques of data analysis/interpretation	111
5.4.1	<i>Preliminary analysis during fieldwork</i>	112
5.4.2	<i>Main analysis after fieldwork</i>	113
5.4.3	<i>Interpretation</i>	116
5.5	Conclusion	117
 CHAPTER SIX : THE SCHOOL AND PUPIL CONTEXT		 118
6.1	Introduction	118
6.2	The school context	118
6.2.1	<i>The school setting</i>	118
6.2.2	<i>The cohort of pupils</i>	120
6.2.3	<i>Curriculum organization</i>	121
6.3	The pupil context	123
6.3.1	<i>Introductory profile of Amy</i>	124
6.3.2	<i>Introductory profile of Janie</i>	126
6.3.3	<i>Introductory profile of Ernie</i>	128
6.3.4	<i>Introductory profile of Russell</i>	129
6.4	Conclusion	131
 CHAPTER SEVEN : READER IDENTITY AND MARGINALISATION		 133
7.1	Introduction	133
7.2	Reader identity voice vignettes	134
7.2.1	<i>AMY</i>	136
7.2.2	<i>JANIE</i>	137
7.2.3	<i>ERNIE</i>	138
7.2.4	<i>RUSSELL</i>	139
7.3	Reader identity and self-concept	140
7.4	Reader identity and marginalisation during classroom activities	147
7.5	Reader identity, marginalisation and withdrawal tuition	149
7.6	Conclusion	157
 CHAPTER EIGHT : PRESENTATION OF SELF AS A READER		 158
8.1	Introduction	158
8.2	Presentation of self via impression management	158
8.2.1	<i>'Covering' in order to save face during conversations about difficult texts</i>	159
8.2.2	<i>'Passing as normal' within the classroom community of literate practice</i>	163
8.3	Contextualising the silent reading sessions	168

8.4	A typology of reader identity	171
	8.4.1 <i>Interested reader (ERNIE)</i>	172
	8.4.2 <i>Disinterested reader (JANIE)</i>	174
	8.4.3 <i>Interested dissembler (AMY and RUSSELL)</i>	177
	8.4.4 <i>Disinterested dissembler (JANIE)</i>	182
	8.4.5 <i>Contextual variation in chosen silent reader identity</i>	184
8.5	Impression management during silent reading sessions	186
	8.5.1 <i>Making a strategic choice of book in order to maximize real textual engagement</i>	186
	8.5.2 <i>Making a strategic choice of book in order to appear to be a member of the classroom community of literate practice</i>	188
	8.5.3 <i>Engaging with the book but not with the print</i>	189
	8.5.4 <i>Engaging in an alternative legitimate activity in order to avoid reading</i>	191
	8.5.5 <i>Dissembling when apparently engaged in reading</i>	192
8.6	Conclusion	195

VOLUME II

CHAPTER NINE : INTER-PERSON COPING STRATEGIES FOR CONVENTIONAL READING		197
9.1	Introduction	197
9.2	Inter-person coping strategies for individual seat work tasks – pupil/adult	198
	9.2.1 <i>Soliciting adult support in order to get assistance with reading</i>	199
	9.2.2 <i>Soliciting support from adults in order to manipulate them to do the reading</i>	202
	9.2.3 <i>Expecting that adults will provide unsolicited support with tasks involving reading</i>	204
9.3	Inter-person coping strategies for individual seat work tasks – pupil/pupil	210
	9.3.1 <i>Collaborating with another pupil as an equal on tasks involving reading</i>	210
	9.3.2 <i>Using a more able friend as a peer tutor during tasks involving reading</i>	215
	9.3.3 <i>Prevailing on peer to do written task involving reading</i>	219
	9.3.4 <i>Using involuntary peer support during a task involving reading</i>	220
9.4	Conclusion	221

CHAPTER TEN : WITHIN-PERSON COPING STRATEGIES FOR CONVENTIONAL READING	223
10.1 Introduction	223
10.2 Within-person coping strategies for individual seat work tasks	223
10.2.1 <i>Engaging in off-task behaviours in order to avoid reading</i>	224
10.2.2 <i>Engaging in a legitimate alternative activity in order to postpone or avoid doing any reading</i>	225
10.2.3 <i>Regarding a task as a symbol copying/matching exercise</i>	226
10.2.4 <i>Copying chunks of text rather than reading and selecting relevant material</i>	227
10.2.5 <i>Ignoring written instructions/guidance in texts</i>	228
10.2.6 <i>Ignoring handwritten texts</i>	230
10.2.7 <i>Evaluating texts as hard to read and then giving up</i>	232
10.2.8 <i>Inventing content by guessing from incompletely decoded text</i>	234
10.2.9 <i>Depending on illustrations for understanding hard texts</i>	235
10.2.10 <i>Avoiding reading multi-syllabic key vocabulary</i>	236
10.3 Within-person strategies for whole class/group teaching sessions	238
10.3.1 <i>Reading text in advance of the teacher</i>	239
10.3.2 <i>Listening instead of following as teacher reads a text</i>	240
10.3.3 <i>Keeping a low profile during class discussions involving prior reading of a text</i>	242
10.3.4 <i>Covering when given insufficient time to read a text on own</i>	244
10.3.5 <i>Not volunteering to read out loud from an unfamiliar text</i>	246
10.4 Within-person coping strategies during small group reading sessions	247
10.4.1 <i>Following text carefully prior to turn reading</i>	247
10.4.2 <i>Not owning up when unable to read a passage on own</i>	248
10.5 Coping with environmental print by using a passive avoidance strategy	250
10.6 Conclusion	252

CHAPTER ELEVEN : THE IMPACT OF MULTIMODAL ELECTRONIC TEXTS	253
11.1 Introduction	253
11.2 Previous research on children’s reading of internet texts	254
11.3 The effect of family socio-economic circumstances on ICT use	257
11.4 ICT reader identity at school	260
11.4.1 <i>Active apprentice (JANIE)</i>	262
11.4.2 <i>Passive apprentice (AMY)</i>	263
11.4.3 <i>Active onlooker (RUSSELL – START OF Y6)</i>	267
11.4.4 <i>Passive onlooker (RUSSELL –REST OF Y6; ERNIE)</i>	267
11.4.5 <i>Contextual renegotiation of ICT reader identity</i>	270
11.5 Coping strategies for reading multimodal electronic texts	271
11.5.1 <i>Inputting web addresses</i>	272
11.5.2 <i>Using search engines to generate websites</i>	273
11.5.3 <i>Reading on websites</i>	274
11.6 The impact of the introduction of an electronic interactive whiteboard (IWB)	275
11.7 Conclusion	278
CHAPTER TWELVE : CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS	280
12.1 Introduction	280
12.2 The overall conclusions and implications of the research	280
12.2.1 <i>Reader identity</i>	280
12.2.2 <i>Presentation of self</i>	282
12.2.3 <i>Coping strategies for reading</i>	282
12.2.4 <i>The impact of electronic multimodality</i>	283
12.3 Limitations of the study	284
12.4 Future research needed	286
12.5 The feedback process	288
12.5.1 <i>Pupil feedback</i>	288
12.5.2 <i>Staff feedback</i>	290
12.6 Personal reflections on the research journey	291
12.7 A final vignette and concluding comments	293
REFERENCES	296
GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATED FORMS	329
APPENDICES	

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

	Page Number
FIGURES	
Figure 8.1: A typology of silent reader identity	172
Figure 11.1: A typology of ICT reader identity during more able/less able partnerships	262
TABLES	
Table 8.1: Ernie – Systematic Observation of Literacy silent reading, 1.12.2004	173
Table 8.2: Janie – Systematic Observation of Literacy silent reading, 26.11.2004	176
Table 8.3: Amy – Systematic Observation of Literacy silent reading, 17.11.2004	178
Table 8.4: Russell – Systematic Observation of Literacy silent reading, 24.11.2004	180
Table 8.5: Janie – Systematic Observation of Literacy silent reading, 8.11.2004	183
Table 9.1: Amy – Systematic Observation of individual Literacy task, 19.4.2005	201
Table 9.2: Russell – Systematic Observation of individual Literacy task, 21.4.2005	208
Table 9.3: Amy (working with Janie) – Systematic Observation of individual Literacy task, 7.10.2004	211
Table 9.4: Ernie – Systematic Observation of individual Literacy task, 23.5.2005	214

LIST OF APPENDICES

	Page Number
APPENDIX 1: Preliminary information for governors and staff	i
APPENDIX 2: Consent letters	iii
APPENDIX 3: Fieldnote conventions and extract	v
APPENDIX 4: Systematic Observation schedules	vii
APPENDIX 5: Interview transcript conventions and extract	ix
APPENDIX 6: Interview guiding questions	xi
APPENDIX 7: Amy – reader statistics	xii
APPENDIX 8: Janie – reader statistics	xiii
APPENDIX 9: Ernie – reader statistics	xiv
APPENDIX 10: Russell – reader statistics	xv
APPENDIX 11: Pupil level findings	xvi
APPENDIX 12: Feedback letters	xvii
APPENDIX 13: Spoof self-help booklet	xix
APPENDIX 14: Teaching tips to aid inclusion of dyslexic pupils	xxvi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first acknowledgement must go to all the pupils with dyslexic-type literacy difficulties that I have taught since 1995, as without them there would have been no impetus to conduct this research, because I would have been unaware of the extent of the problems they faced each day at school. Particular thanks go to the three boys who took part in my M.Ed. study (Anderson, 2001) and who spoke so articulately about their school experiences and so eloquently about their dyslexic problems. The findings of that study led me to feel that I owed it to them to investigate the subject further, and at that stage I must thank Elaine Millard and Jackie Marsh for encouraging me to continue my research. Jackie Marsh, as my supervisor and critical friend, has been a continual source of support and advice, as have my son, Ben and daughter-in-law, Rachel. At each stage of my academic journey as a novice researcher, Ben and Rachel have been one step ahead, and discussions with them have helped to demystify the doctoral process from start to finish.

Thanks must also go to Val McCartney, my tutor when I was studying for my SpLD diploma in the mid 1990s, as she alone was responsible for restoring my self-worth as a teacher after a difficult time professionally. My cousin, Maureen Hardy, too played her part in nurturing my interest in dyslexia, and I value greatly her continued interest in my work. The experience of studying successfully for a professional diploma gave me the courage in 1999 to return to academia after twenty-five years, and I would like to thank all involved in the M.Ed. in Literacy at Sheffield University at that time for their inspirational teaching. My husband, Adrian, too must be thanked for his invaluable help in proof reading, for acting as an unpaid computer technician on many occasions, and above all, for uncomplainingly chauffeuring me to the UKLA conference in July 2005 when I was due to present preliminary findings, and public transport was disrupted in the aftermath of the London bombings. Claire and Ruth, my two daughters, must also be congratulated for their forbearance over a number of years as they uncomplainingly put up with the unusual situation of having their mother, brother and future sister-in law all preoccupied with different stages of the doctoral process, and as serendipity would have it, all being distracted by the major upheaval of house buying and selling when the time came to write up!

Last but not least, my thanks go to the headteacher and staff of the school where the research was conducted, who as Hall (2002) has also acknowledged, must remain anonymous to protect their privacy, but who, because of this, cannot have their hard work and professionalism made public. In particular I am indebted to the Upper Junior staff who accepted with good grace the presence of a constantly scribbling stranger in their classrooms over a two year period. However, the most important people to thank are the participants, as without their cheerful co-operation despite the intrusion, there would be no data, and therefore no findings. I therefore dedicate this thesis to those four children, who by now will be entering their teenage years, and who I can only refer to by their pseudonyms - Amy, Janie, Ernie and Russell.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

The vertically grouped class of Upper Juniors at Granville Primary School were having their weekly ICT lesson, and their task was to use an American website devoted to information on Christmas in different countries to research and record ten customs. Janie and Amy, two Y5 pupils with dyslexic-type literacy difficulties, chose to work together on a lap-top computer, and after instructions had been given out by the teacher, began to type in the site address. Most other pupils logged on quickly and started to search for information on their chosen country, but these girls, functioning on the margins of the class community of literacy learners, were struggling. They had to have several tries before they copied the complex web address accurately and once into the site, their comments suggested both that the fancy blue font reduced legibility, and that they were overwhelmed by the amount of reading needed to extract information on customs. Yet by the end of the strictly timed session, and despite receiving only a small amount of adult support, they had produced a written list that the teacher deemed satisfactory. The reason for the 'successful' outcome was their employment of a coping strategy that involved copying summary information about the country (but not its customs) to which the teacher had drawn their attention, and then reducing the reading demands of the task by inventing meaning from words that were highlighted in the text.

(Vignette derived from fieldnotes, 24.11.2003. All names have been changed throughout the thesis to protect anonymity.)

1.1 Introduction

I have chosen to begin this thesis with a “snapshot vignette” (Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul, 1997, p.74) of a learning experience observed during preliminary fieldwork for this research. I see it as an example of what Mitchell (1984) calls a “telling case” (p.239), in that it illustrates well the substantive area that this ethnographic case study investigates, namely how pupils with dyslexic type reading difficulties cope with the demands of classroom reading in their final years at primary school. I will begin this chapter by setting the scene for the study by explaining its core interest and defining some basic parameters. I will then show how my personal background in several spheres of life have led to the development of this research. I will next discuss the view of childhood that underpins the study, and then explain how the focus of investigation gradually narrowed to produce the

four final research questions which will be set out. Finally I will describe the thesis structure in order to assist the reader to navigate through the following chapters.

1.2 Definitions and explanations

It is important at the start to make it clear that I define 'literacy' in Kress' (2003) narrow sense as the making of "messages using letters as the means of recording that message" (p.23), rather than more broadly as 'competence' in a variety of communicative practices (Barton, 2001; Vincent, 2003). If Kress' view is taken, then 'literacy' subdivides into the mirrored aspects of reading and writing. I decided to confine my attention to reading rather than also look at writing as, of the two, it is my belief that "reading proficiency is the most fundamental skill, critical to most, if not all, academic learning and success in school" (Reid Lyon, Shaywitz, Chhabra and Sweet, 2004, p.161) to which I would add 'and in life overall'. To put it more succinctly, it is my contention that it is reading rather than writing that is the "gate-keeper of learning" (Fokias, 1998, p.28), and it is for this reason that reading has been prioritized for investigation in a study whose central concern is the experiences of pupils marginalised by their literacy difficulties.

I am interested in the middle years of schooling because it is then that there is an expectation on the part of teachers in particular, and society in general, that the majority of children will be past the stage of 'learning to read' and will have become experienced readers engaged in 'reading to learn' (Chall, 1983; Primary National Strategy, 2006a) as they competently negotiate ever increasing textual demands within the classroom. For example, the recent Rose Review indulges in this culturally accepted view when it states that "learning to read progresses to reading, effortlessly, to learn" (Rose, 2006, p.35). However, as Salinger (2003), speaking of the American education system, reminds us, "despite what is known about the prevention of reading difficulties in young learners, many students reach upper elementary and middle school without having acquired strategies and skills to become strong independent readers" (p.79). According to McCray (2001) the consequence of this is that such pupils find it hard to undertake many classroom

assignments either because the level of texts is too hard and/or because their reading speed is slow (Rasinski, 2000), and as they fall further and further behind they become at risk of “subsequent academic failure and dropout” (McCray, 2001, p.298). Stanovich made the same point twenty years ago in his classic article when he stated that:

Poorer readers often find themselves in materials that are too difficult for them.... Lack of exposure and practice ... delays the development of automaticity and speed at the word recognition level. Slow capacity-draining word recognition processes require cognitive resources that should be allocated to higher-level processes of text integration and comprehension.... Thus reading for meaning is hindered, unrewarding reading experiences multiply, and practice is avoided or merely tolerated without real cognitive involvement. (Stanovich, 1986, p.364)

Stanovich (1986) then went on to suggest that by the middle years of schooling, pupils with lower levels of reading attainment may only read about ten thousand words a year by comparison with perhaps a million read by average readers, and that this denies them the vital “bootstrapping mechanism” (p.380) created by a high volume of print experience. In the years shortly before Stanovich’s article appeared, Allington (1983) had discovered that pupils of lower abilities received less advantageous types of reading tuition, and Jorgenson (1977) and Gambrell, Wilson and Gantt (1981) had found out that many pupils were assigned reading books that were too hard for them, leading to frustration, lack of motivation and passivity (Bristow, 1985). Stanovich (1986) therefore postulated that all these adverse experiences resulted in such pupils becoming caught in the downward spiral of poorer and poorer attainment that he called the “Matthew effect” (p.380), because of the association with the biblical text “For the man who has will always be given more, till he has enough and to spare; and the man who has not will forfeit even what he has” (Matthew, 25:29, *New English Bible* version). It is this subset of pupils, who, in the terms of the model of patterns of reading performance in the revised Literacy Framework, have “poor word recognition; good comprehension” (Primary National Strategy, 2006a, p.5), that form the focus of this study. Such individuals are

often described as 'dyslexic' or as 'having dyslexic-type literacy difficulties', and in Chapter Two I will provide a full explanation of my use of these terms.

1.3 Researcher stance and background to the study

I am influenced by those who emphasize the centrality of reflexivity throughout the research process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Delamont, 2002; Pillow, 2003) and so I acknowledge the importance of my personal, professional and intellectual autobiography (Rhedding-Jones, 1997; Luttrell, 2000) in the development of this study. The consequence of this is that I agree with Graue and Walsh (1998) when they state that "the particular package of characteristics and experiences that we call ourselves are powerful contexts for our inquiry" (p.75). I therefore propose now to show how both planned and serendipitous events and encounters in my life have interacted to culminate in this study, and so by telling the story behind my stance, I hope that the reader is provided with "multiple ways of seeing and thinking about what is being researched and the researcher's journey towards understanding" (Ely et al., 1997, p.40).

Having read Geography as an undergraduate at Sheffield University in the early 1970s, I took the somewhat unorthodox career path at that time in that I decided to train to teach Infants rather than become a secondary subject specialist. My tutor on my postgraduate course in Nottingham was Dorothy Glynn, a leading proponent at the time of the 'look and say' method of teaching reading, and author of the then popular *Dominoes* scheme. Her advocacy of informal, language rich, learning for young children influenced me a great deal when I started to teach in a First School in 1975, and I began to take an interest in new ideas about reading which were emerging from the field of psycholinguistics (for an overview see Hall, 2003). Techniques such as Miscue Analysis (Campbell, 1993) were being advocated, and having learnt about this meaning focused 'whole-language' approach from professional texts such as Dean, Goodacre and Root (1976), I was enthused and inspired that this was the right way to teach reading.

However, as was not uncommon in the 1970s, after two years I left the profession in order to bring up a family at home, and did not return to primary teaching until 1991 where I found a much changed educational climate due to the recent introduction of the National Curriculum. I soon rekindled my interest in the teaching of reading, but quickly began to feel frustrated that large class sizes and the new “over-loaded and over-constrained curriculum” (Pollard and Filer, 1999, p.309) made it impossible to give children with literacy difficulties the time and support they needed. There was much in the press at the time about ‘Reading Recovery’ (Clay, 1991), and increasingly I felt that pupils who did not quickly latch onto the mechanics of word decoding needed a more structured and systematic programme than my current teaching, which at the time was most closely aligned with the psycholinguistic perspective (Hall, 2003), provided. I had heard of ‘dyslexia’, but the concept was still viewed with suspicion in the LEA for which I worked, perhaps because of “underlying disquiet about the way it was defined and the implications that this had for the identification of children and allocation of resources” (Riddick, 1996, p.3). However over time the growing numbers of pupils I taught who had severe difficulties with the written word, but who were verbally bright and had no problem with global understanding, puzzled me, and according to Riddick (1996) this is a common feeling amongst teachers who go on to specialize in the field.

The fact that both myself and my son were academic ‘high-flyers’ at school and were proficient and avid readers but embarrassingly poor spellers added to my curiosity as I began to wonder if rather than just being ‘careless’ as our teachers had led us to believe we were, our problems could in fact be situated at the mild end of a continuum of specific literacy difficulties. This was another factor which propelled me to find out more about dyslexia and I was fortunate that at that time my cousin, an educationalist whose research interest was in the field of oral language development, was involved with Morag Hunter-Carsch in organizing a series of conferences on the theme of dyslexia at Leicester University. I was invited to go to these to help run the United Kingdom Reading Association bookstall, and as I

listened to lectures given by eminent and well-respected academics involved in the field, I became fascinated by what I heard.

The consequence was that in 1995 I left my teaching post and retrained as a 'Dyslexia Specialist', my reasoning being that a postgraduate diploma would re-skill me so that I could concentrate purely on 'one to one' tuition for pupils experiencing literacy difficulties. I found the course books, for example, Purnfrey and Reason (1991), challenging, as the theoretical perspective of reading offered was almost wholly from the field of cognitive psychology (Hall, 2003), a subject about which I had no prior knowledge. Although this was a very different way of looking at the reading process from that I had previously encountered, this behaviourist approach seemed to make sense, as when I began to apply the principles of multisensory structured cumulative phonic teaching (Hornsby, 1992) to the task of helping pupils learn to read, their progress seemed to accelerate. However, although I was not aware of this until it was pointed out to me by my tutor, my teaching practice lessons were somewhat different from other students on the course. This was because, in addition to focused tuition in basic skills (Hornsby, 1993), the earlier 'whole language' influences could be seen as I always made "explicit connections ...between the text, sentence and word levels of language study" (Wray, Medwell, Fox and Poulson, 1999, p.21), and so an important element of my lessons was the sharing of fiction or non-fiction texts chosen by the pupils themselves. I maintained then, and continue to maintain, that dyslexic pupils, and, indeed, all pupils, have got to become enthused about what books can offer and thereby take on the values of the community of literate practice (Hall, 2006) if they are to feel it worth putting in the considerable effort involved into learning to read, a view recently endorsed by the final report of the Rose Review (Rose, 2006).

My new qualification did indeed enable me to develop a successful portfolio career from 1996 onwards which was composed of part-time teaching in independent schools and out of hours private tuition for state school pupils. However, increasingly I felt that my recent training had given me a narrow and over simplistic

view of literacy as hierarchic skill acquisition, and that I did not fit naturally into what I began to call 'the official world of dyslexia' as promoted by organizations such as the British Dyslexia Association and the Dyslexia Institute. I decided that I wanted to reconnect with a broader view of reading and writing, and so in 1999 I enrolled on the M.Ed. in Literacy course at Sheffield University, and there I was introduced to a socio-cultural view of literacy (Hall, 2003), a theoretical position with which I was totally unfamiliar at the time. At first I felt disconcerted as there seemed to be an intellectual discontinuity between the meld of psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology with which I was now familiar, both of which were essentially concerned with the individual. However once I had read the recommended text by Barton (1994), the view of literacy as sets of socially and culturally constructed practices within situated communities began to make more sense. Later in the course I came across what Hall (2003) sees as a fourth perspective, but which I prefer to see as a sub-grouping within socio-cultural approaches, namely the 'socio-political' orientation of New Literacy Studies with its advocacy of a critical concern with issues of power and inequality. This stance helped me to see that differing theoretical underpinnings impact fundamentally on practice, something I was hardly aware of before, and according to Ely et al. (1997), such an intellectual awakening apparently commonly occurs at the stage of becoming a graduate student. However, at the same time as becoming overtly aware of these seemingly conflicting influences on my view of reading, I began to wonder if it might be possible to integrate the three main perspectives.

As time went on, the cohort of Masters students of which I was a part were encouraged to begin to think about likely topics for their dissertation. To start with I felt devoid of ideas as my professional practice seemed far removed from the subjects that formed the central core of the course. However, when one of the course tutors, Ann Finlay, gave a lecture which drew on her own doctorate study of *Not yet fluent adults' reading strategies* (2000), she mentioned in passing that she had discovered that because her participants did not often read out loud, it was hard to know what their reading level actually was, and this gelled in my mind with

something that had happened several years before. One of my first private pupils was a Y6 girl called Kirsty, who was in the same class at primary school as my younger daughter. When the two girls moved up to secondary school they were placed in the same class, and although they were not particular friends, for some time sat together. One day my daughter asked me to help her with some English homework, and realising that the text she had to read was well beyond Kirsty's independent reading level, I asked her if Kirsty ever sought support from her or from staff with reading. My daughter said that she had never known that happen, and gentle questioning during Kirsty's ongoing private lessons also elicited a 'no problem' response. This led to the fleeting thought that dyslexic pupils might engage in dissembling behaviour in order to save face as readers, but I did not think much more about this until Ann Finlay's words reminded me of the conversations several years before. After I related the story to my tutor, I realised that, as so often happens in qualitative research, I had stumbled serendipitously onto my dissertation topic (Fine and Deegan, 1996).

At this point that I must acknowledge the influence of another member of my family in the development of my thinking, as my son had just embarked on a PhD in Social and Cultural Geography, and in the course of his reading had come across the work of Erving Goffman on the 'presentation of self' which he felt might have relevance for my study. I was aware of what is perhaps Goffman's most famous book, *Asylums* (1961), but had not read *The presentation of self in everyday life* (1959), but when I did I immediately realised that this work would become a key influence in my thinking, as will be revealed in Chapter Three. I decided that in my dissertation I could perhaps retain the concept of dyslexia, but instead of viewing the subject through the conventional cognitive psychology lens, could take an educational sociology approach to look at broader issues pupils face as they attempt to function, often without a great deal of support, within the normal classroom learning environment. Around this time too I began to read the work of Peter Woods, and in his book *The happiest days?* (1990) I discovered the notion of 'coping strategies', which will be discussed further in Chapter Three. Suddenly I began to see or hear

the verb 'to cope' around me everywhere, and although the definition "deal effectively with; manage successfully" given in the *Oxford Paperback Dictionary* is neutral, it seemed to me that in common parlance the various forms of the word were always used in relation to some kind of difficulty or trauma that must be overcome by a person if they were to be effective or successful in whatever situation was being discussed. It then struck me that 'coping with reading' was a most suitable phrase to use to describe the daily struggle that dyslexic pupils faced as they negotiated their way through the texts encountered in the classroom, and that, moreover, one coping strategy might be to pretend to read a passage of text that was in reality too difficult, as I suspected Kirsty had done several years before.

In order to investigate this issue I designed a research study for my M.Ed. dissertation, entitled "*Sometimes you can and sometimes you can't*": *coping with the demands of classroom reading as a dyslexic pupil in the middle years of schooling* (Anderson, 2001), in which I interviewed three boys aged 10, 12 and 13 whom I taught at an independent school. The study generated rich findings on the negative social and emotional effects of being dyslexic, and on the problems the pupils encountered as they functioned on the margins of the classroom literacy community in their academically orientated school. However, I did not feel that via a small scale study that had relied on interviews as its sole method of data collection I had been able to get at the heart of what I was wanting to investigate, namely the exact nature of the strategies the boys used to cope with reading and the true extent of any dissembling behaviour they indulged in. It therefore seemed to me that a more fruitful way of researching the topic would be larger scale ethnographic study conducted within the state sector, for the reason that that is where the vast majority of children receive their education. I decided that I would use direct observation as the main data source, supplemented with informal interviews, and began to plan the investigation reported here. I felt that this was an important topic to pursue further as I discovered that there had been little prior research within the literature on dyslexia/reading difficulties which looked directly at the daily classroom experience of pupils. Over twenty years ago, Lipson and Wixson (1986) urged that "research

on reading disability must move away from the search for causative factors within the reader” (p.111), and further stated that “we know a great deal about how subjects process various isolated words and short, contrived texts, but little about what that has to do with reading , and more important, learning to read in the classroom” (p.121). Around the same time Johnson (1985) also drew attention to the lack of studies looking at affective and motivational aspects of dyslexia, but the situation has changed little since as can be seen from the research section chapter titles of the edited book produced for the most recent British Dyslexia Association conference (Reid and Fawcett, 2004). Titles of articles published in the journal, *Dyslexia*, also reveal that most research has remained firmly rooted in the cognitive psychological/neurological tradition of positivistic as opposed to naturalistic methods of inquiry (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000) and therefore focus on individual functioning. Confirming the truth of this assertion, a book on dyslexia and self-concept which has appeared since the instigation of this study, has, on its opening page, deplored “the neglect of the human side of dyslexia” (Burden, 2005, p.1), and has returned to the theme in its conclusion, where the author states his belief “that the vitally important socio-cultural aspect of dyslexia has hitherto been unjustifiably neglected” (Burden, 2005, p.87). This study therefore aims to make a contribution to scholarship that helps in a small way to redress the balance, because I agree with Johnson (1985) that:

An understanding of reading failure cannot be gained through fragmented analyses of the speed of performance of various isolated mental acts out of the context of their social and motivational environment and antecedents. Rather, a useful understanding will only emerge from an integrated examination of the cognitive, affective, social and personal history of the learner. (Johnson, 1985, p.155)

1.4 View of childhood

My M.Ed. study (Anderson, 2001) was based entirely on the pupils’ own perspectives as it is my belief that children should be viewed as competent social actors who are well able to report and reflect on their own experiences (Christensen and James, 2000; Lewis and Lindsay, 2000; Christensen, 2004). Having confirmed

in Anderson (2001) that by the middle years of schooling pupils are “observant and have a rich but often untapped understanding of processes and events” (Ruddock and Flutter, 2000, p.82) when talking about classroom learning, I resolved to conduct this research on the same basis. My overall position accords with what Prout and James referred to in 1997 as the “new paradigm for the sociology of childhood” (p.7), the basic tenets of which are:

- Childhood is understood as a social construction. As such it provides an interpretive frame for contextualizing the early years of human life. Childhood as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies.
- Childhood is a variable of social analysis. It can never be entirely divorced from other variables such as class, gender, or ethnicity. Comparative and cross-cultural analysis reveals a variety of childhoods rather than a single and universal phenomenon.
- Children’s social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults.
- Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes.
(Prout and James, 1997, p.8)

In the course of background reading for my M.Ed. study, I discovered that this approach which attempts “to understand children’s lives in their own terms” (Morrow and Richards, 1996, p.97) and listens to their views via their own voices (Prout and James, 1997) has, until recently, been a relatively neglected perspective both in education in general (Duffield, 1998; McCallum, Hargreaves and Gipps, 2000; Ruddock and Flutter, 2000; Wood, 2003), and in the field of specific learning difficulties in particular (Pumfrey and Reason, 1991; Johnson, 2004; Burden, 2005). In the last few years articles have appeared that have urged that the voices of children with Special Educational Needs should be listened to (e.g. Beame, 2002; Messiou, 2002; Quicke, 2003) and studies are now appearing which address this gap in the literature with regard to children with generalized learning difficulties, (e.g. Norwich and Kelly, 2004). However, as I will show in Chapter Four, only a very

small body of literature exists in the dyslexia field. I offer this study then as an investigation into an under-researched aspect of dyslexia which uses a neglected perspective within research on such children - that of the pupil him or herself. In the quotation below, Tony Martin is reflecting on his teaching, but his words are transferable to the research situation and sum up my position well:

For too long we have neglected the thoughts and feelings of the child failing to make progress in reading... Have we asked him (*sic*) for his views on the nature of reading? I believe that at the centre of working with reading failures should be a relationship between pupil and teacher which takes into account and tries to explore the former's feelings and perceptions about the situation. (Martin, 1989, p.5)

1.5 The evolution of the research focus

A feature of research conducted within the naturalistic research paradigm that is often discussed in methodological textbooks (Cohen et al., 2000; Anderson, 1998) is that rather than being 'set in stone' from the outset as most positivistic quantitative research is, the exact focus of qualitative studies tend to evolve over time. This has certainly been true for this study and I shall now document the changes, as recommended by Ely et al. (1997). When I first began to think about this research, perhaps because the ages of the pupils in my M.Ed. study straddled the primary/secondary divide, I decided that the focus should be the transition between these two stages of schooling. I therefore envisaged that the main part of the fieldwork would be undertaken over two years, firstly at a primary school and then at a secondary school. I wanted in particular to chart how the move from having one class teacher to being taught each day by a number of subject specialists would affect the way that dyslexic pupils coped with the demands of school reading. However, once I began preliminary fieldwork, I discovered that the organisation of the school where I had negotiated access meant that the upper junior aged pupils were in fact being taught by several members of staff on most days with the result that their "experience approached levels of fragmentation more often associated with secondary schooling" (Bibby, Moore and Clark, 2007, p.2). In view of this I decided

that, as so little research had been done on this area, it would be more appropriate, and certainly more manageable, to confine the focus to the final primary years.

I also became aware over time that some adjustment of the research questions was necessary. The three main questions have remained largely unchanged throughout the course of the project, but I originally felt that three subsidiary questions were also needed. However, as I refined my thinking I decided that the first two, on curriculum organisation and reading demands in different subjects, would be covered in addressing the main questions. As I had developed an interest during my M.Ed. studies in differences in literacy learning between boys and girls, the third subsidiary question was on this topic. During preliminary fieldwork, I realised that although my case study design of concentrating on a very small number of participants was appropriate for collecting rich data on my other questions, it did not lend itself well to the investigation of gender issues, and so this aspect of the study was dropped. However, an issue of enormous importance presented itself that I had not foreseen as a focus prior to the commencement of fieldwork, namely the impact of multimodal electronic texts within the classroom in this 'new media age' (Kress, 2003), and so a fourth research question was formulated to cover this aspect of the study.

1.6 The research aim and resultant guiding questions

The overarching aim of this research is:

to investigate the ways that pupils with dyslexic-type literacy difficulties cope with the demands of classroom reading in the final years of primary schooling.

This aim has been translated via a process of refinement over time into the following four guiding questions:

- 1. What is the effect of having dyslexic difficulties on upper junior aged pupils' identities as readers at school?*
- 2. In what ways do dyslexic pupils manage their presentation of selves as readers within upper junior classroom communities of literate practice?*

3. *What strategies for coping with the demands of classroom reading are used by dyslexic pupils of upper junior age?*
4. *What has been the impact of multimodal electronic texts on the classroom reading experiences of dyslexic pupils of upper junior age?*

1.7 Conclusion -outline of the thesis

In this first chapter I have set the scene by introducing the core substantive area of dyslexia, discussed my researcher stance and detailed the evolution of this specific study. I now move on in Chapter Two to provide contextual information on dyslexia, and then connect the concept to the field of literacy studies. In Chapter Three I present my overarching theoretical and analytic framework via a discussion of symbolic interactionism and the work of Erving Goffman. Chapter Four consists of a wide-ranging survey of literature which has looked at the impact of dyslexic difficulties on classroom reading. My attention in Chapter Five turns to methodological matters, as I look firstly at ethnography, and then at aspects of the design of the study, including ethical issues, and in the second part of the chapter, detail the specific data collection and analysis techniques used.

Chapter Six provides an introduction to the empirical chapters via contextual details about the school setting and the four participant pupils. In Chapter Seven I take an individual perspective as I consider how the participants' reader identities were affected by their dyslexic difficulties, and in Chapter Eight, I change to a sociological lens in order to focus on their presentation of selves as readers. I then move on to the specific ways these dyslexic pupils coped with the reading they encountered at school by setting out what I term 'inter-person strategies', namely those which directly involved other people, in Chapter Nine, and 'within-person strategies', those for which they relied on their own inner resources, in Chapter Ten. In Chapter Eleven I discuss the impact of the 'new media age' (Kress, 2003) on the participants' school reading experiences, and threads will be drawn together in the concluding chapter, Chapter Twelve, as I present a summary of the overall findings and their implications, and reflect on the study.

CHAPTER TWO

DYSLEXIA AND LITERACY

2.1. Introduction

The specific learning difficulty now commonly called '(developmental) dyslexia' was first recognized in academic literature about a hundred and ten years ago when an article appeared in the British Medical Journal entitled 'A case of congenital word blindness' (Pringle Morgan, 1896/1996). This described the case of a fourteen year old boy who wrote his name as 'Precy' instead of 'Percy', and who, despite being of 'normal' intelligence and having received years of instruction in literacy skills, still could not read an easy child's book or spell simple words correctly. Since then a huge and complex literature on the subject of dyslexia has arisen, but understanding is still not complete. In the first part of this chapter I will provide contextualising information about the concept of dyslexia and briefly discuss some unresolved issues. The definition that I have chosen to use will then be set out, before I explain how my study represents an attempt to link the concept to the field of literacy studies.

It is perhaps important to explain before beginning the chapter proper, that a complication of working in the dyslexia field is that a number of terms are to be found in the literature (Riddick, Sterling, Falmer and Morgan, 1999) to describe the subset of pupils with reading difficulties who form the focus of this study. At present in the UK, 'dyslexia' seems to have become the term universally used (Johnson, 2004), but for a while in the 1990s, 'specific learning difficulties (SpLD)' was sometimes seen as a synonym, as shown by the title of Pumfrey and Reason's (1991) book. Today the usage of SpLD has changed such that it has become an "umbrella" term (Riddick, 1996, p.1) to describe a family of learning problems that only affect part of an individual's functioning as opposed to more generalized difficulties that impact globally. Similar confusion has arisen over the way the term 'learning disabled' (LD) is used in the USA according to Riddick (1996). I have consulted many studies that employ that term, and if selection criteria for participants are

provided, as in Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen and Forgan (1998), they seem to be similar to those in most definitions of dyslexia. However the term 'reading disabled' is also used by some academics (e.g. Kos, 1991) to describe the same group, and the fact that McCray, Vaughn and Neal (2001) employed the term 'reading related learning disabilities' makes me wonder, if, as with SpLD in this country, LD is now being used to describe a broader group in the USA. To avoid confusion, in this thesis the words 'dyslexia' or 'dyslexic' will be used throughout, except when referring to American studies, in which case the original term used by the researchers will be retained.

2.2 Background information on dyslexia

As revealed in the previous section, initial concern about the puzzling way that some children experienced problems in learning which seemed to be specific to literacy was expressed by the medical profession (Miles and Miles, 1999), and although this interest has been maintained in neurology and genetics (Pumfrey, 2001), over time the academic focus within the dyslexia field has moved to cognitive psychology (Miles and Miles, 1999). As explained in Chapter One, most attention has therefore been given to within-person functioning, with research tending to be of an experimental, quantitative nature derived from a positivistic theoretical position (Cohen et al., 2000), and learning to read and write viewed as a cognitive process of sequential skill development.

Much debate between academic researchers has occurred over the years on issues related to the concept of dyslexia (Reid and Wearmouth, 2002), including whether such pupils can be considered as a discrete group or whether they represent the extreme end of a continuum of literacy difficulties (Stanovich, 1994). The inclusion of the term within official government publications, the earliest being the *Code of practice on the identification and assessment of Special Educational Needs* (DfE, 1994), may have given the impression that there is now general acceptance of the concept. However that this is not so was graphically illustrated by the furore in September 2005 that erupted after a Channel 4 Dispatches documentary entitled *The*

dyslexia myth (Mills, 2005) was screened, with controversy further fuelled by provocatively titling the associated conference, *The death of dyslexia?* (CEM Centre, 2005). The academic associated with these events was Julian Elliott of Durham University, who had decided to seek publicity for his view that a label of dyslexia is often spuriously assigned, and may then cause learning support to be diverted from unlabelled, but equally deserving pupils (CEM Centre, 2005; Moorhead, 2005). His solution to the problem was that the term should be dropped, but unsurprisingly there was a storm of protest from academics in the field and from official organizations, such as the Dyslexia Institute and British Dyslexia Association (Kirkham, 2005). What Elliott had tapped into was the ongoing debate regarding the plausibility of regarding 'dyslexia' as a 'syndrome' (Frith, 2002) with identifiable 'symptoms'. The persistence of regarding problems specific to literacy as representing a cognitive difference, deficit or defect arises from the "historically dominant scientific paradigm" according to Poole (2003, p.167), and psychological normative notions of what attainment levels should be expected at particular points in a child's development. Green and Kostogriz (2002) believe that this view has been greatly influenced by the medical model of disability, with its tendency to pathologise individual differences (Ho, 2004) which then come to be regarded as diseases (Tomblin, 2006), and they suggest that what is considered normal or abnormal is defined according to dominant cultural values. Dudley-Marling (2004), too, suggests that it is no surprise that psychology and medicine were the first disciplines to take an interest in children with learning difficulties, given the individualistic ideology of western society.

Associated with the belief in a 'dyslexia syndrome' with a distinctive pattern of difficulties which affects individuals on a continuum from mild to severe (Miles, 1993), has been a search for causation. The earliest hypothesis put forward was that dyslexia was a visual processing defect, but this was discredited in the early twentieth century (Miles and Miles, 1999), and since then a huge literature on causation has arisen (for comprehensive reviews see Reid and Wearmouth, 2002; Reid and Fawcett, 2004; Rice with Brooks, 2004). Although a myriad of theories

exist, Snowling's belief, first set out in 1987, that dyslexia is a clearly defined developmental cognitive disorder mainly affecting phonological functioning, has become widely accepted, particularly as sensitivity to speech sounds is known to be of critical importance in learning to read successfully (Adams, 1990; Rose, 2006). However Fawcett and Nicholson's (2004) theory that dyslexic problems have a neurological basis in a deficit of cerebellar functioning, which then affects automatization of learning in many areas including language, has also gained support in recent years. Uta Frith (2002) has devised a "causal modeling framework involving three levels of description – behavioural, cognitive and biological" (p.45) which she hopes "can solve some seemingly intractable problems and confusions" (p.45) that have arisen in the attempts to explain dyslexia. Of crucial importance to me is that, although the framework emanates from the traditional 'psychological' view of dyslexia, it recognizes that environmental factors and cultural context can "aggravate or ameliorate the condition" (Frith, 2002, p.65) at each level.

2.3 The definition of dyslexia used in the study

Alongside the search for a cause, and connected to it, has been much debate about proposed definitions of dyslexia that expand on its literal Greek meaning "difficulty with words" (Hornsby, 1993, p.3). Most include a possible cause and suggest that a discrepancy between levels of literacy skills and overall intellectual potential should be demonstrated, a recent example being that set out in Reid Lyon, Shaywitz and Shaywitz (2003). However, a myriad of definitions exist, and as is demonstrated in Rice with Brooks' (2004) comprehensive review, no two are exactly the same. In fact Julian Elliott's belief that the term should be dropped rested on this lack of consensus over definition, the consequence being, in his opinion, that there is no definitive way to 'diagnose' a pupil as dyslexic, despite a plethora of assessment tests which reflect the different theories (CEM Centre, 2005; Moorhead, 2005). He was not trying to deny the existence of children with reading difficulties, but was making the same point that Rea Reason (1998) had made some years earlier when she had stated that regardless of whether or not a distinct dyslexic group existed, all pupils with literacy difficulties should be taught the same way. In 1996 Stanovich

put forward a solution to the problem of confusion over how much discrepancy between expected and actual performance there should be before a label of dyslexia was considered appropriate by proposing what was in effect a 'mirror image' of Julian Elliott's view. Stanovich argued persuasively that the term should be retained, but that it should be used to describe "all children with problems in phonological coding resulting from segmental language problems" (Stanovich, 1996, p.161), and in fact, a new more inclusive definition was adopted by the British Psychological Society (BPS) in 1999 after a working party chaired by Rea Reason was set up to look into the whole issue of assessment. Their working definition states that:

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 of a staged process of assessment through teaching. (Reason, 2002, pp.188-9)

In common with earlier definitions, this quickly attracted criticism, for example from the British Dyslexia Association, who, because of their emphasis on prevention via early identification in young children, took issue with the assumption that there must be failure before the label is considered appropriate (Reid, 2001). The result has been that some academics continued to support 'traditional' discrepancy definitions (Thomson, 2003), but others recognized the usefulness of the one given above for their work (Hunter-Carsch, 2001; Cline, 2002). It was particularly significant that Frederickson and Jacobs (2001), in a study which will be discussed in Chapter Four, chose to use the BPS definition in research that was firmly rooted in the psychological tradition of statistical reporting of results. In 2002 Reason cited a survey whose findings suggested that the BPS definition had widespread support amongst educational psychologists, and it is interesting to note that in the USA, similar alternative approaches to definition and identification have recently been put forward (Fletcher, Coulter, Reschly and Vaughn, 2004). From the start Reason (2001) robustly defended the need for the inclusive definition, particularly as she felt its main strength lay in the way it could easily be applied to children in primary

schools due to its terminological connection with the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998), and for this reason I have chosen to use it in this study.

2.4 How the term 'dyslexia' is used in this study

It is my belief, based on my professional experience, that there are a group of pupils in the middle years of schooling for whom the environment appears satisfactory, but who still experience problems specific to literacy, as opposed to learning in general, which are focused at the word level. They are pupils whose difficulties remain persistent and significant even if they have been targeted with focused interventions that have enabled many "pseudo-dyslexics" (Frith, 2002, p.49) whose problems are rooted in environmental factors (O'Leary, 1997) to make satisfactory progress. Therefore although I acknowledge that there are unresolved issues surrounding the concept of dyslexia, I do not think Julian Elliott's (Moorhead, 2005) view is helpful, and so feel that it is useful to retain the term as a descriptive shorthand. However Burden (2002) reminds us that it is important to be aware that "the difference between describing someone as 'having dyslexia', 'being dyslexic', or 'displaying learning difficulties of a dyslexic nature'" (p.271) is highly significant in terms of theorization of the concept. He feels that the usage as a noun suggests "medicalisation" (Johnson, 2004, p.237), and the first adjectival use may be interpreted as being "handicapped" (Burden, 2002, p.272) in some way, with both implying an all encompassing 'condition' or 'syndrome'. Because of my educationalist stance, I prefer Burden's (2002) third way of using the word as a descriptive "term of convenience to enable us to make sense of otherwise incomprehensible but apparently related aspects of learning behaviour" (p.272). It is therefore in the sense of 'learning difficulties of a dyslexic nature' which manifest on a continuum from mild to severe, that the term 'dyslexic-type literacy difficulties' is used in this thesis. However, from now on the adjective 'dyslexic' will be used whenever the fuller descriptive phrase seems cumbersome. It is important to note at this point that although the term 'dyslexic' was used in private by the staff at the school where this research study was conducted, the only time I heard it used openly was once when a withdrawal session was referred to as 'the dyslexia group'. The

term was therefore never used by me when interacting with the pupils, and consequently a discussion about the effects of being labelled, as had taken place in Anderson (2001), was precluded.

Reason's (1999) inclusive definition and Burden's (2002) use of the term as a descriptive shorthand are particularly appropriate for my study, as the participants had not all been formally 'diagnosed' as dyslexic, but had instead been identified by the school as experiencing specific difficulties with literacy focused at the *word* level. I believe that "the gold standard definition of dyslexia is linked to the person's difficulty in dealing with single words" (Grigorenko 2000, cited in Frederickson and Jacobs, 2001, p.406), and certainly these pupils' main problems were specific to decoding. If they could not understand what they read, it appeared to be a consequence of word reading difficulties rather than because of more global language comprehension problems, and Spooner, Baddeley and Gathercole's (2004) recent study has demonstrated that this phenomenon does occur. Oakhill, Cain and Bryant (2003) suggested that the presence of both hyperlexic and dyslexic individuals in the population shows "that although word reading and comprehension skill are correlates, distinctly different abilities account for variance in these reading subskills" (p.463). The Rose Review (2006) devoted much attention to this issue in relation to their model of the 'simple view of reading' which has been incorporated into the revised Literacy Framework (Primary National Strategy, 2006a). One of the four reading performance patterns generated by the model consists of "children who have difficulty reading the words in the text but good language comprehension: i.e. children for whom poor word recognition skills are the major barrier to understanding written texts" (Rose, 2006, p.81), and it is my contention that, although it is not made explicit, it is the dyslexic group, to which the participants in this study belong, that is being referred to.

2.5 Connecting dyslexia and Literacy

In the past, most studies of literacy development conducted in education departments also focused on within-person functioning of the individual (Comber and Cormack,

1997; Hamilton and Barton, 2001) and tended to use quantitative positivistic methodologies, but at present qualitative naturalistic methods are often employed in sociologically based research studies. A socio-cultural view of literacy (Hall, 2003) is commonly taken in which reading and writing are seen as socially and culturally constructed practices (Freebody, Luke and Gilbert, 1991; Barton, 1994, 2001; Comber and Cormack, 1997; Bloome and Dail, 1997; Hamilton, 1999) which are inexorably bound up with identity (McCarthy and Moje, 2002). Learning to read is therefore considered to take place in situated communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Gee, 2001; Hall, 2003) in which experts support novices (Lave and Wenger, 1991), a view that Rubenstein-Avila (2003) connects with Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the 'zone of proximal development'. Green and Kostogriz (2002) also see Vygotsky's thinking as of central importance within this approach:

Vygotsky's ideas about the social origin of the mind, the role of language and social interaction in the formation of psychological functions, and the importance of a 'practice' account of learning, constitute now a significant conceptual component within new sociocultural approaches to literacy learning. (Green and Kostogriz, 2002, p.107)

Seen through this socio-cultural lens, the causes of literacy difficulties are often situated in problematic interpersonal relationships and environmental mismatches which interfere with effective learning (Martin, 1989; Gaines, 1993; Hart, 1996), and this view can perhaps be connected with the social model of disability (Barton, 1996; Goodley, 2001; Chappell, Goodley and Lawthorn, 2001). Dudley-Marling (2004) makes the related and thought provoking comment that if initial concern with learning difficulties had been within anthropology or sociology, then the field might look very different as interest would have been more likely to focus on why a particular culture should create so much failure. However, this was not to be, and the consequence of the concentration of interest in dyslexia in the discipline of psychology is that in many education departments there has been scepticism about the concept (Riddick, 1996), and a consequent lack of academic interest by comparison with other aspects of literacy learning.

Green and Kostogriz (2002) discuss this tendency for the two perspectives of psychology and sociology in relation to literacy to be viewed as separate, and suggest that this has come about because of the “individual–society dichotomy that bedevils much educational debate” (p.105). However they state that “rather than being held within a limited and limiting binary logic, the focus in literacy research has now shifted to a more complex and accommodating concern with *both* psychology and sociology (Green and Kostogriz, 2002, p.105). The appearance of Kathy Hall’s (2003) book, *Listening to Stephen read*, shows how this trend is influencing the study of literacy difficulties, as in the introduction the author states her intention “to promote understanding of multiple perspectives on reading and its development” (p.2).

Although dyslexia studies cannot be said to be at the forefront of this new approach, there have been moves even in this field to bring education/literacy studies and psychology/dyslexia together as evidenced by the title of Morag Hunter-Carsch’s (2001) book, *Dyslexia: a psychosocial perspective*. Herrington and Hunter-Carsch (2001) state that although Frith (2002) acknowledged the mediating effect of the environment in her multi-level model, which was mentioned above, there was not, at the time they were writing, a “broad-based attempt to integrate models of dyslexia with either radical perspectives of dyslexia or social models of disability” (Herrington and Hunter-Carsch, 2001, p.114). They therefore proposed a ‘social interactive model of specific learning difficulties’ which had four parameters, namely, individual differences, institutional values and constraints, community values and perceptions and social and political context. Since then some academics have used integrative approaches, for example Poole (2003), who made use of an ecological paradigm to debate a ‘wider view’ of dyslexia, and Burden (2005), who despite having an academic background firmly within the educational psychology field, has recently brought a number of “major theories from the social sciences” (p.15) to bear on his study of *Dyslexia and self-concept*, which will be discussed in Chapter Four

A particularly effective example of the new interdisciplinary approach to dyslexia can be found in a chapter by Green and Kostogriz (2002) which forms part of a textbook for an Open University postgraduate course which has the integration of the differing perspectives as its stated aim (Wearmouth, Soler and Reid, 2002; Soler, Wearmouth and Reid, 2002; Reid and Wearmouth, 2002). The authors introduce the main tenets of New Literacy Studies, and show how learning difficulties can be re-theorised within what they call a “socially-critical perspective” (Green and Kostogriz, 2002, p.102). Central to their discussion is Vygotsky’s work on children with disabilities, which was little known in the west before it was brought to the attention of academics by Gindis in 1995. In the 1920s Vygotsky was involved in practical work within a branch of Soviet paediatrics called ‘defectology’, and although this did not include the study of children with specific learning difficulties, his resultant writings in this area are believed by Gindis (1995) and Green and Kostogritz (2002) to have much to say of relevance to the field of special education needs today. Vygotsky believed that the most damaging effect of disablement was not the problem itself, but the way that the society’s normative values impacted on the social and cultural development of the child (Green and Kostogriz, 2002), a view endorsed by Cooper (2006) who recently stated that “we are not ‘disabled’ by our dyslexia, but by the expectations of the world we live in. There is nothing ‘wrong’ with being dyslexic per se” (p.59). Vygotsky took this view further when he said that:

The greatest mistake – the view of a child’s abnormality as only an illness – has made our theory and practice subject to a most dangerous delusion ... we meticulously analyse every corpuscle of the defect ...while we never notice the gold mines of health inherent in each child’s organism. (Vygotsky, 1993, p.80)

When it is remembered that this was originally written more than seventy years ago, it becomes obvious how far Vygotsky’s ideas were ahead of his time. He was referring to physical disabilities, but his words could have been written today as a

critique of the deficit medical model by a proponent of the social model, as they resonate with Goodley's (2001) assertion that "assumptions about the origins of 'learning difficulties' have massive impacts on the treatment of, and research of people with 'learning difficulties'" (p.222).

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed a number of aspects of dyslexia and shown that although the field has long been dominated by cognitive psychology, the concept can be retained when connected to a socio-cultural view of literacy development. I hope that my educational stance on dyslexia will mean that my study can be seen as part of the trend to bring the two academic worlds of psychology and sociology together, because as Dudley-Marling (2004) states as part of his social constructionist view of learning disability/dyslexia:

One cannot be learning disabled on one's own. It takes a complex system of interactions performed in just the right way, at the right time on the stage we call school to make a learning disability. (Dudley-Marling, 2004, p.482)

The above quotation uses the phrase 'the stage we call school', and is therefore a particularly appropriate way to end this chapter, as I now turn in Chapter Three to my overarching theoretical and analytical framework, namely symbolic interactionism, and discuss in detail Erving Goffman's dramaturgical approach to the study of social interaction.

CHAPTER THREE

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND ERVING GOFFMAN

3.1 Introduction

I believe that the research questions posed in Chapter One, which are fundamentally concerned with human interaction, can best be addressed via a naturalistic qualitative research approach (Cohen et al., 2000), and that an “interpretive” paradigm (Graue and Walsh, 1998, p.17) is most appropriate. I decided that ‘constructivism’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) with its emphasis on “understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live within it” (Schwandt, 1994, p.118), and more precisely, the ideas of symbolic interactionist theorists, would be an insightful way to frame my research theoretically and analytically. This view is endorsed by Cohen et al. (2000) who state that this perspective is “singularly attractive to the would-be educational researcher” (p.26) because of the way it fits “naturally with the kind of concentrated action found in classrooms” (p.26). Even more pertinently, Filer and Pollard (2000) assert that symbolic interactionism is a “valid and appropriate theoretical framework” (p.5) particularly for ethnographic studies within the educational field because it “yields a communicable set of analytic concepts with which to illuminate key aspects of taken-for-granted social processes in schools” (p.5). In the first part of this chapter I will use a historical perspective to introduce symbolic interactionism, and then, as incorporation of concepts taken from other disciplines to help understand data is an analytical strategy recommended by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), I will demonstrate how this theory links to my socio-cultural stance, and how it has been effectively used in the educational field. In the second part of the chapter I will narrow the theoretical focus in order to discuss concepts developed in the early work of the mid-twentieth century sociologist, Erving Goffman.

3.2 A historical overview of symbolic interactionism

The term ‘symbolic interactionism’ was coined in 1937 (Rock, 2001), but was not widely used by those working from what we now refer to as this perspective until

the 1960s (Plummer, 1991). However, the theoretical ideas that underpin symbolic interactionism had been originally developed by George Herbert Mead at the 'Chicago school' of sociology in the 1920s (Plummer, 1991) where they were transmitted largely as an oral tradition via student lectures (Rock, 1979). It was within the micro-sociological area of the study of the everyday life of small groups that Mead's ideas, encapsulated in his posthumously published book, *Mind, self and society*, and publicised and further developed by Herbert Blumer (1962, 1969, 1981), became highly influential up to the mid-twentieth century (Plummer, 1991). Between the 'mind' of the individual and people collected together as 'society' is placed the 'self', which consists of a subjective 'I' that is "able to reflect on an objectified sense of the 'me'" (Pollard and Filer, 1999, p.4). This theorisation is connected to another major tenet of symbolic interactionism, namely the 'looking glass self' (Cooley, 1902). This stands as a metaphor for the unique human capacity to be able to see oneself from the perspective of another, who may be a particular person or a generalised societal 'other' (Hewitt, 1984), and also to understand how one's own actions will impact on or influence the actions of others.

Plummer (2000) states that symbolic interactionist theory, as originally put forward, is "built around three key premises" (p.201) relating to the ability of humans to communicate via symbolic systems of subjective meaning, the most important of which is language. He selects from Blumer's writings the following quotation, which he believes encapsulates these ideas:

The first premise is that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them.... The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Blumer, 1969, p.2 quoted in Plummer, 2000, p.201)

At the beginning of his classic text, *The ethnographic interview*, Spradley (1979) examines these tenets via a discussion of a short newspaper report. This real-life

situation has aided my understanding as Spradley (1979) demonstrates clearly how people react to things as “symbols with special meanings” (p.6) rather than to the things themselves, and how the cultural meanings constructed by groups are “inextricably bound up with the social life of their particular communities” (p.6). He also shows how, despite the existence of principles for dealing with the “unanticipated social occasions” (p.7) that he believes make up most of everyday life, people are not “automatons, driven by their culture to act” (p.7) in certain ways, but rather interpret things individually in ways that are continually revised over time. In terms of the situation of the dyslexic pupil attempting to function as a reader within the classroom community of literacy learners, the first tenet can be seen in the symbolism connected to the high status accorded to ‘quality’ literature by comparison with texts derived from popular culture (Marsh, 2003), even though the latter would be more accessible to those with reading difficulties because of their familiarity in the media. The second tenet can be demonstrated by the way school communities accord privileged status to those with proficient literacy skills and marginalise pupils with difficulties (Burden, 2005), who then, because of the negativity transmitted by others, develop low self-esteem due to the operation of ‘the looking glass self’ (Cooley, 1902). However, perhaps more optimistically, the operation of the third and final tenet helps explain why pupils who become distressed because of their ongoing literacy problems can revise their perception of their situation over time, as happened to a participant in Anderson (2001), and this will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

After the middle years of the twentieth century, a tightly knit group of researchers, mainly in the USA (Plummer, 1991), continued to work from the symbolic interactionist position. One of these individuals was Howard Becker (1952a, 1952b, 1986, 1998) whose work Burgess (1995) believes was very influential for those developing the field of educational ethnography within this country. Hammersley and Woods (1984) too suggest that it was the injection of symbolic interactionist ideas from the USA that led to the investigation of experiences of school from the participants’ viewpoint becoming an important research topic in the UK. It may be

that Jackson's (1968) pioneering book, *Life in classrooms*, inspired British researchers, and a significant body of literature on social interaction, particularly that between pupils and teachers, emerged (e.g. Nash, 1973; Delamont, 1976; Hammersley and Woods, 1976, 1984; Woods, 1979, 1980; Measor and Woods, 1984; Pollard, 1985), but it is important to note that none of these studies made pupils with special needs their specific area of interest.

Overall, symbolic interactionist theory became increasingly less central within mainstream sociology from the 1970s both here and in the USA as structural functionalism came to dominate, with the result that society was increasingly viewed as a social system in which children were passively socialised into the adult world (Pollard and Filer, 1999). Denzin (1992) refers to the period from 1980 until the present as the "greying of interactionism" (p.13), and Plummer (2000) states that by the 1990s the theory in its pure form was largely ignored by researchers, except a "select group" (p.194), such as Adler and Adler (1998) in the USA, and Peter Woods (1990; 1996) and Andrew Pollard (1996) in the UK. However, Plummer (2000) suggests that symbolic interactionism has been "quietly one of the most enduring social theories of the twentieth century" (p. 194) because elements, namely the interest in the social construction of practices, the significance of signs and symbols linking with semiotics, the belief in multiple realities which are constantly being redefined, and the emphasis on researcher reflexivity, have been incorporated into post-modern, post-structural and feminist ways of looking at the world. It is true that within some dyslexia-related research that will be referred to in Chapter Four, symbolic interactionist ideas are cited explicitly, as for example when Burden (2005) describes the theory briefly as part of a socio-cultural framework for investigating dyslexia and self-concept. However, self-evident, albeit, unacknowledged, influence seems more common, as when Herrington and Hunter-Carsch (2001) in discussing their model of SpLD, referred to in Chapter Two, state that "we know that the 'disability' associated with dyslexia is largely constructed from the perceptions and social practices of others" (p.129).

In 1993 Gary Fine published an article entitled 'The sad demise, mysterious disappearance, and glorious triumph of symbolic interactionism' in which he documented the "fragmentation" (p.61) of the pure form of symbolic interactionism, its "expansion" as it was "incorporated" (p.61) into wider social theories, and finally its "adoption" (p.61) into the undisputed canon of wisdom associated with naturalistic methodology. Certainly over time I have discovered that the texts that influenced me most when designing both this and my previous research study (Anderson, 2001) have been edited and/or authored by those who embrace this perspective, for example Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Woods (1986, 1996). In relation to my methodological stance, which will be set out in Chapter Five, symbolic interactionist ideas are behind my acknowledgement of the centrality of the researcher's subjective self throughout the research process (Silverman, 1993; Woods, 1996), and the resultant emphasis on the importance of reflexivity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Woods, 1983). There can be no doubt then that symbolic interactionism has been an significant influence methodologically, but the main reason I regard the classic form of the theory as so important is because I have found it to be a powerful theoretical framework to "make sense of 'what is going on' in the social setting being studied" (Ely et al., 1997, p.227), and in the next section I move on to explain why this is so.

3.3 Linking symbolic interactionism to this study

The central importance of symbolic interactionism for this study was confirmed in my mind when I became aware that links can be demonstrated between the theory and the socio-cultural perspective on literacy discussed in Chapter Two. In a discussion paper on the importance of gender as an aspect of identity at times of school transition, Jackson and Warin (2000) pointed out the resonance between Mead and Cooley's view of the self and Vygotsky's words, "the personality becomes for itself what it is in itself through what it is for others" (p.377). Those authors did not develop the link in their paper, but the British symbolic interactionist, Andrew Pollard, has explored the connection with Vygotskian social constructivism more fully. In the first book published on the findings of the 'Identity

and learning' project, which is discussed below, Pollard stated that there is a "basic assumption shared by both approaches that people are active and make decisions on the basis of meanings" (Pollard with Filer, 1996, p.7). However, he makes a useful distinction as he discusses previous research stemming from the two approaches in terms of their psychological or social emphasis:

Whilst social constructivist work had begun to identify the processes by which people 'make sense' in social situations, symbolic interactionist studies promised to provide more detailed and incisive accounts of the dynamics and constraints of the contexts in which learning takes place". (Pollard with Filer, 1996, p.7)

It is because of this emphasis on the context of learning, which will be discussed further in the conclusion to this chapter, that the theory is so compatible with a socio-cultural stance on literacy, and Myers (1992) has demonstrated clearly how the basic tenets of symbolic interactionism and a communities of practice view of literacy dovetail into each other:

Literacy skills are socially negotiated actions that result in meaningful thought and behaviour in the context of prior actions and social interactions of the group. These actions construct the social context for further meaningful action (Crick, 1976). This cyclical negotiation of contexts and skills which meaningfully fit each other represents the theoretical position of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), in which people fit their activity to the activity of others to construct shared meanings about their joint activity. Jointly defined activity reoccurring over time results in social practice. When the actions of social practice include reading or writing, then the social practice is a literacy practice. (Myers, 1992, p.301)

Having shown how the symbolic interactionist position and a socio-cultural stance on literacy can be linked in a general sense, I will now introduce two specific concepts developed by the leading British proponents of symbolic interactionism in order to demonstrate their analytic usefulness for this study.

3.3.1 *Pupil career*

Before introducing Andrew Pollard's concept of 'pupil career' it is perhaps useful to briefly describe his 'Identity and learning programme' (Pollard with Filer, 1996; Pollard and Filer, 1999) in order to contextualize the discussion. The project consisted of a longitudinal case study which used ethnographic methods to investigate the learning identities of ten pupils as they progressed through an English primary school between 1987 and 1994. Although not concerned with literacy learning or with pupils with special educational needs, this work has influenced my thinking greatly because of the emphasis on identity construction and how that interacts with learning dispositions within the classroom situation. There are also resonances with the view of childhood set out in Chapter One, in that Pollard and Filer (1999) explicitly state that their research should be viewed as a "contribution to an emergent paradigm in studies of children" (p.7) which regards pupils as competent social actors.

In Pollard and Filer (1999), 'career' is defined in Goffman's (1961) terms as referring to "any social strand of any person's course through life" (p.119) rather than in the more usual narrower sense of relating only to employment prospects. The authors explain that their conceptualisation of 'pupil career' consists of three components, namely "patterns of outcomes... patterns of strategic action... [and] the evolving sense of self ..." (Pollard and Filer, 1999, p.25). The heart of their thesis is that these components interact in a recursive "spiral of learning and identity as children encounter new experiences through the years" (p.25). Pollard and Filer's overall conclusions show clearly how they have used the basic tenets of symbolic interactionism, introduced earlier in the chapter, to explain how learning and identity interweave to create the pupil career:

1. Children's social development can be conceptualized in terms of 'strategic biography' and represented through narratives of influences, perspectives, actions and consequences in lives over time. ...
2. As children get older and develop their pupil careers, strategic awareness of teacher requirements gradually increases and characteristic patterns of strategic action and orientation to learning tend to become established....

3. On the other hand, the strategies deployed in a pupil career are also dynamic. Pupils negotiate their path through successive teacher and classroom settings and in doing so they create, maintain and shape their pupil identity...

4. The concept of 'pupil career' thus reflects the year-by-year interplay of previous orientations and contextually specific forms of strategic actions in schools... (Pollard and Filer, 1999, pp.303-304)

One way of conceptualising these 'contextually specific forms of strategic action', especially when pupils face difficulties with school work, is to regard them as 'coping strategies', and so I now turn to a discussion of this notion.

3.3.2 *Coping strategies*

As explained in Chapter One, I became interested in the notion of 'coping strategies' as a means to explain the ways school pupils deal with unavoidable "threats, anxieties and challenges" (Jackson and Warin, 2000, p.378) during my previous study (Anderson, 2001), and as my thinking has developed since, the concept has evolved into a central analytic organiser. Breakwell's (1986) definition of a 'coping strategy' was written with reference to the employment rather than educational situation, but is useful because of its acknowledgement that the individual may or may not be aware that their strategic behaviour is directed towards coping:

Any thought or action which succeeds in eliminating or ameliorating threat can be considered a coping strategy, whether it is consciously recognised as intentional or not. (Breakwell, 1986, p.79)

In a discussion of the general pressures that pupils face at school, Chaplain (1995) makes the same point when he states that many "coping strategies are activated automatically" (p.120). He then usefully extends Breakwell's conceptualisation by suggesting that stress results if the individual becomes "consciously aware of having to cope" (p.120). Jackson and Warin (2000) also connected the notion of 'coping' and times of stress in their discussion of school transition times referred to above, and they suggest that coping is a "particularly appropriate way of conceptualising

the operation of the sense of self since it incorporates both cognitive and affective dimensions” (p.378).

Andrew Pollard, whose concept of ‘pupil career’ has been introduced above, first made use of the notion of ‘coping strategies’ in his early research on teacher-pupil interactions in the primary school (Pollard, 1985), and according to him a ‘coping strategy’ is:

...a type of patterned and active adaptation to a situation by which an individual copes. It is a creative but semi-routinised and situational means of protecting the individual’s self. (Pollard, 1985, p.155)

Pollard’s definition has helped me refine my thinking because it has reminded me to be aware that rather than a particular child’s coping strategy being unique to each classroom reading event, habitual patterns may develop. However, Pollard (1985) has also alerted me to the possibility that different children may develop very different coping strategies in response to the same challenging learning situations because:

... ‘coping’ is essentially subjective. Thus individuals can judge if they are or are not ‘coping’ only by reference to criteria which are part of their own perspective regarding the situation. Of course people’s perceptions of any situation will be patterned by various aspects of the culture around them, but for any individual there will be unique features associated depending on his or her biography, socialization and previous experiences. (Pollard, 1985, p.152)

As explained in Chapter One, the work of another British exponent of symbolic interactionism, namely Peter Woods (1979, 1980, 1983, 1990, 1996), has also influenced my thinking on coping strategies. His interest has always been in pupil-teacher interactions in the secondary school, and the main conclusion in his book, *The happiest days? How pupils cope with school* (Woods, 1990), is a useful reminder to a former learning orientated conformist pupil, such as myself, that many children approach classroom tasks with a very different attitude:

'Pupil work' (schoolwork) is not a straightforward matter of application to a task in hand, but the product of a series of adjustments to the exigencies of the moment, and these adjustments are strongly influenced by background cultural factors... Schoolwork is therefore unreal for many pupils, and they duly transform it into something more meaningful - play or sociation. In this form they can live with it, even enjoy it. But work of the old-fashioned order has lost its structural supports and its accomplishment therefore will not be a result of a pure state of application, but a product of negotiation, bartering, adapting and manoeuvring. (Woods, 1990, p.190)

For Woods, coping strategies, which he suggests occur when "individual intention and external constraint meet" (Woods, 1983, p. 9), are the means by which this 'negotiation' of the demands of school between teacher and pupils takes place. In the following quotation he sets out in detail his conceptualisation of the pupil position:

This particular image of person as copier, manager, dramatizer, rationalising a way through means to ends, adjusting behaviour according to situations and contingencies, continually monitoring the process of action, checking and recasting thoughts and intentions in line with changing possibilities and expectations, in short, as a deviser of strategies is basic to interactionist approaches, and particularly apt for the study of largely conflictual situations like schools. (Woods, 1990, p.144)

The above description essentially sets out a view of pupils as strategists, and although not acknowledged, as it is in some of Peter Wood's writing, it betrays the influence of ideas put forward by the dramaturgical sociologist, Erving Goffman, and so I now narrow the theoretical funnel in order to engage in a detailed discussion of his work.

3.4 The work of Erving Goffman

Although the symbolic interactionist concepts discussed above are central to this study, as mentioned in Chapter One, the particular ideas of a researcher who was only loosely associated with the perspective, but whose work in the field of "dramaturgy" (Adler and Adler, 1994, p.383) had "strong affinities" (Plummer, 2000, p.208), have had the greatest influence. At the same time that Herbert Blumer

was writing, the Canadian academic, Erving Goffman, was also publishing work which led to him being hailed as “the greatest sociologist of the latter half of the twentieth century” by Collins (1988, p.41). Despite his fame he actively disassociated himself from the position of any particular perspective (Burns, 1992), and has therefore been described as a “maverick scholar” (Williams, 1998, p.151) who over twenty five years “explicitly borrowed the insights, findings, concepts and vocabularies of many individuals and groups of researchers” (Williams, 1998, p.152).

According to Williams (1998) Goffman was concerned with three recurrent substantive issues, namely, structures of interaction, of the self and of experience. He himself explained shortly before his untimely death that he hoped to develop a distinct area of study of ‘face to face’ encounters (Kendon, 1988) to be called “the interaction order” (Goffman, 1983, p.2) which he said existed whenever “two or more individuals are in one another’s response presence” (p.3). Goffman’s training at the Chicago school (Burns, 1992) meant he was mainly concerned with the sociologically defined Meadian ‘self’, as discussed earlier in this chapter. This has led to criticism that he denied the significance of inner motivations and emotions, but according to Williams (1998), he has been misunderstood, as he intended they should be “treated as virtual, as available for use rather than unavoidably used” (p.155). He has also been accused of making no attempt to link his micro-social theories to macro-social concerns, but Berger (1986) believes that in his analyses he did take account of the “large, sturdy, and durable institutional structures that distributed the resources of interaction (power, prestige, social skills for example) unequally” (p.xv), and Goffman (1983) himself stated that there was a “loose coupling” (p.11) between interaction practices and the social structures of a society.

Goffman was an acutely close observer of the minutiae of everyday life as people interact with others (Williams, 1998; Berger, 1986), and he often made clever use of metaphor “in order to persuade his readers to see things his way” (Williams, 1998, p158). He was much influenced by Simmel’s “notion of social forms [in his concern

to]... search for recurrent patterns of action” (Williams, 1998, p. 153), in that rather than carry out a study and write it up in the usual academic way, he would take a conceptual theme, and then draw explanatory empirical examples from “traditional ethnographic studies of social settings... systematic naturalistic observations... [and] secondary observations based on the study of a vast array of fictional and factual accounts” (Williams, 1998, p.157). This often led to criticism from academics that his writing was little more than a succession of anecdotes, and that he made no attempt to describe his methodology or produce coherent interpretative theory (Burns, 1992), but I agree with Williams (1998) that “his vision of the wider significance of his findings was clear” (p.158). Certainly the way Goffman wrote meant that his work appealed to a wide audience during his lifetime and beyond (Burns, 1992), with the result that he is still widely cited across the humanistic disciplines when interaction is being discussed.

I now propose to look in detail at theoretical concepts developed by Goffman that offer insights which will help me frame my analysis of the coping strategies for reading devised by dyslexic pupils. I will limit the discussion to his earlier publications as it is these that have helped me to generate ideas for my research (Becker, 1986). I am aware that Goffman developed and altered some of the concepts contained in these writings later in his life, so that there may be some truth in the view of critics that in their unmodified form they represent an “incomplete” view of humankind (Burns, 1992, p.357). However, they contain a wealth of insightful and original ways of looking at face to face interaction, even though it must be remembered that his ideas are firmly rooted in their time and place. I therefore acknowledge that at times his use of language and implied sexist attitudes towards women are ethically unacceptable today.

3.4.1 The presentation of self in everyday life

The presentation of self in everyday life (1959) was Goffman’s first major book, and in the preface he explains that:

The perspective employed in this report is that of the theatrical performance: the principles derived are dramaturgical ones. I shall consider the way in which the public individual in ordinary work situations presents himself (*sic*) and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them. (Goffman, 1959, p.9)

Through the book Goffman develops his ideas on how people, when in closed 'team' situations in "any concrete social establishment" (Goffman, 1959, p.9) co-operate to produce a managed performance which is prepared in a 'backstage' region and then presented to the world when 'front stage'. Rueda and Mehan (1986) suggest that Garfinkel (1967) extended Goffman's notion of performance management when he contended that people do plan the impression they will give in social situations, but that often they have to engage in on the spot spontaneous 'improvisational' practices as well. However it is my belief that within his dramaturgical theorization of interaction, Goffman did make provision for what happens when interactional events take an unexpected turn via the notion of "face work" (Goffman, 1955, p.216). He introduced this in an early article in which he defined 'face' as "an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (Goffman, 1955, p.213). He suggested that 'face work' occurs if individuals find themselves in compromising situations in which avoidance or corrective actions during 'front stage' performances are the only way to ensure that their chosen presentation of self is repaired to the extent that they are able to "save face" (Goffman, 1955, p.215).

Although Goffman's ideas were formulated with regard to Anglo American white collar work situations in the mid twentieth century, they can be usefully applied more widely within modern western society, and in particular to my study. Pupils in a classroom community of learners can be regarded as players in a closed team who try to give idealised public performances that "attempt to incorporate and exemplify officially accredited values of the society" (Goffman, 1959, p.45). Because a high status is accorded to proficient literacy skills (Bigger and Barr, 1996; Burden, 2005) it is my contention that dyslexic pupils are likely to attempt to sustain a presentation of themselves as more competent readers than they really are. If this 'public'

performance is compromised for some reason, they will then engage in 'face work' in order to "counteract 'incidents' – that is events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face" (Goffman, 1955, p.216).

Gary Fine (1981) certainly believed that by the middle years of schooling children are capable of this kind of impression management, and it is perhaps useful at this point to provide an anecdote from my professional experience which occurred a number of years ago and was of seminal importance as I developed my thinking in this area. Nine year old Barnaby, who was severely affected by dyslexic-type literacy difficulties, arrived for his 'one to one' lesson at start of the autumn term and announced that he had chosen the first *Harry Potter* novel as his school reading book. As I feared, the book proved a challenge when he read parts of it aloud to me as it was far too difficult, but with my support he managed rather better than I expected, and as he had a video of the film, we mutually decided he would persevere. As the weeks went on it became painfully obvious that his rate of progress through the long book was unacceptably slow. Therefore when he appeared after Half Term with a different rather less demanding book I was somewhat relieved. On asking him whether he had finished *Harry Potter* during the holiday, he told me that he hadn't, but had decided to leave it as it was becoming boring as there was no surprise element because he knew the story so well. I am sure that was true, but I suspect that over time he had come to realise 'privately' that the book was too hard, but his 'public' reason allowed him to 'save face' and maintain the illusion that he was the type of reader who was capable of reading that sort of text.

By coincidence, soon after this incident occurred, Jane Moore (2002) wrote in her column in *Guardian Education* that Year 3 struggling readers in the class in which she helped often chose to read *Harry Potter* books, even though they were too difficult, which she saw as evidence that "these children want to be reading the same stories as everybody else" (p.5). Her words, together with my experience with Barnaby, made me wonder if this series of books were beginning to take on a kind of iconic status as a 'badge of honour' which pupils believed gave the impression to

others that they were competent members of the school community of literate practice, and indeed, Hall (2006) has also recently suggested that children may carry texts around at school for this very reason.

3.4.2 Embarrassment and social organisation

In the early part of his career, Goffman was also interested in the place of embarrassment in social organisation and his ideas on this subject (Goffman, 1956) also usefully inform my analysis of the effect of literacy difficulties on reader identity. Goffman defined embarrassment as occurring “whenever an individual is felt to have projected an incompatible definition of himself to those present” (Goffman, 1956, p.264). He demonstrates that embarrassment is not just a physiological and psychological phenomenon of individual experience, but that it also has a sociological dimension in that the feelings of fluster and awkwardness always occur in the presence of others. Findings from Anderson (2001) supported this, as the word ‘embarrassment’ was not used by the three participants in their interviews when talking about reading to a supportive teacher or parent, but was consistently mentioned in relation to reading aloud in class. Goffman (1956) would interpret this as a situation where “incompatible principles of social organisation occur” (p.264) because the dyslexic pupil believes that there is a danger that the expectation of the audience of hearing a competent reading performance will be unfulfilled if they are hesitant and non-fluent. Goffman’s ideas on this subject were taken up by Gross and Stone (1964) who suggested that there are three requirements for successful role performances, namely identity, poise and confidence, and I would contend that if dyslexic pupils have to read out loud to a general audience, they fail on all three conditions which, according to this theorisation, explains why they may become embarrassed.

3.4.3 Stigma

After his first productive phase of writing, Goffman spent some years studying interaction within mental institutions as a participant observer (Burns, 1992), an experience which led to the publication of *Asylums* (1961). I do not find the insights

into the functioning of total institutions put forward in that book resonate with my work, but those within a second, also written at this time, entitled *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity* certainly do. On the back cover of the book is a useful summary of its position:

Stigma is a study of situations where normal and abnormal meet, and of the ways in which a stigmatized person can shore up his (*sic*) precarious social and personal identity... Goffman argues that stigma is intimately associated with stereotype, and that both are related to the unconscious expectations and norms which act as unseen arbiters in all social encounters. (Goffman, 1963, back cover)

Goffman is largely concerned with the social identity of people who are stigmatised because of the racial group to which they belong, or because they experience mental health problems or physical disabilities, and there is no mention of the educational situation other than a brief discussion of the plight of physically deformed pupils on entering school. However, it was always Goffman's view that his ideas should be widely applied, and in the following quotation he could be speaking from a social model of disability viewpoint about the position of pupils with reading difficulties functioning within a culture which holds proficient literacy skills in high esteem (Bigger and Barr, 1996; Burden, 2005):

The special situation of the stigmatized is that society tells him (*sic*) he is a member of the wider group, which means he is a normal human being, but that he is also 'different' in some degree, and that it would be foolish to deny this difference. This difference itself of course derives from society, for ordinarily before a difference can matter much it must be conceptualized collectively by the society as a whole. (Goffman, 1963, p.149)

For it must be remembered that in pre-literate societies, the concept of dyslexia simply cannot exist, as potentially affected individuals, and those around them, can have no idea that some people possess cognitive differences that mean that they would be stigmatised if reading and writing were developed as universal communicative forms in addition to oracy.

A concept developed in the book that is particularly pertinent for my research is Goffman's categorisation of stigmatised individuals into two distinct groups. Goffman (1963) contrasts "discredited" (p.57) persons who cannot hide their stigmatising characteristics, with the "discreditable" (p.57) group who appear normal to outward appearance, but who are constantly in a position of:

...managing information about his (*sic*) failing. To display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case to whom, how, when and where. (Goffman, 1963, p.57)

Goffman (1963) goes on to say that being 'discreditable' is a very difficult and stressful state to maintain as the individual must engage in "passing as normal" (p.92) in social situations, and therefore must always be on guard if they are to avoid their stigmatising trait being discovered. This situation of being 'discreditable' is surely that of the pupil with dyslexic type reading difficulties in today's upper junior classrooms whether or not they have been given a stigmatising label, as so much emphasis is placed on the importance of reaching externally imposed standards in literacy (Fielding, Daniels, Creese, Hey and Leonard, 1999; Hall, Collins, Benjamin, Nind and Sheehy, 2004). As far back as 1985, Johnson was aware of the stress that deciding whether or not to 'pass as normal' caused one of his participants in a study which will be discussed further in Chapter Four, as is shown by his comment that "the conflict between concealing his reading problem versus accepting and revealing it has been likened to the dilemma of a homosexual 'coming out'" (p.171). Goffman (1963) suggests that as well as 'passing', 'discreditable' individuals may also use "the adaptive technique [of] covering" (p.126) which occurs when there is an attempt to "restrict the display of those failings most centrally identified with the stigma" (p.126). In relation to the school situation, it is possible that dyslexic pupils might cover by using avoidance strategies to conceal their problems, for example by not volunteering to read aloud in a group session, or not putting their hands up to answer questions in a class discussion following the silent reading of a passage of text.

One solution suggested by Goffman (1963) that individuals may use to deal with the stress of 'passing' and 'covering' when managing their presentation of self in public 'front-stage' situations is to disclose in private when 'back-stage' to a small number of "wise" (p.41) supportive people, often family or close friends, who then become "intimately privy to the secret life of the stigmatized individual and sympathetic with it" (p.41). In the case of dyslexic pupils at school this role is usually taken on by teachers and supporting classroom assistants who often become highly sensitive to the need of the individual to not be put in compromising situations with regard to reading. This difference between the 'private' and 'public' acknowledgement of reading problems was discussed in Anderson (2001) in relation to the effects of being labelled as dyslexic, which I acknowledge is rather different from the situation of the pupils in the present study with whom the term was never used openly. However the findings are pertinent if seen as an indication of whether pupils want others to know they have reading problems, as like Riddick (1996), I discovered that the participants in Anderson (2001) were at ease with the idea that their family, teachers and close friends should know they were dyslexic, but were unsure whether everyone else at school should be privy to the information.

3.4.4 Rueda and Mehan's development of Goffman's concepts

Over the years concepts developed in Goffman's early work have continued to be referred to in academic studies across the social sciences, but they have rarely been central in research emanating from the fields of literacy difficulties or dyslexia. However a notable contribution within the American educational literature was provided by Rueda and Mehan (1986) in a discussion paper which used concepts from *The Presentation of self in everyday life* (1959) and *Stigma* (1963) as its main analytic framework. Rueda and Mehan (1986) began their article on 'strategic interactions in the lives of students with learning disabilities' by stating that:

A paradox appears in the lives of students with learning disabilities: on the one hand, they go to great lengths to avoid difficult tasks while trying to appear competent (i.e. they display many of the characteristics associated with people who are attempting to conceal a tarnished identity while

'passing' as bona fide). On the other hand, they check, monitor and evaluate their actions (i.e. they display many of the characteristics associated with 'metacognition'. (Rueda and Mehan, 1986, p.145)

The authors went on to explain their belief that passing and metacognition are "flip sides of the same conceptual coin – strategic interaction" (p.145), and in their conclusion they spelt out in more detail what they mean by this:

In essence both metacognition and passing are ways of saying that people think about acting.... The difference between using more capable peers or adults to increase one's problem-solving activities and using more capable adults or peers to help mask one's incompetence or ignorance seems to lie in the ways in which the pursuit of goals is organised. Checking, monitoring, evaluating, etc., organised in pursuit of socially acceptable goals is metacognition. The same group of strategies organised to proceed undetected is passing. (Rueda and Mehan, 1986, p.159)

Although this article was a discussion paper rather than a report of a research project, the authors gave examples taken from case studies, both their own and those of other researchers, which showed these strategies in operation during particular literacy events in both school and everyday lives of children with a variety of learning difficulties that affect reading ability. In their vignettes they were at pains to show that both metacognition and passing are not strategies used all the time by individuals, but are context specific during social interactions. With regard to practices involving reading, they stated that the school situation tended to be difficult to handle, as interaction with texts is constant and unavoidable, and they contrast this with the out of school situation where passive avoidance of print could take place more easily. At one point they suggested that a boy who used passing behaviour during a reading activity at school was "in effect, was working on two tasks at once: the management of his identity and the management of the intellectual task put to him" (Rueda and Mehan, 1986, p.151), and that because of this was putting himself in a difficult cognitive state that was likely to compromise learning. Rueda and Mehan's (1986) article was written soon after Goffman's death, and they did not develop their thinking on this topic in later work, but this one article, with its

meld of theory and supporting empirical evidence, shows clearly the power of his concepts for aiding understanding of the reader identity of pupils with literacy difficulties.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that symbolic interactionism is a “tradition [that] is alive and well” (Gordon et al., 2001, p.199) by providing an overview of the theory and describing how specific concepts have been used in educational research. I have also shown that Goffman’s ideas, although put forward in mid-twentieth century America, are a valid way to help make sense of the pupil experience in the context of British schools of the early twenty first century. As Peter Woods (1996) argues, even in these post-modern times symbolic interactionism continues to hold much ‘promise’ for educational sociologists because, via its central tenets, it can help “bring together cognition and affectivity, the micro and the macro” (p.76). I would contend that within dyslexia studies there has been too much emphasis until the present on the ‘micro’ world of the psychology of reading development, and not enough on how the affective domain of the emotions and the self interact with cognition within the ‘macro’ world of the classroom.

If ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ are used in the more usual broader sense, then I believe that a symbolic interactionist ethnographic study can connect different structural levels within society, and I reject criticism, such as that put forward by Skelton (2001) that there is a neglect of wider influences. As Pollard with Filer (1996) suggest, the “three domains of influence” (p.5) on learning, namely “intra-individual” (p.5) “interpersonal” (p.5) and “socio-historical” (p.6) cannot really be understood without reference to each other. I therefore believe that social actors can only construct their symbolic meanings, and ethnographic researchers can only make sense of what is observed or spoken about, if the influence of the local classroom learning environment is viewed as “embedded in many larger nested and overlapping contexts” (Graue and Walsh, 1998, p. 10), namely the school, area and national educational situation. I was very conscious of these influences throughout

the fieldwork stage of this research, and so I am aware that specific context must always be noted when any school related literature is consulted. With this in mind, in the next chapter I turn my attention to a review of previous research from a variety of perspectives in order to discover what insights it can provide that inform my study of how dyslexic pupils cope with the demands of classroom reading.

CHAPTER FOUR

PERSPECTIVES ON DYSLEXIA AND CLASSROOM READING

4.1 Introduction

Having set out the core substantive interest and theoretical underpinnings of this research, in this chapter I will conduct a broad based review of literature that informs the study of dyslexia and classroom reading. In the same way that, as explained in Chapter Two, I have retained the concept of dyslexia but have chosen to study the subject via a socio-cultural lens, in this chapter I will draw on research from a variety of sociological perspectives, but will also introduce literature from the psychological field. In order to keep the reader's attention on the core interest of the study, I shall begin by reviewing research that has focused on social and emotional aspects of dyslexia. I will then widen the area of interest out by looking at American sociological research that has discussed the classroom experiences of pupils with reading difficulties. In the next section I will refocus on the dyslexia field, but will look at a body of research that takes a very different position from that reviewed previously as it draws from psychological theories of self-concept. In the last part of the chapter I will broaden the discussion again as I consider how literature on aspects of learner motivation that has arisen from the discipline of psychology can inform the study of reading difficulties.

4.2 Literature which uses a sociological perspective to look at the problems experienced by dyslexic pupils with reading at school

A vast and often complex literature exists on the subject of dyslexia, but as mentioned in Chapter One, most research has been from a cognitive psychological perspective, focusing on within-person functioning. However, a small body of research concerned with the social and emotional effects of dyslexia does exist (Humphrey and Mullins, 2002a), and in this section I review studies which have highlighted the problems experienced by pupils with reading at school both via

reflections of adults on their childhood experiences and via the views of pupils on their current experiences.

4.2.1 Reflections of dyslexic adults on their childhood experiences

Given the neglect of the pupil voice until recently, as discussed in Chapter One, it is no surprise that Riddick (1996) asserted that up until when she was writing in the mid 1990s, most of the evidence on the social and emotional effects of being a dyslexic child had come from personal accounts and life histories in which adults reflected retrospectively on their experiences. Riddick (1996) states that when adults talk of their experiences they “tell it how it is” (p.3), but I would suggest that interpretation is more complex, as I take Silverman’s view that personal reflections consist of narratives constructed to put across a particular stance and may include “atrocious stories” (Silverman, 1993, p.109). However, despite this caution, I feel a discussion of reflective accounts written by, or about, adults is appropriate in this review, as although the main concern of many individuals is with the wide social and emotional consequences that their dyslexic difficulties had on childhood experiences (Riddick, 1996), specific coping strategies for reading and dissembling behaviours are sometimes described.

Reflective accounts seem to be reported in two ways in the literature. Firstly, there are populist books written by dyslexic adults themselves, their motivation being to publish their life-histories in order to increase awareness. Some of these individuals are well known, such as the actor Susan Hampshire who has contributed forewords to books on dyslexia, for example, Hornsby (1992) in which she recalled the “terror” (p.ix) of waiting for her teacher to ask her to read aloud at school. However, many of the adults who have written about their childhood experiences are not well known, such as the individuals quoted in Osmond (1993) who divulged coping strategies such as pretence and memorisation when learning to read. In *The teacher who couldn't read*, the American author, John Corcoran (1995), related how via “survival techniques” (p.107) he managed to keep his very severe problems with literacy learning secret throughout school and college. The pretence that he was competent

in literacy skills continued for some time after he had graduated as a teacher and many of his recollections resonate with concepts developed by Goffman (1959, 1963) which were discussed in Chapter Three. For instance at one point in his account he stated that in order to “create the illusion of literacy, I always tucked a newspaper under my arm or carried books as props” (Corcoran, 1995, p.128), and he revealed that overall his life was full of anxiety because “an illiterate person who gives the appearance of reading is always in danger of being discovered” (p.113).

The second type of literature on social and emotional consequences is that which draws on reflections of the past by adult dyslexics within research studies written by academics. An early example of this approach was a case study by Johnson (1985) of three American adults with ‘reading disability’ which used a Vygotskian theoretical framework. The male participants were described as having normal intelligence, but severe reading problems at the word level, so it would appear that their difficulties were of a dyslexic nature. One of the areas that Johnson looked at was coping strategies, and he reported that in their school years the participants said they avoided reading by listening for oral instructions and bluffing. Johnson (1985) made the telling point that such strategies “are effective only for attaining short-term survival goals but are self-defeating in terms of the long-term goal of learning to read” (p.159), and he explained that this effect was intensified by the operation of Stanovich’s (1986) ‘Matthew effect’, as mentioned in Chapter One, in that the men had taken :

...a preventative approach to the problem, which involved systematically excluding print from their lives. The goal of their behaviour was never to be caught in a situation in which they might be expected to read... Thus even though they may have wanted to learn to read, they systematically missed opportunities to practice (*sic*) decoding. (Johnson, 1985, p.160).

Around the same time Bruce (1987) reported interview research in this country which consisted of a large follow-up study of young adults who had received specialist dyslexia support in London. Although his main concern was with their educational and career histories, the findings contained some useful insights because

Bruce (1987) discussed the coping strategies for reading that his participants had used at school. He stated that “reading was affected by attempts at concealment – at the most extreme by the feigning of illness to avoid reading aloud” (p.9), and that one boy “memorised passages for reading aloud in class, and always sat next to friends willing to whisper the ending” (p.10). Recently Terras, Minnis, Mackensie and Thompson (2004) have used focus group methodology (Cohen et al., 2000) to research the psychosocial effects on six adults of living with dyslexic problems. The authors state that “coping with reading, especially in the context of school, was frequently reported as stressful, anxiety provoking and damaging to self-esteem” (Terras et al., 2004, p.3) as their participants reflected on childhood experiences, and they include quotations which mention panic and avoidance tactics such as going to the toilet to get out of having to read.

Taking rather a different approach, Nistler and McMurray (1993) related the retrospective story of McMurray’s struggle with literacy development throughout her education in order to increase awareness of dyslexia amongst teacher educators in America. Although perhaps in not such an extreme way as Corcoran (1995), McMurray too managed to keep her reading problems concealed at school by means of avoidance strategies and her mother’s collusion. The breakthrough came with a writing assignment at college in which she decided to describe an “especially painful read-aloud fourth grade experience” (Nistler and McMurray, 1993, p.560), and the article reports that once she had escaped from the cycle of deceit, her learning became more successful, such that she eventually became a talented special needs teacher herself. The American academic, Rosalie Fink (1995), was also interested in the childhood experiences of individuals who achieve outstanding success in their chosen careers despite being dyslexic. She discovered in interviews with twelve adults who all needed to be able to function as competent readers at work, that a common theme was a coping strategy for reading that they developed as they grew up, which in some ways was the opposite of the various kinds of avoidance or concealment techniques described so far. “Through avid reading about a topic of passionate interest” (Fink, 1995, p.268), such as the American Civil War, they used

their knowledge of the subject to provide semantic context which compensated for poor decoding skills, and this sustained and nurtured their reading development. It must be acknowledged that these were all exceptional individuals who were famous or very successful in their chosen professions, so their experiences cannot really be seen as typical of the wider dyslexic population. However, Johnson (1985) also found that his participants made “extensive use of their general knowledge and the context of a given word or phrase in order to figure it out” (p.160). It is interesting too that one of the participants in Anderson (2001) used this coping strategy when motivated by fascination with the fantasy fiction genre to make meaning from Philip Pullman’s ‘Dark Materials’ trilogy of novels, even though the reading level was much higher than most texts he read.

4.2.2 Reflections of dyslexic pupils on their current experiences.

Since the mid 1990s there have been several relevant British sociological studies that have used interviews to foreground the perspective of dyslexic pupils themselves. Edwards’ (1994) research, in which the social and emotional consequences of the educational experiences of eight teenage boys are recounted in their own words, is widely quoted and was used as a ‘model’ example of the case study approach by Wellington (1996). Edwards taught at a specialist independent boarding school, and initially set out to study a sample of boys whom she felt were successes of the system, but as the investigation developed and she was made aware of their overwhelmingly negative experiences, she changed her focus to *The scars of dyslexia*. Edwards (1994) did not explicitly discuss reading, but her study showed how dyslexic problems, if not sensitively handled, can engender a high level of stress which may lead to significant secondary behavioural problems and interfere with all areas of learning (Gentile and McMillan, 1987). In another interview study conducted with twenty pupils of primary and secondary age, which looked at ‘The emotional world of Specific Learning Difficulties’, Bigger and Barr (1996) did make relevant points about reading. They reported that as their sample reflected on earlier learning experiences, they showed that they were aware they were having more

difficulty learning to read than most pupils, even before “it became an issue for the adults [and that their] first response was almost always to conceal or deny it” (Bigger and Barr, 1996, p.382). The authors went on to explain how they believed that this distressing feeling of confusion, and the lack of understanding that it was often met with both from adults and other children, frequently led to a “desperate, private and lonely emotional state [which could] delay the possibility of more useful learning” (Bigger and Barr, 1996, p.383), a finding which resonates with those of Edwards (1994).

Perhaps the most detailed academic research to date into wide-ranging social and emotional consequences of dyslexia was carried out by Barbara Riddick in 1996. Her study, which was largely based on interviews with twenty-two Dyslexia Institute pupils, aged eight to fourteen, and their parents, provides a wealth of thought-provoking findings, and as she allowed the voices of the children to be heard in the numerous verbatim quotations, the book provides a vivid account of *Living with dyslexia*. In a chapter entitled ‘Views on school’, Riddick (1996) reported a list of the children’s perceived problems with work, and reading was shown to be of much less concern than spelling, writing and speed of work, both for those in the primary and secondary age groups. She suggested that a possible reason for this was that they had all received specialist support for some time, and so had tended to improve their standard of reading a good deal. However Riddick (1996) went on to say that “several did mention they had had problems with reading in the past” (p.122) and that dislike of “reading aloud in class” (p.124) was frequently admitted to. It is unfortunate in relation to my research interest that Riddick did not report in the same detail on reading as she did on writing, but she did make the relevant points that in order to cope with written work the pupils devised strategies which involved seeking support from others, minimizing task demands, or engaging in avoidance techniques. She also commented that, although the pupils said they often felt “disappointed, frustrated, ashamed, fed up, sad, depressed, angry and embarrassed by their difficulties” (Riddick, 1996, p.129), there seemed to be a defensive tendency,

particularly among the younger pupils, to underestimate or be reluctant to acknowledge problems with school work. This finding led Riddick to ask:

Were they genuinely unaware of the extent of their difficulties or were they personally aware but not willing to admit to them, or had they consciously or unconsciously minimised their difficulties in order to keep their self-esteem intact? (Riddick, 1996, pp.125-6)

The quotation above shows that Riddick (1996) was aware that pupils engage in impression management, and although not acknowledged, may have been influenced by concepts developed by Goffman in *The presentation of self in everyday life*, as discussed in Chapter Three. Riddick (1996) certainly had some familiarity with Goffman's work as she cited *Stigma* when she discussed the effects of labelling, and in fact she went on to make a thorough 'examination of the relationship between labelling and stigmatisation' in dyslexia (Riddick, 2002) in which Goffman's (1963) ideas were more central to her argument. In that paper she drew on her 1996 data and also on that from a later study of university students (Riddick, Sterling, Farmer and Morgan, 1999) and concluded that, even if there was no overt labelling, stigmatisation could still occur because of the associated difficulties. This was the position of the participants in my study as the dyslexia label was not used openly in the school, but there can be no doubt that their problems with reading impacted adversely on their experiences as members of the classroom community of literacy learners. I now turn to a body of American literature that has focused on just this issue.

4.3 American sociological literature which has focused on the classroom experiences of pupils with reading difficulties

Delamont (2002) has stated that as most studies of classroom interaction have looked at normally achieving children, "Britain is short of observational work on learning-disabled pupils" (p.52). At the start of Chapter Two I discussed terminology and suggested that there was some confusion over whether the dyslexic group of pupils was being referred to when the American term 'learning-disabled'

was used, and as Delamont's (2002) discussion proceeds it becomes obvious that her intention was to refer to individuals with a wide range of learning difficulties. In fact some recent British ethnographic research has focused on inclusionary/exclusionary school experiences of pupils with unspecified special needs (Benjamin, 2002; Benjamin, Nind, Hall, Collins and Sheehy, 2003). However, Delamont's (2002) assertion does seem to hold good with regard to dyslexia related research, in that the British studies reviewed in the previous section all used interviews as their sole method of data collection. In the American literature, by comparison, a body of mainly ethnographic literature has arisen in which the specific concern has been with the problems faced in the classroom by pupils with learning/reading disabilities in the middle years of schooling. In this section of the review I consider these research studies in detail, and then connect the discussion back to symbolic interactionist ideas via a consideration of a particularly pertinent American paper on the coping strategies of older unsuccessful readers.

4.3.1 *'Struggling readers' in the middle years of schooling*

The impetus for this body of research, which was conducted from the early 1990s onwards, seems to have come from puzzlement expressed by researchers with professional backgrounds similar to mine. Their concern was that although a consensus was emerging regarding what constitutes effective early reading instruction (Adams, 1990), many pupils were still failing to progress satisfactorily, and the consequence of this was that as they rose through the school grades they struggled more and more as reading demands associated with the curriculum proliferated in the middle years (Salinger, 2003).

In 1991 Raylene Kos studied four middle school reading disabled pupils aged thirteen to fifteen years old, and as she felt they were well able to reflect on their experiences, she suggested that if schools wanted to improve their policies and practice they should "listen to the voices of students who ... have experienced the frustrations of being captured in a system that has not even taught them to read"

(Kos, 1991, p.893). The participants were several years older than the pupils in my study, and the primary method of data collection was full participant observation with the author acting as a tutor during 'one to one' reading sessions, but Kos also used some methods similar to mine, as will become apparent in Chapter Five. She conducted semi-structured interviews which explored reader identity and attitudes to instruction, made classroom observations during lessons that involved reading and analysed background documentation. She then used her body of richly detailed data to build up a picture of each of the four students prior to looking for cross case similarities "for the purpose of uncovering factors that may have prevented these students from progressing in their reading development" (Kos, 1991, p.875). She discussed the stress that the situation induced and the consequent low self-esteem shown by the pupils because of their acute awareness of their shortcomings, and she concluded that many aspects of their school experiences had contributed to the distressing fact that all had been identified during their early years of schooling, but none had made much progress despite extensive extra support. This led her to suggest that school responses may actually have perpetuated reading difficulties because instruction was often ineffective, and classroom tasks tended to be poorly matched to ability leading to pretence and avoidance strategies on the part of the pupils.

Around the same time Zigmond and Baker (1990) also asserted in a preliminary report of a large longitudinal project on the effectiveness of inclusion of learning-disabled (LD) pupils in elementary schools, that those placed in mainstream classes made little progress in reading because on the whole "business as usual" (p.176) continued. In the more detailed papers associated with the final report (Baker, 2005; Zigmond, 1995; Zigmond and Baker, 1995) the authors stated that even if accommodations were made they tended to be for the whole group. Because of this the changes made were not sufficiently well individualised, and the result was that there were low levels of pupil participation and "not much learning was taking place" (Zigmond and Baker, 1995, p.247), a finding which led a commentator to write that his "worst fears [were] realized" (Martin, 1995, p.193) about inclusion.

Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen and Forgan (1998) were interested in whether learning disabled pupils preferred “inclusion or pull-out service delivery” (p.148) at school , and in the course of their discussion mentioned that their team had also found that “students with LD are provided [with] few accommodations in the general education classroom to meet their academic needs and little of the work they are engaged in is at their reading level” (p.155).

Morris, Ervin and Conrad (1996) conducted a detailed case study of Brett, an American 6th grade (Y7) male pupil, and reported that he had been assessed as learning disabled/dyslexic by his school, but despite extra support was still only functioning at a 2nd grade (Y3) level in basic literacy skills. Morris et al. (1996) also suggested that the reason for Brett’s lack of progress was that in the past his extra tuition had not been sufficiently tailored to his exact needs, and they then stated that once he received a programme that was individualised, his motivation to learn improved and he made steady progress towards independence as a reader. The authors underline their concern that, as the other studies reviewed here have shown, there are:

...many thousands of Bretts sitting in middle-school classrooms. These students struggle mightily with grade level reading assignments and, because they are forced to read at frustration level most of the school day, their reading may improve little from year to year; in effect they fall further behind their peers. (Morris et al. 1996, p.375)

This accumulating evidence about the problems faced by struggling readers in the middle years of schooling was extended further in a study conducted by Gay Ivey in 1999. At the start of her article Ivey (1999a) made a plea for more qualitative, as opposed to “experimental and highly controlled” (p.175) research, and she cited Kos (1991) and Morris et al. (1996) as the only directly relevant prior work which had looked in depth at a small number of individuals. Ivey (1999a) used the usual ethnographic mix of observation and interviews, but also included informal ‘one to one’ sessions when books were read and discussed, as I did, as will become apparent

in Chapter Five. Ivey chose to study three 6th Grade (Y7) pupils, one of whom had been previously identified as an above average reader, one considered to be average but who was reluctant to read, and one who was reading disabled, and these categorisations resonate with Moss' (2000) typology of junior aged British pupils into "can/do" (p.104), "can/don't" (p.105) and "can't yet/don't" (p.105) groups of readers. However, after analysing her data, Ivey (1999a) came to the conclusion that by the middle years of schooling, prior experiences meant that reading behaviour had become complex and context dependent, such that pupils could not be categorised simplistically as skilled or unskilled, engaged or reluctant. The detailed example of the reading disabled pupil showed that the girl could become motivated to read books if they were set at an easy level for her, or were about non-fiction areas that interested her. Ivey (1999a) also explained that the girl was able to discuss texts in an involved way if they had been previously read out to her even when she had appeared to be inattentive, and she concluded that she had learnt to cope in the classroom by becoming a strategic listener rather than trying to follow text because she knew she lost her place and got left behind.

At the end of her article (Ivey, 1999a), and in another that draws both on material from the research study and from her extensive experience of teaching struggling middle school readers (Ivey, 1999b), Ivey reflected on ways that she felt tuition for such pupils could be improved, and her recommendations show how case study can lead to rich insights that go far beyond the confines of the specific context. She states her passionate belief that pupils should be given more opportunity to read at comfortable independent levels for them (i.e. with at least 95% accuracy (Fielding and Roller, 1992)) and insists that they feel a great sense of relief and pleasure if allowed to do this rather than stigmatisation because they are on 'easy' books; that reading should be for authentic purposes rather than contrived; and that personal interests and tastes should be accommodated as this will lead to greater perseverance with hard material. This advice, viewed from my professional stance, seems to be a model of good practice, but depressingly the recommendations are at variance with the formulaic lessons, as proscribed in the Literacy framework (DfEE, 1998), and

reductive remedial tuition sessions that I observed during fieldwork, as will become apparent in the empirical chapters.

The most recent contribution to this body of American case study literature has been provided by Robertson (2003). She used data from her doctoral research to construct a case study of a 5th grade (Y6) pupil called Victor who was categorised as learning disabled and who was receiving his education in a general rather than special needs classroom. Robertson (2003) vividly documented the plight of a pupil experiencing “cognitive confusion” (p.16) which resulted from being caught in the middle of a “turf war” (p.14) between his class and withdrawal session teachers. Robertson (2003) explained how both members of staff were equally dedicated, but that their philosophies of what constituted literacy competence were diametrically different, such that one viewed Victor as severely reading disabled because her judgement was based on ‘drill and skill’ acquisition criteria, while the other, taking a ‘whole language’ approach, saw him as an engaged literacy learner who loved books. Although Robertson (2003) documented Victor’s steady progress as a literacy learner despite this situation, it was inevitable that the mixed messages he received about his literacy competence had a detrimental effect on his educational development and reader identity. Given that the participants in my study received reading tuition from a number of members of staff, both in in-class and withdrawal situations, this study has alerted me to the possibility of the existence of similar confusion.

I end this section by drawing attention to an American interview study which focused entirely on the pupils’ own perceptions (McCray, 2001; McCray, Vaughn and Neal, 2001), as the richly detailed findings confirm the conclusions of the rest of the research reviewed here. McCray and her colleagues used a semi-structured schedule to elicit the views on reading of twenty pupils in grades 6 – 8 (Y7-9) who were identified as learning disabled using IQ/reading discrepancy criteria, and who were receiving extra withdrawal teaching for part of their school day. McCray (2001) found that “despite many years of challenge with reading, these students made it very clear that literacy is important to them and that all they want is a chance

to learn to read better” (p.298) because of their acute awareness of the fundamental importance of reading for success in their future lives. They also said they were desperate to be allowed to engage with the same type of reading materials and assignments as the rest of their classes, rather than suffering the reductive version of the curriculum they were sometimes offered. Their interview responses also confirmed the findings of the ethnographic studies reviewed above, in that they articulated that what they craved was explicit tuition on reading strategies that was much more focused on their individual needs than that they currently experienced. However a discontinuity in their thinking, similar to that found in Anderson (2001), as discussed in Chapter Three in relation to Goffman’s ideas in *Stigma*, was revealed as they also divulged the importance of trying to maintain an air of secrecy about their problems. They therefore emphasised how important it was that any specialised tuition was delivered sensitively in a way that would not cause them to feel embarrassed in front of their peers.

4.3.2 *Coping strategies of unsuccessful readers*

As discussed in Chapters One and Three, I have found the symbolic interactionist notion of coping strategies a useful way to frame the discussion of the problems with reading faced at school by pupils with learning difficulties/dyslexia. None of the research reviewed so far has used this lens, and so at the end of this survey of sociological literature I bring the reader’s attention back to my core interest via a consideration of an American study that has looked specifically at this subject. In ‘Hiding out in secondary content classrooms: coping strategies of unsuccessful readers’, Brozo (1990) observed three Grade 11 (Y12) pupils during classroom reading activities. Even though these pupils were much older, and therefore at a very different stage of schooling to my participants, there are many resonances between the coping strategies he uncovered and those I will reveal in the empirical chapters. Brozo (1990) found that “the most common way that these poor readers coped with their inability to read well was to avoid eye contact with the teacher, especially when the teacher asked questions about the reading assignment [and that] the next most frequent coping behaviour was to engage in disruptive behaviour” (p.326). He also

discovered via interviews with the pupils that they had learned to become good listeners, and had come to “rely on ‘with it’ classmates when they needed to quickly tune into classroom activities” (p.362). They also used good readers to find their place in textbooks, sought help from friends with homework, forgot “to bring class books and other materials that may be needed for oral reading [and lastly] used manipulative techniques in and out of class to gain teachers’ positive perceptions” (p.362).

Brozo (1990) drew attention to Johnson’s (1985) important point, already mentioned in Chapter Three, that such “coping strategies often are effective only for attaining short-term survival goals, but are self-defeating in terms of the long term goal of learning to read” (p.139). Hart (1996) too has highlighted the tension that can exist when the response of a pupil with literacy difficulties can be interpreted either as a coping strategy to enable them to complete a task or as a hindrance to their learning. She reminds her readers to be aware that “children’s own strategies for coping with the demands of classroom life may precisely be designed to obscure from us the nature of the help that is required” (Hart, 1996, p. 93). Rueda and Mehan (1986), whose work has been discussed extensively in Chapter Three, also make the point that because the chosen strategies often result in avoidance of difficult work or the eliciting of adult support to complete tasks for them, pupils compromise their learning by their use. In fact in his classic book, *How children fail*, Holt (1982) similarly drew attention to the presence of damaging learning stances when he stated his belief that the American pupils he observed were mainly motivated by fear of failure, with the result that their coping strategies were aimed “above all else at avoiding trouble, embarrassment, punishment or loss of status” (p.91). Holt (1982) was talking in general terms, but his comment that “this is particularly true of the ones who have a tough time in school” (p.91) could be read as a reference to the lot of learning disabled/dyslexic pupils as they attempt to cope with the demands of classroom reading. I now move on in this review to consider the effect on the individual of being in such damaging social situations via a discussion of literature that has arisen within the discipline of psychology.

4.4 Literature which uses a psychological perspective to look at self-concept in dyslexic pupils

The large volume of dyslexia-related literature that looks at within-person functioning from a cognitive psychological standpoint does not usefully inform the subject matter of this study, but research from the social psychology perspective can provide illuminating insights both into aspects of identity, which will be discussed in this section, and into learner motivation, which will be discussed in the next and final part of this chapter. I begin this section by introducing the notion of 'self-concept' before focusing on specific research studies.

4.4.1 Self-concept and self-esteem

Riddick (1996) has stated that 'self-concept' (sometimes called 'self-image') and 'self-esteem' (sometimes called 'self-worth') are important elements affecting the learning process, and are therefore relevant to a sociological study of dyslexia. As the terms 'self-concept' and 'self-esteem' are used "somewhat interchangeably in the literature" (Riddick, 1996, p.229), the result has been confusion over what is being referred to in some published research (Burden, 2005). I agree with Riddick (1996) that the two terms are distinctive in that:

The self-concept organises all that we think we are, what we think we can do, and how best we think we can do it, while self-esteem is the extent to which we are pleased by that concept, or feel worthy (McCarthy and Schmeck, 1988, p.131).

In Burden's (2005) recent book, *Dyslexia and the self-concept: seeking a dyslexic identity*, the work of Burns (1982) on self-concept and education is introduced. Burden states that according to Burns:

Self-concept appears to have a three-fold role: maintaining a sense of inner consistency, determining how experiences are interpreted, and providing a set of expectancies" (Burden, 2005. p.7-8).

Burden (2005) then explains how the operation of these three roles can lead to dyslexic pupils concluding, in relation to the first role, that they cannot learn to read

because they are stupid; in relation to the second, that if they fail one learning task this will apply globally; and in relation to the third, that the expectation of failure will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Burns (1982) conceptualizes the self-concept as hierarchal rather than global and suggests it is composed of an “array of self-attitudes” (p.24) divided up into physical, social, academic and emotional domains which operate within three “perspectives” (p.24), namely:

- 1.The cognized self-concept, or the individual’s perception of his (*sic*) abilities, status and roles. It is his concept of the person he thinks he is.
- 2.The other or social self. This is how the individual believes others see and evaluate him.
- 3.The ideal self. This is the kind of person the individual hopes to be or would like to be. (Burns, 1982, p.25)

It then follows that if an individual’s perception of his/her three ‘selves’ are close together, self-esteem is high, but if they “are far apart, the gap produces discontent, ineffective learning and slow progress” (Cotton, 1995, p.111), and low self-esteem results. A hierarchical view of the self–concept allows for the possibility that self-esteem may be low for one domain, rather than globally, and for dyslexic pupils, this is likely to be the academic domain (Elbaum and Vaughn, 2001). Certainly there would seem to be an association between low self-esteem and low educational achievement (for comprehensive reviews see Riddick, 1996; Riddick et al, 1999; Burden, 2005). A symbolic interactionist interpretation would suggest that the operation of Burn’s ‘other or social self’ is salient here, and in fact in an early study, Brookover, Thomas and Paterson (1964) used Mead and Cooley’s theorisation of the self, as discussed in Chapter Three, to look at ‘self-concept of ability and school achievement’. They concluded that it is the “composite image rather than the images of specific others that appear to be most closely associated with the student’s self-concept in specific subjects” (Brookover et al., 1964, p.278). If this is still so today then the current educational climate of performativity (Hall, Collins. Benjamin, Nind

and Sheehy, 2004) must mean that a primary school is a stressful place for dyslexic pupils. Gentile and McMillan (1987) have defined 'stress' as "the body's response to any extra demand placed on it" (p.2). In their book, *Stress and reading difficulties*, they set out a list of what they call "threatening practices" (Gentile and McMillan, 1987, p.4) which act as stressors lowering self-esteem in affected pupils, and these include being forced to read aloud to the class, and made to read books that are too hard or designed for younger pupils. The authors then warn that as a result of these damaging experiences pupils might develop "specific maladaptive" (p.10) fight or flight reactions, which are "manifested in a range of behaviour from anger and aggression to avoidance and apprehension" (p.10). Gentile and McMillan's (1987) work is thought provoking, but their discussion is couched in general terms, and so I now consider literature which has clearly identified the group of pupils whose literacy difficulties are of a dyslexic type.

4.4.2 Research on self-concept in dyslexic pupils

Many studies of self-concept and self-esteem in relation to dyslexia were conducted in the USA some time ago, but as they used self-administered inventories, rating scales or questionnaires, Riddick (1996) advises that findings derived from these instruments should be viewed with caution as they are culture dependent and susceptible to respondent dishonesty. Lack of space precludes a detailed review here, but it is perhaps useful to set out the conclusions that Burden (2005) has recently drawn from his extensive survey of this body of literature:

- there is a clear negative association between early and continuing literacy difficulties and self-concept/self-esteem;
- these negative feelings are likely to be long lasting;
- the ways in which they may manifest themselves are likely to be complex, taking the form of vulnerability to stress, feelings of learned helplessness and depression. (Burden, 2005, p.13)

These conclusions paint a worrying picture of negative consequences, but it is important not to use them to suggest that some kind of mental health problem is the

inevitable result of having dyslexic type literacy difficulties. Rourke (1988) discovered that “although some [learning disabled pupils] suffer from socio-emotional disturbance, most do not” (p.801), and certainly only one of the three participants in Anderson (2001) was affected in this way. Lamm and Epstein (1992) also concluded from a statistically based study of adolescents and young adults that there was no association between specific reading impairments and serious emotional difficulties. However, they did comment that “this conclusion does not imply that individuals with dyslexia are unaware or unconcerned by their learning difficulties” (p.613), but like all “those facing prolonged frustration, cope with it in a variety of ways” (p.613). What is certain is that even though this may not necessarily lead to problems sufficiently severe to be called ‘emotional disturbance’, it is likely that, as even quite young children are aware that “the ability to read ... is a socially desirable skill” (Young and Tyre, 1983, p.98) within the classroom situation, most pupils with dyslexic type difficulties are likely to experience lowered academic self-esteem brought about by a mismatch between their level of functioning and that of the majority of their peers.

Since the mid 1990s a small body of British literature has appeared which has been concerned with dyslexia and self-concept, and although none of this research has looked specifically at literacy learning, I now propose to discuss these studies individually as relevant points are raised in each. Hales (1994) used a self-report questionnaire to look at personality factors in three hundred dyslexic children and adults, and discovered certain trends within different age groups. Dyslexic children in the middle years of schooling tended to find self-control difficult, were not particularly conscientious or ambitious, and preferred to work alone, sometimes having problems relating to peers, which could lead to emotional instability. They showed high levels of anxiety and low self-confidence during this “pessimistic patch” (Hales, 1994, p.177) from which they recovered to some extent as they got older. The participants in my study were at the age when they were beginning to experience the hormonal upheaval of the onset of adolescence, and Seary (1988) has suggested that it is at that stage of development that a child’s self-image is most

adversely affected by the views of others as “he (*sic*) comes to recognise his own imperfections” (p.456). Ott (1997) too has emphasised that adolescence is a time when there may be much self-doubt and sensitivity to criticism, which may result in what Weber, Miracle and Skehan (1994) term “an intense fear of being exposed and shamed by others, especially peers” (p.43).

In a study in which Goffman’s ideas on the presentation of self and stigma are mentioned in passing but not developed into a theoretical framework, Neil Humphrey researched the self-concept and self-esteem of sixty three primary and secondary aged pupils who had formal SEN statements of dyslexia (Humphrey, 2002, 2003; Humphrey and Mullins, 2002a, 2002b). Humphreys used a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods to compare the experience of being in mainstream school settings with that of being in specialist units. He found that the entire sample of dyslexic pupils experienced problems that had “negative consequences for their self-development” (Humphrey and Mullins, 2002b, p.1), and that these were more marked for those in mainstream settings as they often felt isolated and excluded, with up to half regularly teased and bullied. Only pupils at the severe end of the spectrum of dyslexic difficulties are likely to be in receipt of a statement, but it must be noted that that was the position of one of the participants in my study. The happiest pupils in Humphrey’s sample seemed to be those placed in specialist units (Humphrey and Mullins, 2002a), which only exist in some LEAs, and this finding suggests, somewhat controversially in the current inclusive school climate, that mainstream settings may not always be the most appropriate for pupils with special educational needs. In mainstream classrooms additional adult in-class and withdrawal support is usually put in place once a statement has been issued, and this makes it obvious to the rest of the children that the dyslexic pupil is somehow different (Humphrey, 2003) and needy (Benjamin, 2002). I would contend that this may add another layer to the feelings of low self-esteem experienced by dyslexic pupils because of the inevitable marginalisation within the classroom community which the daily struggle to cope with literacy tasks brings about. These effects are perhaps less apparent in special units where all the pupils are in the same ‘dyslexic

boat' and are likely to be taught by specialist teachers able to tailor reading and writing demands individually and offer higher levels of support and resources (Humphrey and Mullins, 2002a).

Humphrey's finding that pupils seem to be happier in withdrawal settings has recently been complemented by Burden (2005) in an investigation of the "attitudes to learning and sense of personal identity" (Burden and Burnett, 2004, p.2) of fifty severely affected dyslexic boys who attended a small independent specialist secondary school. A variety of quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect the data, which was then analysed using several socio-cultural and learner motivation theoretical lenses. The overall conclusion was that the dyslexic boys displayed positive self-perception and attitudes to learning which seemed to manifest in a sense of "dyslexic pride" (Burden, 2005, p.81), which the authors hypothesized was related to the supportive ethos at the school (Burden and Burdett, 2004). Although it is reassuring to discover that the pupils in that particular specialist independent school did not seem to suffer negative social and emotional consequences as a result of being dyslexic, it must be remembered that the vast majority of pupils have no choice but to receive their education within ordinary classes in the state sector. In view of this Burden and Burdett (2004) did acknowledge the unusual nature of their sample, and the possibility that a very different picture might have emerged if pupils in mainstream schools had been studied.

Most dyslexic pupils do not have formal SEN statements and are taught by non-specialist teachers, with any additional literacy support they receive usually delivered by classroom assistants who may have had minimal training in the needs of pupils with specific learning difficulties (OFSTED, 2004a; Bray, 2005). A study conducted by Fredrickson and Jacobs (2001) is therefore of great significance because their sample of twenty junior aged pupils who attended mainstream primary schools, were identified, not because they had statements of dyslexia, but because

they fulfilled the criteria set out in the BPS working definition (Reason, 1999) that was discussed in Chapter Two. The statistically reported results of a self-perception profile administered to the dyslexic pupils and a comparison group showed that the dyslexic pupils had “significantly lower perceived scholastic competence than their normally achieving peers, but their global self-worth was not significantly lower” (Fredrickson and Jacobs, 2001, p.401), a finding which connects with Burn’s (1982) suggestion that the self-concept is made up several separate domains. The main area of interest of Fredrickson and Jacobs’ (2001) research, however, was not with self-concept, but was with controllability attributions for academic performance, and their work will be discussed further in the next and final section of the chapter in which I discuss aspects of motivational learning theories.

4.5 Literature which uses a psychological perspective to look at aspects of motivational learning theories that have a bearing on dyslexia and identity

Although aspects of theories of motivation and learning put forward by researchers working from a psychological perspective have not been specifically developed with the situation of dyslexic pupils in mind, they can help to illuminate an understanding of how their experiences at school shape their self-concept and reader identity. I therefore end this literature review by discussing a number of maladaptive orientations that do not “promote a positive approach to learning or the maximizing of an individual’s potential” (Rogers, Galloway, Armstrong, Jackson and Leo, 1994, p.26), as these will be drawn on in the analyses in the empirical chapters.

4.5.1 Mastery and performance learning goals

Hall and Myers (1998) discuss Dweck’s (1986) “social-cognitive approach” (p.1040) to studying the motivational processes affecting learning in which it is suggested that pupils are motivated either by:

... *learning goals*, in which individuals seek to increase their competence, to understand or master something new... (or) *performance goals*, in which

individuals seek to gain favourable judgments of their competence or avoid negative judgments of their competence. (Dweck, 1986, p.1040).

Rogers et al. (1994) believe that “the positive form of motivation, mastery orientation ... is well adapted to the requirements of school with its emphasis on learning [and] making progress” (p.26), and in contrast to this, Hall and Myers (1998) make the point that “a tendency to prioritize performance goals will not help the learner learn how to learn” (p.9). This statement is particularly worrying in relation to the situation of dyslexic pupils attempting to function in the SATurated atmosphere of today’s Y6 classrooms (Hall et al, 2004). As discussed above, their sense of self-worth is likely to be highly sensitive to low marks and adverse teacher comments because of their literacy difficulties, and the result is that they are likely to be performance goal orientated (Urdu and Midgley, 2001; Jackson, 2002).

4.5.2 Locus of control and attribution for success and failure

Burden (2005) feels that an aspect of attribution theory developed by Rotter which looks at “locus of control” (p.20) can provide useful insights when studying the school experiences of dyslexic pupils. Burden explains that this term refers to “a person’s beliefs about their control over life events” (p.20) and he goes on to explain that:

Some people termed ‘internalizers’, feel personally responsible for everything that happens to them, whilst others, termed ‘externalizers’, feel that their outcomes in life are determined by forces beyond their control, e.g. by fate, luck or other people. (Burden, 2005, pp.20-21)

Burden then discusses literature that has looked at attributions in relation to educational achievement, and concludes that “more internal beliefs are associated with higher achievement” (p.21). If the converse is true, then it is likely that pupils with dyslexic type literacy difficulties will externalize the reasons for their reading problems, and may therefore feel that their standard at any given time is due to factors out of their control. Fredrickson and Jacobs’ (2001) British research on self-

concept, referred to earlier in the chapter, investigated the 'controllable' and 'uncontrollable' attributions for academic performance that were given by dyslexic primary aged pupils. They found that "children with uncontrollable attributions had significantly lower perceived scholastic competence than children with controllable attributions, even when actual reading attainment was taken into account" (Fredrickson and Jacobs, 2001, p.401), and they pointed to earlier research that showed that learning disabled children tended to have uncontrollable attributions (Jacobsen, Lowery and DuCette, 1986). There are important implications here for dyslexic pupils, particularly as Carr, Borkowski and Maxwell (1991) found that for their sample of "underachieving" (p.108) pupils in American Grades 3 to 5 (Y4-6), "attributional beliefs had a crucial role in determining academic success through influencing how children feel about themselves" (Fredrickson and Jacobs, 2001, p.404).

Hall and Myers (1998) draw attention to a study by O'Sullivan and Joy (1994) which showed that pupils throughout the primary age range without learning difficulties thought that lack of effort rather than ability was the cause of fictitious children's reading problems. Gipps and Tunstall's (1998) research suggested that this belief sets in early, as "effort was the most commonly cited reason for success/failure" (p.149) by their sample of Y1 and Y2 pupils in several school activities, including reading. However, it is likely that because they tend to have low self-esteem in the academic domain, as discussed above, dyslexic pupils will see their continued problems as they progress through primary school as proof of lack of ability (Jacobsen et al., 1986; Fredrickson and Jacobs, 2001). This is the opposite of what typically functioning children presume, but is especially likely if they are very effortful but still have significant reading difficulties, and this must have a damaging effect on their motivation to learn and worrying consequences for their reader identity.

4.5.3 *Learned helplessness*

Given the attributional tendencies discussed in the previous section, it seems likely that some dyslexic pupils will descend into the damaging learning disposition which was theorized by Seligman in the 1970s as ‘learned helplessness’ (Burden, 2005). As far back as 1980, Butkowski and Willows reported the existence of this state alongside low self-concept of ability in their study of 5th grade Canadian “poor readers” (p.408). Stanovich (1986) also pointed to the potential presence of ‘learned helplessness’ in pupils affected by the ‘Matthew effect’, as discussed in Chapter One, and the links between the two concepts are evident in Craske’s (1988) detailed description:

A state of learned helplessness is reached when an individual perceives that he lacks control in obtaining a desired outcome... In an academic context, a student who has failed repeatedly at a particular task, and who construes the failures as a consequence of his (*sic*) lack of ability, will experience negative affect and a lowering of his self-esteem, and he will not expect to perform well on a similar task in the future. In particular, he will perform more poorly after failure than before, on tasks of equal difficulty... In essence, the learned helplessness model implies that some students may ‘give up trying’ because they do not see themselves as capable of success. (Craske, 1988, p.152)

According to Burden (2005), Seligman believed that this state could lead to depression as a “potential extreme outcome” (p.26) if pessimism became dominant. Certainly in Anderson (2001) I reported that one of the participants, Hugh, was in such a depressed mental state that he felt he would never be able to overcome his problems with schoolwork, although it must be acknowledged that his low mood was exacerbated by a bullying problem which did not seem to be related to his literacy difficulties.

Carr et al. (1991) believe that the “metacognitive-motivational-affective system (p.108) of ‘learned helplessness’ children becomes dysfunctional and that it is:

...their maladaptive beliefs that set them apart from average-achieving children. Whereas ‘mastery-oriented’ children modify or switch strategies in the face of failure, helpless children often fail to effectively alter strategies.

... Helpless children do not see the usefulness of being strategic because they do not understand their capacities to cause success and to minimize (or reconcile) failure. (Carr et al., 1991. p.116)

The above quotation appears to paint a very pessimistic picture of the future for individuals who become 'learned helpless', but Burden (2005) discusses Seligman's later work on 'learned optimism', and he suggests that "neither learned helplessness or depression need be permanent states or explanatory styles" (p.27) if the individual can be taught to believe in the power of their own agency to effect change. I was delighted to also report in Anderson (2001) that by the time I wrote up my project, a counselling approach (Lawrence, 1996) woven into 'one to one' literacy skills tuition, had enabled Hugh to become more optimistic about his future. As time went on he began to show signs of improved self-esteem in relation to the academic domain of his life, and his level of achievement increased so much that by the time he left the school he was formally recognised as 'outstanding pupil of the year'.

4.5.4 *Self-worth protection*

In their study of 'changes in motivational style over the transfer from primary to secondary school', Rogers et al. (1994) compared 'mastery learning' with 'learned helplessness', but also introduced Covington's (1992) theory of 'self-worth protection' as another alternative. Craske (1988) explains that:

The self-worth theory is based on the notion that much of a student's behaviour is designed to maintain a self-concept of high ability. To this end it is important to avoid failure whenever possible since failure carries with it implications of low ability. On the occasions when failure is unavoidable, low ability inferences can be deflected by ascribing it to stable, external factors (such as task difficulty) or to unstable elements (such as bad luck and insufficient effort). From this perspective, it is clear that the application of effort under conditions of possible failure can be risky: if a student tries hard, but fails, then suspicions of low ability are increased. A reduction in, or withdrawal of, effort after a failure experience can therefore be used by the student as a strategy to prevent further damage to his (*sic*) sense of self-worth. Consequences of the withdrawal of effort are decreased persistence and achievement levels. (Craske, 1988, p.153).

Jackson (2002) has used this construct as a way to explain 'laddish' behaviour in secondary schools, and her work has made me aware that some pupils with dyslexic type difficulties may exhibit this faulty motivation orientation. If they do, then the most defensive avoidance of effort is likely to occur with reading tasks set at the correct level, as, according to this theory, if failure does occur, then it poses a greater threat to self-worth and self-perception of ability than failure on difficult tasks does.

There are resonances between 'self-worth protection' theory and the notion of 'academic self-handicapping', as can be seen in Urdan and Midgley's (2001) statement:

The primary motive for handicapping is a fear of failure and a fear of appearing stupid or less able than individuals believe they are, or than they want to appear to others (Urdan and Midgley, 2001, p.119).

Urdan and Midgley (2001) explain that 'academic self handicapping' takes place when tactics are deliberately employed that enable the reasons for poor performance on tasks that "the individual considers important" (p.116) to be deflected onto external causes. This effect is seen for example when dyslexic pupils make sure they cannot practise reading at home by saying they 'forgot' to put their book in their bag, when in fact this was a deliberate omission rather than a lapse of memory, or by giving the excuse that no one was available to hear them when this was not true. They then hope that this will mean that school staff and their peers will attribute their lack of progress in literacy learning to these factors rather than to within-person difficulties. According to Urdan and Midgley (2001), early adolescence, the developmental stage my participants were at, is a time of increased self – handicapping because of "heightened self-consciousness and concern regarding how one appears to others, particularly peers" (p.131).

Essentially the theories of 'learned helplessness' and 'self-worth protection' both try to explain why performance deteriorates after failure at academic tasks. Craske (1988) believes that both learning orientations "exist amongst primary schoolchildren" (p.153), and she succinctly sums up the essential difference between them, and the implications for practice:

It is proposed that some children decrease persistence after failure because they wish to avoid the appearance of inability, and others because they believe they are unable to control outcomes, and trying is therefore irrelevant. Distinguishing between these two populations is important, since attempts to overcome low persistence will have varying effects depending on the reason for its existence. While it may be useful to train 'helpless' students to attribute failure to low effort, to do so with self-worth motivated students may decrease persistence further. (If failure still occurs, even with the application of more effort, inability is strongly implicated.) (Craske, 1988, pp.153-154)

4.5.5 *Classroom help avoidance*

Hall and Myers (1998) define 'metacognition' simply as "thinking about thinking" (p.8), and Myers and Paris (1978) underline the importance of the ability to do this when they state that "metacognitive knowledge serves an executive function of coordinating and directing the learner's thinking and behaviour" (p.680). According to Ryan, Pintrich and Midgley (2001):

As children develop into adolescents their metacognitive skills improve...and they are better able to monitor and reflect on their performance and their need for help in academic situations... However, many adolescents do not seek help with their academic work when needed... in fact help avoidance has been found to increase during early adolescence. (Ryan et al. 2001, p. 94)

This phenomenon of 'classroom help avoidance' is another strategic choice that occurs when poor self-esteem in relation to academic competence prompts pupils to avoid drawing attention to their need for support and therefore give the impression they can function as autonomous learners. Newman (1990) and Newman and Goldin (1990) used structured interviews with pupils in American grades 2 to 7 to research children's reluctance to seek help with schoolwork, including reading, and

concluded that pupils with low achievement and low perceived competence were less likely to seek help, even though they were the ones who needed to most. Van de Meij (1988) found that in the Netherlands, junior aged children's urge to become independent learners acted as a constraint on their question asking in the classroom, but Newman (1990) makes the point that "instrumental help seeking" (p.18) is necessary for mastery oriented learning to take place when an individual's efforts at problem solving have failed. A small scale interview study of four 10 –12 year old dyslexic boys conducted by Healey Eames (2002) suggested that they did have a good sense of the help they need with reading, but it does not automatically follow that pupils with literacy difficulties will seek support if doing so draws attention to their failings and therefore threatens the appearance of competence (Ryan et al., 2001). Osmond (1993) reported a boy who said he often became frustrated with reading but preferred not to ask for help with unknown words and a participant in Anderson (2001) recounted a time when he knew he needed help but decided not to seek support. However according to Newman (1990), some pupils with faulty learning motivation engage in behaviours which are the opposite of help avoidance and ask for support not because they cannot do a task, but because they are "dependency orientated and directed towards mere task completion" (p.18). This may be a particular risk for dyslexic pupils who have been allocated classroom assistant time as they may be in a position where they are rarely allowed to complete tasks on their own, and if this is so, habituated support dependence is an inevitable consequence (OFSTED, 2004b; Reedy, 2005). It is clear that the decisions that pupils make to seek or avoid help with difficult work are inextricably bound up with the way they wish to present themselves to other pupils and adults in the classroom, and with this reminder of Goffman's (1959) concept of impression management, as introduced in Chapter Three, I end this discussion.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed literature from a number of disciplines in order to demonstrate how a wide range of research interests can provide insights that inform this study. Gerald Hales has asserted that:

Those investigations which effectively regard the dyslexic individual as a learning machine, (or even worse, a broken learning machine!) are no longer sufficient for the complete understanding of the problem. (Hales, 1994, pp.172-3).

The unifying feature of all the research studies I have discussed is that the pupils with reading difficulties who were the focus of attention were not regarded as 'broken learning machines', but were viewed as interacting social actors who were able to reflect meaningfully on their perspective of the situation. However, although all the studies resonate with my research focus, the only one that made coping strategies for classroom reading its central concern was that conducted by Brozo (1990), but he looked at an amorphous group of much older 'unsuccessful readers' who were functioning in a very different educational and school context. If as teachers we are to understand better the specific problems with the demands of classroom reading encountered by dyslexic pupils in the middle years of schooling, and so enable them to become more effective learners, a vital first step is to study their everyday experiences, and that is the purpose of this research. In order to remind the reader of the specific area under investigation in this study, I now restate the four research questions which were first presented at the end of Chapter One:

- 1. What is the effect of having dyslexic difficulties on upper junior aged pupils' identities as readers at school?*
- 2. In what ways do dyslexic pupils manage their presentation of selves as readers in upper junior classroom communities of literate practice?*
- 3. What strategies for coping with the demands of classroom reading are used by dyslexic pupils of upper junior age?*
- 4. What has been the impact of multimodal electronic texts on the classroom reading experiences of dyslexic pupils of upper junior age?*

It is now time to turn my attention to how I set about answering these questions, and so in the next chapter, I discuss the stages in the process of designing this project.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

5.1 Introduction

Cohen et al. (2000) and Anderson (1998) make a distinction between three different levels of methodological planning. They suggest that firstly, epistemological decisions are made about which broad research paradigm and theoretical perspective will underpin the project, secondly the overall design style is chosen, and thirdly the most appropriate techniques for data collection and analysis are selected from the range available. The first level of planning for this project has already been addressed in Chapter Three, and so this chapter provides a discussion of methodological aspects related to the second level, and then moves on to a detailed consideration of the third level by looking at data collection and analysis techniques.

5.2 Research design

The search for a suitable methodological framework that meshed with my research interest and overarching theoretical stance led me to ethnography, as this approach is often associated with symbolic interactionism in the literature. As far back as 1986, Lipson and Wixson asserted that “ethnographic research ... is well suited to the study of reading (dis)ability” (p.127), and more recently Hamilton (1999) has made a strong case for ethnography to be linked to literacy studies because of its interest in “cultural practices involving written communication” (p.431). Perhaps most pertinent of all, Allison James (2001) has stated:

It may not be too far fetched to claim that the *social* study of childhood...has only been made possible through the use of ethnographic approaches, for what ethnography permits is a view of children as competent interpreters of the social world. This involves a shift from seeing children as simply the raw and uninitiated recruits of the social world to seeing them as making a contribution to it. (James, 2001, p.246)

It would be impossible to provide a comprehensive overview of ethnography as a vast interdisciplinary body of literature exists, so the first part of this section of the

chapter will consist of a selective discussion of relevant aspects. I will then introduce case study as a specific research design, and afterwards consider site access, sample and temporal issues, validity and reliability. This section will conclude with a discussion of ethical dilemmas associated with the design of the project.

5.2.1 *Ethnography*

Life history interviews and document analysis were most commonly used in the early days of the Chicago School of sociology (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998), but by the era of Blumer and Becker in the mid-twentieth century, ethnographic method based on participant observation had become closely associated with researchers working from a symbolic interactionist position (Adler and Adler, 1987), and this has continued to the present day (Plummer, 2001). According to Rock (2001):

The practice of interactionist ethnography flows directly from the organizing assumptions of symbolic interactionism itself... Useful social and sociological learning is not a state but a matter of practical exchange, a *process* ... By and large, ethnographers attach considerable importance to the practical knowledge that people on the social scene ... employ to guide their own actions. It is not only the ethnographer who goes to the world and interprets it, who engages in the knowing-known transaction, who synthesizes the symbolic materials of everyday life. Subjects do so too. (Rock, 2001, pp.30-31).

According to James (2001) "in its literal translation, the term 'ethnography' means writing about people" (p.246), but Wolcott (1987) believes that in addition to anthropological description, cultural interpretation is an important characteristic. Atkinson and Hammersley (1998) suggest four main defining features of ethnography, the last of which illustrates their broadly interactionist stance:

- a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them.
- a tendency to work primarily with 'unstructured data'...
- investigation of a small number of cases ... in detail.
- analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of

verbal descriptions and explanations. (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998, pp.110-111)

Spradley (1979) takes an even more explicit symbolic interactionist position when he states that:

The essential core of ethnography is this concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. Some of these meanings are directly expressed in language: many are taken for granted and communicated only indirectly through word and action. But in every society people make constant use of these complex meaning systems to organise their behaviour, to understand themselves and others, and to make sense out of the world in which they live. These systems of meaning constitute their culture: ethnography always implies a theory of culture. (Spradley, 1979, p.5)

The quotation above reveals that Spradley (1979) also believes that ethnography is closely bound up with 'culture', which he sees as "the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behaviour" (p.5). I find this definition useful as it 'puts flesh on the bones' of Geertz' (1973) classic statement that culture refers to "the webs of significance man has spun for himself (*sic*)" (p.5). Many other academics have attempted to define culture, and as Snyder (2003) suggests that it is "one of the most complicated words in the English language" (p.10), lack of space precludes further discussion (see Marsh (2003) for a comprehensive overview).

Traditionally anthropological ethnographers immersed themselves in unfamiliar exotic fieldwork locations by taking on the role of participant, but slightly distanced observers, allowed foci to emerge over long periods of time, and then described and interpreted the culture via written 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). Denzin (1989) states that this ensures that "the voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals are heard" (p.83), and that it can be described as "biographical, historical, situational, relational and interactional" (p.91). As Fetterman (1989) asserts, there is no reason why the same techniques of immersing oneself in a group cannot be applied to situations within one's own society, and it is this type of

ethnography that has more commonly been engaged in by sociologists and educationalists. In this case the problem of familiar/unfamiliar becomes the opposite one (Spindler and Spindler, 1982; Thorne, 1993; Delamont, 2002), because it can be hard to cultivate a feeling of distance as all researchers have past experience of childhood and education. It is necessary then to deliberately make “the familiar strange” (Gordon, Holland, and Lahelma, 2001, p.188) and, as a teacher at an independent school, by choosing a research site in the state maintained sector, my hope was that this would provide the optimum situation by making things just slightly strange and slightly new (Rock, 2001). Although researchers have begun ethnographies in their own societies with only a hazy notion of what their area of interest would be, usually “one does not go presuppositionless into the social world ... with no foundation of expectations or knowledge” (Rock, 2001, p.30). Theoretical preferences leading to interest in particular “foreshadowed problems” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p.28) mean that focused studies such as mine should be perhaps be called “motivated ethnographies” (Lloyd and Duveen, 1992, p.43) to distinguish them from the traditional all encompassing type.

Prior to the post-modern view of a world consisting of multiple truths, there existed a naïve assumption that researchers could objectively describe, analyse and interpret the ‘reality’ of what they saw in the field (Gordon et al., 2001). There is now a realisation that the subjective self of the ethnographer, and its positioning, is an important element affecting the research at all levels (Coffey, 1999; Ropers-Huilman, 1999), and this resonates with symbolic interactionism’s view of the researcher role (Woods, 1996). Current thinking has also led to the re-formulation of other previously held beliefs about ethnography. This trend perhaps began with Geertz’s (1973) insistence on the centrality of “inscription” (p.19), by which he meant the permanent existence given to transient events once written down. The recent literary turn within the social sciences has led to the expansion of this notion into the acknowledgement that ethnographic texts are always invented constructions rather than descriptions of culture (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Atkinson, 1990, 1992). Others, often working from a feminist viewpoint, have focused on

problematizing the power relationships between the ethnographer and those he or she studies, and I am indebted to Skeggs (2001) for drawing my attention to an important statement by Stacey:

Ethnographic method appears to (and often does) place the researcher and her informants in a collaborative, reciprocal quest for understanding, but the research product is ultimately that of the researcher, however modified by or influenced by informants. With very rare exceptions it is the researcher who narrates, who 'authors' the ethnography. In the last instance an ethnography is a written document structured primarily by a researcher's purposes, offering a researcher's interpretation, registered in a researcher's voice. (Stacey, 1988, p.23).

It would seem then that some academics believe that the field of ethnography has become complex, contested and fractured at present (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998; Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland and Lofland, 2001; Walford, 2002). However, it is important not to focus so much on problematizing the method that one loses sight of the fact that, provided one acknowledges the issues discussed above, it can still be an appropriate and effective way to research substantive issues in the sociology of education (Gordon et al., 2001).

5.2.2 Case study design

Although ethnography provides the methodological framework for this project, I prefer to regard the basic design as a 'case study' which Mitchell (1984) states can be distinguished from more general ethnographies by the "detail and particularity of the account" (p.237). Cohen et al. (2000) define a case study as a "specific instance ... of a bounded system [which] provides a unique example of real people in real situations" (p.181). This research design is particularly suitable for naturalistic qualitative research that gathers a great deal of data from a small number of participants and then subjects it to interpretative inductive analysis (Cohen et al., 2000), particularly when the substantive area is one about which there has been little previous research (Facer, Furlong, Furlong and Sutherland, 2003). Barrs and Meek Spencer (2005) have recently drawn attention to the rich detail that this kind of research can provide via a discussion of Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel and Kluasner's

(1985) classic American investigation of learning to read, and case studies described in Chapter Four, such as that by Kos (1991), show how illuminative the findings can be.

Anderson (1998) states that although the term is “familiar ... to many people, there is little agreement on what exactly constitutes a case study” (p.152), and perhaps this is because, unlike other classic research designs, it is not defined by “the methods of inquiry used” (Stake, 1994, p.236). However a number of methodologists do believe it has a clear identity (Mitchell 1984; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994) and Merriam (1988), writing specifically about educational research, states that “the following four characteristics are essential properties of a qualitative case study: [it is] particularistic, descriptive, heuristic and inductive” (p.11). Stake (1994) put forward a typology of case studies, and his designation of ‘instrumental’, in which “the choice of case is made because it is expected to advance our understanding of that other interest” (p.237), is the most appropriate for my research as I studied pupils with dyslexic type literacy difficulties in order to investigate how they coped with classroom reading.

5.2.3 Site access and sample issues

Once the basic research design was settled, I was ready to negotiate access to a school. As mentioned in Chapter One, I felt it was important that this study should be conducted in the state sector where the vast majority of pupils are educated, and so I needed to locate a primary school large enough to be likely to have a number of pupils in each year group who were experiencing dyslexic-type literacy difficulties. As in Pollard’s ‘Learning and Identity Programme’, which was discussed in Chapter Three, a “major factor in selecting a school, though, had to be a headteacher who was supportive of the study and likely to remain in the school over the period” (Filer with Pollard, 1998, p.62). I therefore took the pragmatic decision to use “personal networks” (Epstein, 1998, p.28), and contacted a former teaching colleague who had recently become headteacher of a large primary school, and who I knew was interested in my research area because she had a dyslexic son (See Chapter Six for

further details of the school). My initial approach was positively received by her and the teaching staff, and formal written permission was then sought and gained from the governing body after a preliminary information sheet, given in Appendix 1, about the scope and purpose of the research was provided.

The project was designed to be conducted in two parts, consisting of a preliminary year when the pupil participants would be Y5s, aged 9 -10, and a main year, when they would be Y6s, aged 10 –11. Although the term ‘pilot study’ did not seem appropriate, I intended that the fieldwork should be viewed as exploratory during the first year so that I could gain an overall impression of the learner identities of the focus pupils, discover the most effective data collection methods, allow issues within the area of reading to emerge, and adjust my research questions accordingly. Therefore at the start of the 2003/4 academic year I began to visit on a weekly basis, usually on Wednesdays, due to professional commitments on other days, with the aim that by the autumn half-term holiday, I would have acquainted myself with the school’s particular ethos, organisation and physical environment, and would have become a familiar face within the four Upper Junior vertically grouped classes prior to recruiting participants. The headteacher, having consulted the staff involved, allowed me to have free access to the classes and groups whenever I wished to attend lessons, with the proviso that it would be inappropriate for me to visit on days when NFER attainment tests and both practice and real SATs were being administered.

A criticism of qualitative research is often that the way participants are chosen is felt to be less rigorous than the probability sampling of quantitative research (Cohen et al., 2000). However, like McCarthy (2001) I needed to choose pupils from whom I felt I could “learn the most” (Stake, 1994, p.243) in order to answer my particular research questions, and so a “purposive” sample (Cohen et al., 2000, p.103) where potential participants are chosen, in this case by the headteacher, on the basis of a “judgement of their typicality” (p.103) was deemed most appropriate. I discovered that the school did not use any formal dyslexia screening procedures, but given the

inclusive descriptive terms of the BPS definition (Reason, 2002) discussed in Chapter Two, I felt that the headteacher's method of combining NFER and SAT scores with the teachers' professional advice in order to identify pupils with difficulties specific to literacy who then received focused learning support, was acceptable within the context of a primary school. When negotiating access I had explained that I was interested in how dyslexic pupils cope with classroom reading once they are past the age when all children are learning to read, and that I therefore wished to recruit junior pupils who would enter Y5 as I began the research. I was told at that point that there were seven potential participants, but by the time I started the preliminary fieldwork about nine months later, the headteacher informed me that three had made good progress and so were no longer receiving SEN support, and that therefore only four remained eligible to take part. It had always been my intention to only follow a small number of pupils for the entire study so that frequent observations could be undertaken which would then allow in-depth analysis of their particular coping strategies, but I had hoped to begin with more than four participants in case of withheld consent or subsequent withdrawal. However I had no choice but to accept the situation, and fortunately all four pupils remained in the project until its conclusion, so I did not have to bring my proposed reserve plan of recruiting a second cohort of new Y5 pupils at the start of the main research year into operation.

Just before the autumn half-term holiday the parents of the four pupils, two boys and two girls, were asked for their permission by letter in which a brief explanation of the project was given, and a copy of this is provided in Appendix 2. Inspired by Klingner et al. (1998) who "referred to students with LD as *students who need extra help* rather than specifying the term LD" (p.151) in their pupil interviews, the parents were told that the project was concerned with 'how pupils who have extra help with literacy cope with classroom reading', as the school did not openly use the term 'dyslexic'. Once the parents had given their written consent that their children could take part, the pupils were approached and the project explained to them in simple terms in individual interviews. The importance of confidentiality and

anonymity was discussed, including the need to choose pseudonyms, and all four pupils gave their written informed consent on a form I devised, but which was edited to a simpler version on the headteacher's advice. A copy of this letter is provided in Appendix 2 and issues surrounding the consent process will be discussed further in the section on ethics below.

Many of the methodological texts allude to the messiness of 'real world' research (Robson, 2002) and of the pupils selected, one boy had been formally identified as dyslexic and was the subject of an SEN Statement (DfES, 2001), the other boy had been assessed as dyspraxic with dyslexic tendencies, but the two girls had not had a label attached to their specific literacy difficulties (See Chapter Six for a detailed profile of each participant). Daniels, Hey, Leonard and Smith (1999) have drawn attention to this gender difference in the likelihood of formal identification, and my initial observations confirmed that, in my professional judgment, all four pupils could be described as having dyslexic-type literacy difficulties in the terms of the BPS definition (Reason, 2002) discussed in Chapter Two. This was because it was clear that they all had significant ongoing problems with reading and writing at the word level despite targeted support, with the result that their standards in literacy did not seem to reflect their overall intellectual ability.

5.2.4 Temporal issues

Jeffrey and Troman (2004) have recently identified three different temporal styles of ethnographic research, and my study would seem to fit best with their "selective intermittent time mode" (p.540). For the rest of the autumn term of 2003 and the spring term of 2004 I visited the school most weeks on Wednesdays, provided the timetable was running as normal, and spent the whole day with each participant in turn observing all lessons which involved reading, literacy withdrawal groups and assemblies. The only participant who had 'one-to-one' tuition sessions was the boy with an SEN statement and I was invited to be present at those delivered by the designated classroom assistant, but not those with the peripatetic SNSS teacher. By Easter 2004 all four participants had all been observed three times, and I had also

been present on one extra day, when for unexpected organizational reasons, it was impossible to keep to the usual routine of staying with just one pupil. I felt that the aims of the preliminary year had been met, but I conducted one more session with each pupil during the summer term in order to maintain the research relationship, and this resulted in a total of five introductory and seventeen individual visits during 2003/4.

During the preliminary year I became increasingly concerned about the lack of temporal flexibility imposed by my teaching commitments, but this problem was solved when I managed to negotiate sabbatical leave for the academic year 2004/5. Therefore during the main fieldwork year, after one introductory re-orientation visit, I was able to visit the school on two days most weeks, and my intention was that by the end of the year I would have observed each pupil on each day of the week twice. This meant that each participant would be followed ten times, making an potential overall total of forty individual sessions. Again I was allowed free access to all class lessons and withdrawal groups, and additionally, as a new peripatetic SNSS teacher seemed more at ease with my presence, I was invited to observe her group and 'one to one' withdrawal sessions. I also attended special events organized for the Y6 pupils, which included an educational visit to study the history of a nearby market town, a safety event hosted by local emergency services and a poetry day led by two published performance poets.

Despite knowing that more frequent visits might have put a strain on the cooperation of participants and staff, from time to time I still experienced the feeling that Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) believe is common amongst ethnographers that everything interesting was happening when I was not in school. Fortunately common sense would then intervene as I knew that a wealth of rich findings were contained within the thousands of words of fieldnotes and interview transcripts, and hundreds of documents that were gradually building up in the total data set. In fact, by the end of the main fieldwork year when there could be no question of extending the time-scale further as the participants were about to leave the school, I felt

satisfied that my total of forty seven visits during 2004/5, which was considerably more than my original target, had been about the right number to enable me to collect the data I needed. In fact, during the latter part of the term I had begun to feel a sense of 'diminishing returns' which suggested I was "reaching the point when nothing new is being learnt" (Delamont, 2002, p.161). However, alongside this I dreaded the prospect of leaving the field and having no further contact with the staff and pupils, but I realised this was a sign I was in danger of "going native" (Delamont, 2002, p.161) and that it definitely was time to move on to the next phase of the research process.

Woods (1986) and Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000) both assert the importance of achieving balanced data within an ethnography, and so my aim was to even up the observations between the participants and days of the week during the main fieldwork year, so a true reflection of the pupils' curricula experiences would be observed. Planning the rotation proved to be a much more difficult logistical exercise than I anticipated, and towards the end of the main fieldwork year I had to admit that, despite conducting one more 'round' of sessions than had been originally planned, it was going to be impossible to achieve an exact balance of days of the week. The reason for this was that there were unanticipated clashes with school events, closure days and pupil absence, and this was not entirely unexpected as I knew that Griffiths and Davies (1993) had encountered similar problems. In terms of the curriculum, timetable revisions at the start of each term and frequent lesson substitutions and ad hoc alterations on days I visited meant again as time went on it became apparent that the organizational complexity I had created for myself by trying to even the days out had been largely pointless. Observing Literacy and Numeracy was not a problem as these lessons took place every morning and so were seen on each visit, and Science and ICT also usually went ahead as planned. What caused most difficulty was the SATurated nature of the Y6 curriculum (Hall et al., 2004; Benady, 2006), as for the whole of the spring term the National Curriculum foundation subject lessons, which were mainly in the afternoons, often did not take place as timetabled. This was because extra Science revision lessons were

substituted, and recently Boyle and Bragg's (2006) longitudinal data has confirmed the increasing peripheralization of the foundation subjects. This problem was exacerbated by the participants' frequent attendance at withdrawal groups which were timetabled to avoid clashes with Literacy and Numeracy (Wall, 2003). This inevitably had an impact on their "entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum" (OFSTED, 2005b, p.33) and the cumulative effect of these factors has been that observations of Geography, History, RE and Music lessons are underrepresented in the data.

5.2.5 Validity and reliability issues

It is my belief that validity and reliability issues must be addressed, but as they fit more easily into positivistic research methodology (Cohen et al., 2000), there are no easy answers for qualitative research. Internal validity which "seeks to demonstrate that the explanation of a particular event, issue or set of data which a piece of research provides can actually be sustained by the data" (Cohen et al., 2000, p.107) is difficult to demonstrate in a case study as there is no absolute way the data collection methods can be proved to be the right ones to provide the answers to the questions posed. It is perhaps more appropriate to think in terms of "trustworthiness" of the data (Ely et al., 1997, p.34), and I hope I have achieved the type of transparency that Anderson (1998) believes is required by keeping "meticulous records" (p.134) of the cumulative "chain of evidence" (p.134) composed of fieldnotes, interview transcripts and documents. I also felt that in order to produce an authentic account of the research process, it was important to provide "documentation of in-process stumblings, mis-steps, [and] insights" (Ely et al., 1997, p.34), and I did this via analytic memos and personal journal reflections.

Yin (1994) argues that a salient feature of case studies is their use of a variety of data sources, a view related to the positivistic belief that evidence must be triangulated in order to strengthen the internal validity of findings (Woods, 1986; Cohen et al., 2000). Although I agree with Coffey and Atkinson's (1996) post-modern belief that "multiple perspectives and meanings" (Ely et al., 1997, p35)

reside in the data rather than “one overall truth” (Silverman, 1993, p.157), and that this then calls into question the whole notion of triangulation (Ben Anderson – personal communication, December, 2000), nevertheless I believe it is important to use what Denzin and Lincoln (1994) refer to as a “bricolage” (p.2) of data collection methods in order to strengthen the authenticity of the findings. In particular I found that member checks of observational data via informal interviews, as in Myers (1992) and Brozo (1990), were vital to avoid misinterpretations (Spradley, 1979) and consequent distortions in the data (Woods, 1986), and in fact Geertz (1973) believed that such corroboration plays a vital part in the production of ‘thick description’. An example of this occurred when I observed one of the girl participants flicking through her book during silent reading. On face value I took this to be a reading resistant behaviour, but at lunchtime she told me that she had discovered that some pages were missing and had been checking to see if they had been misplaced in the book, which she would have been unlikely to bother to do unless she intended to really read it. I decided that such ongoing checks were more appropriate in a long-term study with children than more formal methods of participant validation after the fieldwork was complete (Ely et al., 1991). Nevertheless, at the end of the study I felt it was important to communicate the findings to the participants at a level they were able to understand and engage with (BERA, 2004), and a discussion of this pupil feedback is given in Chapter Twelve.

“External validity refers to the degree to which the results can be generalized to the wider population, cases or situations” (Cohen et al., 2000, p.109), and so it is often debated in relation to case study (Gomm et al., 2000) because positivistic researchers find its demonstration problematic because of the small sample size and emphasis on the detail of a unique contextualized situation (Woods, 1986). However, Janesick (1994) has argued that because qualitative data tends to be rich and is analysed in great detail, it may sometimes be more appropriate to claim wider implications for findings than it is for larger scale quantitative studies, which according to Wolcott (2001) can result in over simplistic “single issue answers” (p.36). Simons (1996) has attempted to resolve the ‘paradox of case study’ by constructing an argument that

suggests that “unique and universal understanding” (p. 225) can occur together, a belief that, although not acknowledged, seems to echo Denzin’s (1989) view:

Interpretive interactionism assumes that every human being is a universal singular (Sartre, 1981, p.ix). No individual is ever just an individual. He or she must be studied as a single instance of more universal social experiences and social processes. ... Every person is like every other person, but like no other person. Interpretive studies ... attempt to uncover this complex interrelationship between the universal and the singular, between private troubles and public issues in a person’s life. In this way all interpretive studies ... are fitted to the historical moment that surrounds the subject’s life experiences. (Denzin, 1989, p.19)

I believe, therefore, that by providing in depth insightful findings derived from carefully analysed rich data which seek to make “interpretive links ... [from] local descriptions of individual children... [to] larger discussions of culture and history” (Graue and Walsh, 1998, p.13), case studies can help to generate a wide understanding of “complex educational phenomena” (Simons, 1996, p.225) which complements larger scale research. I therefore agree with Lincoln and Guba (2000) that findings may be transferable to similar settings via “naturalistic generalization” (p.36), an intellectual process in which explicit comparisons and tacit knowledge are combined. Therefore although I do not wish to give the impression that I am making the naïve assumption that this study has significance beyond its unique situation, I hope that the findings, when disseminated, will be illuminative for teachers who work with pupils experiencing similar literacy difficulties in mainstream primary schools (Lewis, 1999), and that this will enable them to “gain new understandings of children’s lives” (Graue and Walsh, 1998, p.248).

According to Cohen et al. (2000), “in qualitative research reliability can be regarded as a fit between what researchers record in the data and what actually occurred in the natural setting that is being researched i.e. a degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage” (p.119). Although this is hard to demonstrate in a study using observation as its main data collection technique, I tried to ensure methodological rigour by not publishing in advance the exact days I intended

visiting the school in the hope that this would reduce the possibility of special performances from teachers and pupils (Croll, 1986), and by trying to achieve pupil and curricular balance in the data (Woods, 1986; Gomm et al., 2000), but, as explained above, I acknowledge some distortion from the ideal situation.

Anderson (1998) discusses the issue of reliability in relation to information provided by participants, and in the more positivistic age of the recent past this was seen as a problem for all studies which used interviews as the means to collect all or part of their data. This is because it is difficult to know if people have understood the questions, interpreted them as intended, and given honest answers (Shipman, 1988), and this has always been viewed as particularly acute when dealing with child participants (Greig and Taylor, 1999). However, in the study discussed in Chapter Four, Riddick (1996) made the point in relation to dyslexic pupils' problems with schoolwork, that although what they said they found hard "may not accurately reflect their actual difficulties" (p.118), she felt that in order to understand them, it was important to know what their perceptions were of their situation. Certainly, if a symbolic interactionist stance is taken, the meaning that the individual attaches to his/her experiences is all important (Silverman, 1993).

Anderson (1998) additionally suggests that traditionally reliability refers to "the extent that different researchers, given the same exposure to the same situation would reach the same conclusions" (p.256), the implication being that the researcher should be distanced and objective. If this positivistic view is taken, then again reliability becomes problematic in a study such as mine because there are bound to be subjective distortions in qualitative data collection methods and analysis techniques, but the issue becomes irrelevant if a constructivist position is taken in which the influence of the researcher's self is acknowledged and even celebrated as central throughout the process (Woods, 1996; Silverman, 1993). This stance connects with the concept of reflexivity, which Davies (1999) defines as "a turning back on oneself", (p.4), and which, according to Pillow (2003), can be differentiated from 'reflection' by the need to also consider the effect of one's actions as a

researcher on the 'other', in this case the research participants in particular and the school in general. I am sympathetic to Pillow's (2003) view that it is possible to be over-comfortable in the belief that such introspection is bound to lead to better data, but I am in agreement with Luttrell (2000) that in ethnography one has to settle for being 'good enough' by ensuring that "tensions, contradictions and power imbalances" (p.1) are transparently discussed. I conclude this section with Delamont's (2002) reassurance that "as long as qualitative researchers are reflexive, making all their processes explicit, then issues of reliability and validity are served" (p.9).

5.2.6 Ethical issues surrounding the design of the study

Although guidelines provide important advice on over-riding ethical principles (AARE, 1993; AAA, 1998; BSA, 2002; AERA, 2003; BERA, 2004), most attention should always be given to the issues raised by a specific study (Morrow and Richards, 1996). Kimmel (1988) suggests that the first decision rests on whether the investigation should go ahead at all, and according to Cohen et al. (2000) this "costs/benefit ratio" (p.50) is the most fundamental of ethical dilemmas. I am mindful of AERA's statement (2003) that:

...we are involved not only in research but in education. It is therefore, essential that we continually reflect on our research to be sure that it is not only sound scientifically, but that it also makes a positive contribution to the educational enterprise" (p.1).

In relation to my study, I felt that the inevitable intrusion caused to the school and participants in terms of surveillance and time was justified because the investigation was in an under-researched area within the field of dyslexia and was therefore likely to generate important findings of practical significance within the classroom (Woods, 1986).

As in Anderson (2001), the fact that the participants were minors meant that ethical considerations needed to be particularly “stringent” (Scott, 2000, p.114) in order to ensure that they were treated with respect and dignity throughout the research process (Christensen and James, 2000; BERA, 2004). However I acknowledge that there is inevitably a power and status differential between educational researchers and participants (Cohen et al., 2000; Christensen and James, 2000), and this is most acute when children are involved (Powney and Watts, 1987; Christensen, 2004). My stance on childhood, as set out in Chapter One, means I am fully in agreement with Article 12 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which asserts “the child’s right to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child” (Sinclair Taylor, 2000, p.26). My belief in this principle led to ethical unease during the process of gaining informed consent at the start of the study because the headteacher felt very strongly that permission should first be sought from the parents. I would have preferred the first approach to have been made to the pupils because of my uncertainty as to whether parents should have the over-riding right of refusal if children, who are old enough to understand, wish to take part in a study (Pole, Mizen and Bolton, 1999; Lewis and Lindsay, 2000; David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001).

According to Lewis (2004), this failure to act out the spirit of Article 12 of the UN Convention except in legal circumstances, is a continuing problem in this country, but as a guest in the school, I decided I had no choice but to accede to the headteacher’s wishes. In the event there was no problem as all four sets of parents responded positively to the explanatory letter, provided in Appendix 2, by promptly giving written consent. I was then allowed by the headteacher to conduct the short individual interview with each potential participant as mentioned earlier, and each pupil told me straight away that they would like to take part. I was slightly uncomfortable that the power and status differential might have been the reason for the rapidity with which they made the decision, as it is well known that in school situations children may acquiesce to the wishes of adults because they do not feel able to dissent (Morrow and Richards, 1996), and because of this the term ‘educated

consent' is perhaps more appropriate than 'informed consent' (David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001).

There are other ways too that the notion of 'fully informed consent' must be problematised in research studies such as mine, for in a long-term ethnographic study it is impossible at the outset for participants to know exactly the extent of what they are agreeing to (Thorne, 1980; Epstein, 1998). At the point of gaining initial consent I explained that I would watch lessons and talk to the pupils about reading, but I did not decide to use systematic observation until after the preliminary year, as will be explained below, so that possibility was not discussed (Powney and Watts, 1987). I am also now uneasy that I did not think to spell out to the pupils in the initial interviews that their exact words might appear in publications (Alldred, 1998), but I did explain this at the start of the main year when I asked for their permission to begin to tape record the interviews.

The right to withdraw at any time appears clear cut, but when, during the spring term of the main fieldwork year, one of the girls became generally disaffected with school and began to seem to resent spending time being interviewed during the lunchtime break, which I saw as a vital part of the data collection process, this provoked an ethical dilemma. I was uncertain what to do as the girl did not raise the topic of withdrawing and I was fearful that if I did she would interpret it as rejection and that this would damage her obvious fragile self-worth further (BERA, 2004). I discussed the problem with her class teacher, who was also the SENCO, and as she was working with her at the time to try to resolve various school related problems we decided to wait for a while and see what happened. In the event the girl gradually became happier in general and after I took the chance one day to engage in a 're-bonding' session which had no other agenda than enjoying looking at photographs on the school website, her diffidence about giving up part of her break disappeared. By the end of the year I was very pleased that I had not suggested she should withdraw as comments she made during the pupil feedback session, as will be discussed in Chapter Twelve, showed the importance she attached to the project. It

was also interesting to note in terms of her relationship with me that she was the only one of the four participants who took the trouble to introduce me to her parents at the Leavers' Assembly on the last day of term.

With regard to anonymity, I tried to increase the participants' sense of agency by asking them to choose their own pseudonyms (Epstein, 1998; Delamont, 2002), and so at the end of the study I asked them to select what a boy in Anderson (2001) called 'fake names' that began with the same letter as their real names. I explained that I was imposing this condition in order to avoid confusion on my part, as I had used initials as identifiers in the hundreds of thousands of words of data that the fieldwork had generated, and all four complied. However, I found this discussion problematic for the reason that the participants seemed bemused about the need to keep details of themselves and the school secret because they were so imbued with the desirability of obtaining instant celebrity status in the current 'reality show' obsessed society. However I remain convinced of the need to protect privacy (BERA, 2004), even though Walford (2005) has recently challenged this almost universal academic ethical assumption, but his discussion made me aware that I needed to take care not to inadvertently provide identifiers in the contextual information both about the school and the pupils and staff.

The issue of confidentiality is also not as straightforward as it might first appear to be, as it can never be absolute (BERA, 2004), particularly with minors, in case child abuse is divulged. This need led me to explain that I would not say anything to other adults at the school about what the participants told me unless they said they wanted me to, but I was not sure if the intended message had been received as I struggled to find appropriate language. I confronted these issues during 2003 without the benefit of being able to read Williamson, Goodenough, Kent and Ashcroft's (2005) thought-provoking article, but I felt reassured that I had raised the point about the limit to confidentiality at the outset of research, which they see as vital if participants are to be able to "engage fully with the informed consent process" (p.405). Williamson et al. (2005) also discuss the ethical dilemma they faced over whether to disclose to a

third party when a child in their study said she was being bullied at school. I found myself in a similar situation when the girl participant mentioned above divulged bullying during an interview, but said she did not want me to speak to anyone because the teachers already knew, but were in her opinion powerless to alter the situation. I advised her to talk again to a trusted adult which she said she would, but unfortunately she chose an inappropriate moment during a withdrawal group that afternoon when I was observing, and was brushed aside by the classroom assistant. This made me feel acutely uncomfortable and unsure what to do until later that day I heard various members of staff talking about her problems in the staffroom. This reassured me that they were fully aware of the situation and that I need not disclose the information, and in fact this was the decision that Williamson et al. (2005) also came to after deliberation.

I also found that I had to resolve ethical problems over the issue of fairness in the research relationship with regard to information (Kimmel, 1988) as, for reasons explained below, I acknowledge that I was not always fully open (Powney and Watts, 1987). From the outset I made it clear to the school staff and parents that I was a part-time literacy support teacher who was conducting a university project about coping with reading, but the headteacher thought the pupils might not understand the term 'research', and would relate better to a simpler explanation, and certainly Epstein (1998) discovered that her pupil participants had no conception of the researcher role. Mauthner (1997) feels that it is difficult to describe the purpose of research to children, and suggests that the best way is to "emphasise the need for new knowledge" (p.18). Therefore I told the participants that I was a teacher at another school who was interested in finding out about all the classroom reading children have to do. Inspired by Epstein (1998) and Pollard (1996), I said I was going to write a book in the future for other teachers so they could help pupils to learn more effectively, and the participants' comments from time to time reassured me that they understood the rationale for the project at this level, and realised any benefit was not for them but was for the wider "development of human good" (AARE, 1993, p.2). I am aware that by divulging my focus on reading, the

behaviour of staff and pupils was bound to be different from their normal practice when I was present (Preissle Goetz and Lecompte, 1984), but I believe that in addition to acknowledging researcher effects in a spirit of reflexivity, they are to be celebrated as an integral part of the symbolic interactionist stance. Additionally, I agree with Ropers-Huilman (1999) that we are bound to change those we research, and in my case I hoped that by focusing attention on reading, and therefore perhaps increasing the profile of literacy issues within the school, there might have been a positive “consciousness raising” effect (Ely et al.,1991, p.225). Indeed from the start this seemed to be the case, as on an early day in the field the headteacher told me that my presence in the school hall had made her realise for the first time how just much reading was involved in the hymn practice assembly, and during the main year a student teacher said that she was always more aware of the reading demands of lessons when I was observing.

A further ethical dilemma was created by my conviction that the pupils should not be aware that they were asked to take part because they were experiencing literacy difficulties. Because of this I acknowledge again that I was not fully open, but I believed that it was of overriding importance that their welfare was not put in jeopardy by the potential damage to their self-esteem that would have occurred if they had known the real reason (BERA, 2004). Although I acknowledge Begley’s (2000) concern that the use of this rationale may potentially have made them feel coerced to take part, I told them that they were chosen by the headteacher because they were considered to be particularly helpful pupils, but of course I remained aware throughout the fieldwork that I needed to be very sensitive when talking to them about reading because of their weakness in this area. In fact as time went on I became convinced that participating had enhanced their status because it gave them a rare opportunity to present themselves as “expert witnesses” on their school (Ruddock and Flutter, 2000, p.82), and I made sure that I reinforced this view by often telling them how useful the information they provided would be for other teachers to know. I was also reassured that participating was not causing peer problems for the four pupils as there was undisguised envy from a number of others

in their year group who openly often said they wished they had been chosen to take part in the project, and this must have had a beneficial effect on self-esteem.

5.3 Techniques of data collection

I now turn to the third level of planning identified by Cohen et al. (2000) and Anderson (1998), which is concerned with the exact research methods used in a particular study. In Chapter One, I mentioned my dissatisfaction with the total reliance on interviews in Anderson (2001), and having conducted this study I now believe that “observational data gathered over a long period of immersion are superior to any others” (Delamont, 2002, p.122). I will therefore begin this second part of the chapter with a discussion of my chosen observer role, and then move on to consider the observational act and the writing of fieldnotes. However as explained above, it is important to increase validity of findings within ethnography via a mix of several methods, and in this study systematic observation, transcriptions of informal interviews and document collection were used to enrich the data (Cohen et al., 2000, Delamont, 2002), and these will also be described. I share Christensen and James’ (2000) view that “to carry out research with children does not necessarily entail adopting different or particular methods” (p.2), but that it is the responsibility of the researcher to think carefully about their appropriateness in the local context. It is also important to ensure that a reflexive stance is taken throughout the fieldwork period with regard to power and status differences, and as Wellington (1996) counsels that ethical considerations should form part of every stage of the research process, issues not raised earlier will be discussed when appropriate.

5.3.1 *The Observer role*

The word ‘participant’ is almost always attached to ‘observation’ when used in connection with ‘ethnography’, but the term is used in different ways in the literature (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998). Sometimes it is viewed as synonymous with ‘fieldwork’ (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2001), but I prefer to take Spradley (1980) and Ely et al.’s (1991) usage and reserve it for the description of a particular data

collection technique and researcher role. I agree with Hargreaves (1967) that “we may define *role* as an aspect of the total behaviour of a particular actor occupying a particular *status* or position within a social system” (p.194), and Ely et al. (1991) state that the researcher’s exact observational role can only be negotiated within the context of a specific study. My substantive interest and research questions led me to decide to watch the pupils overtly but unobtrusively within the classroom without a recognised participatory role, but also to interact with them informally in conversation to clarify what they were doing as and when needed, but in the event this was rarely necessary. Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2000, p.677) suggest this researcher position is common in classroom observational studies, and Anne Haas Dyson (1999; 2003) has shown how effective it can be for the generation of rich findings. However if a narrow definition is used it then becomes difficult to decide whether this is ‘*participant* observation’, as it is very different from the type described by Fine and Sandstrom (1988), but it is hard to find a suitable alternative term as ‘non-participant’ seems too passive. Having rejected any of Gold’s (1958) and Spradley’s (1980) classic typologies as not seeming to capture my role, I came to the decision by surveying the literature, that Wolcott’s “limited observer... [who] observes, asks questions, and builds trust over time, but doesn’t have a public role other than researcher” (Ely, 1991, p.45) was most appropriate for someone like me who would “interact only casually and non-directively with subjects while engaged in their observational pursuits” (Adler and Adler, 1994, p.380).

At the start of the research I explained to the staff that I would be a rather “different sort of adult” (Christensen, 2004, p.174) to have in their classrooms in that I would seem unusually passive because I would not be interacting with pupils in a proactive ‘teacherly’ way during lessons, but would nevertheless be maintaining a state of “constant attentiveness” (Christensen, 2004, p.169) as I observed. I always sat at the back of the rooms where I thought I would be least noticeable, but I was aware that unless one actually hides, as King (1978, 1984) did, staff and pupils are bound to register the presence of an extra adult however ‘invisible’ the observer tries to be. I was reassured though when one of the teachers told me towards the end of the study

that at the start she had always been aware of me during her lessons, but as I became 'part of the furniture' she often forgot I was there. Another reminder though that the researcher themselves can become the focus of observation (King, 1984) and curiosity (Epstein, 1998) occurred one day when I realised that a nearby pupil who had become disengaged from a lesson was watching me making notes and suddenly asked me if I ever got tired of constantly writing.

I made sure at the start of the study that the staff realised that in order to minimize power and status differentials between myself and the participants and so maximize rapport and conversational openness (Skelton, 2001), I did not intend to act as a disciplinarian except in situations where physical harm might occur (Thome, 1993; Lappalainen, 2002), but that neither would I patronize the pupils by trying to 'pass' as a child via a 'least adult role' (Mandell, 1988; Epstein, 1998). During the fieldwork period, an article which discussed these issues was published by Christensen (2004), in which the role I hoped to take was described:

Adults doing childhood research should present and perform themselves as an unusual type of adult, one who is seriously interested in understanding how the social world looks from children's perspectives but without making a dubious attempt to be a child. Through this the researcher emerges first and foremost as a social person and secondly as a professional with a distinctive and genuine purpose. (Christensen, 2004, p.174)

I tried to be seen as an adult friend "who could be trusted and to whom the children would enjoy talking and communicating" (Pole, Mizzen and Bolton, 1999, p.46) because of my aim to "seek throughout to respect their views and wishes" (Christensen, 2004, p.174), and I believe I was successful because the participants appeared genuinely pleased when it was their turn to be followed for the day. They developed an easy, but polite relationship with me which is perhaps demonstrated by the fact that one of the boys felt able to joke with me intermittently about what he called my 'scribbling', and one of the girls once playfully teased me when I inadvertently disobeyed a written notice. They also occasionally let me in on "dubious practices from which other adults are usually excluded" (Christensen.

2004, p.172) such as how they subverted words of hymns when singing in assembly, and these and many other behaviours confirmed to me that I had managed to create a role that was differentiated in their minds from that of 'teacher'.

Hargreaves (1967) extends his definition of 'role', referred to earlier, in symbolic interactionist terms, by stating that "the nature of the role is determined not only by the status of the actor but also by his orientation towards the *expectations* of other actors who hold complimentary roles within the system" (p.194). I thought therefore at the start of the study that it was likely that the pupils would try to fit me into a familiar school 'membership role' (Adler and Adler, 1987), and that as they would probably assume I was a new classroom assistant, it might prove difficult to resist taking on that position without appearing unfriendly, for example if they asked me for spellings (Epstein, 1998). However, perhaps because I sat at the back of the room and constantly wrote in a notebook, on my first day in the field a number of pupils surprised me by asking me if I was an OFSTED inspector, and throughout the project the problem that I anticipated of being frequently asked for support never materialized.

While I was still getting used to my role, like Rhedding-Jones (1997), I found the silent nature of observing difficult, and inadvertently slipped into 'classroom assistant mode' on a number of occasions, perhaps because of the difficulty of resisting the natural expectation that human beings will help each other when need is identified (Epstein, 1998). Fortunately each time I quickly became aware that I had come out of role and reverted to passivity, and as time went on I found the urge to interact occurred less and less, to the extent that during the main fieldwork year it disappeared and I was very comfortable as an observer. Interestingly, Gans (1982) has suggested that people who are attracted to observational research methods are often those who prefer to take a marginal role within whatever group they are involved and this is certainly true of me. I was a 'quiet child' (Collins, 1996) at school, who although academically able, lacked confidence and always tended to

stay on the edge of social groups 'looking in' on the action, and this diffidence over moving from a peripheral to a more central position has been a continued theme throughout my professional and personal life.

A sign of my habituation into passivity during the main fieldwork year was revealed when I was only allowed by the headteacher to go on a school trip on the condition that I was responsible for a group of pupils, and found that the resultant 'role conflict' (Hargreaves, 1967; Walford, 1987) made it surprisingly hard to act in the proactively interactional way necessary. However, there were occasional times at school when I decided it would be unethical not to take on the role of a classroom assistant for short periods if I felt that a problem had been created by the participant missing part of a lesson due to a withdrawal group. At these times I found Nind et al.'s (2004) discussion of what to do when a child clearly needs support but does not get it, or is marginalised by exclusionary practices very thought provoking. In particular, during the spring term a worrying dilemma revealed itself because I began to feel compelled to act as an advocate for the pupils due to my increasingly strong conviction that the withdrawal lessons were not benefiting them in terms of literacy learning and in fact were making it harder for them to cope when they returned to the classroom, a subject that will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven. I eventually decided that I would have to make the staff aware of my concerns but when I spoke to them they became defensive, and I realised I had stepped over the boundary of role acceptability and that good relations might break down if I persisted. I felt upset and then it occurred to me that although my feelings were understandable, they were symptomatic of over-involvement with the participants, and so I withdrew from the research site earlier than I had intended before the half term holiday. When I returned after the break I found I was better able keep an appropriate sense of proportion and maintain the self-conscious distancing (Todorov, 1988) that is vital for an ethnographer, but the episode brought home to me the ever present danger of "going native" (Woods, 1986, p.41), in this case with the pupils rather than the teachers.

5.3.2 *Narrative observation*

As soon as fieldwork in a school begins, the observer must decide what to focus on from the “richness and complexity” (Ely et al., 1991, p.48) of classroom life (Boostrom, 1994; Delamont, 2002). Unless one is carrying out insider research within ones own institution, as in Anderson (2001), the usual advice (Adler and Adler, 1994; Goffman, 1989) is that one should immerse oneself in the new setting in order to become acquainted with its ways thoroughly before progressively focusing interest more closely on the substantive area, a process Agar (1980) likens to a narrowing funnel. On my first five visits during the preliminary year, I therefore spent time observing the reading demands of lessons across the curriculum with all four Upper Junior classes and with each of the Literacy and Numeracy inter-class ability groups in order to gain a sense of the intellectual range of the full cohort of pupils. Then once consent was obtained from the participants and each was observed for a day in turn, at first I focused on their overall learner identity, whilst at the same time particularly carefully observing tasks which involved reading. As time went on I found the iterative spiral of narrative observation and analytic reflection enabled me to move onto progressively greater levels of detail as I narrowed the focus and concentrated on reader identity and coping strategies for classroom reading. Throughout each stage of the fieldwork I remained mindful that the selection of what is deemed significant to observe and record is a subjective process linked to “authoritative and authorial prerogatives” (Knupfer, 1996, p.142), and so must be viewed as the first stage of an interpretation process which ultimately leads to a ethnographic account unique to a particular researcher (Silverman, 1993).

Delamont (2002) suggests that it may not be appropriate in all fieldwork settings to record observations in situ, but I found that writing “scratch notes” (Sanjek, 1990 p.95) was unproblematic in the classroom, and I would not have trusted total reliance on my memory of events as advised by Ely et al. (1997). In fact I felt, as Dyson (2003) also did, that the notebook provided a useful rationale via words such as “I’m sorry but I’m really busy with my writing” if pupils did request support, and

in terms of symbolic interactionist theory, I began to realise that the constant 'scribbling' was an important semiotic sign which indicated to all in the room that my role was different from that of other adults present. Some researchers supplement their written observations with audiotape recordings of naturally occurring participant discourse (Woods, 1986), but the semi-open plan nature of the school meant that the ambient environment was too noisy for this, and in any case my instinctual feeling was that this would have been unfairly intrusive.

As soon as possible after each session so as to avoid memory decay (Delamont, 2002), I wrote up my handwritten 'messy' notes, which I supplemented with "headnotes" (Ottenberg, 1990, p.144), into word-processed narrative fieldnotes that I made sure contained sufficiently detailed 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) to allow meaningful analysis after the fieldwork was over (Delamont, 2002). I found I needed to 'think aloud' as I wrote, and so I interspersed the narrative observations with analytic and methodological comments (Hughes 1994; Ely et al 1997), which for reasons of clarity I indicated by the use of different typological conventions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) (See Appendix 3 for conventions and fieldnote extract). As I did this I was constantly aware that:

While the fieldnotes constitute the reservoir of "facts" with which we make ongoing meaning, they are not impersonal descriptors. Instead the fieldnotes are the written record of the data as shaped through the researcher's eyes, with all that implies about the way individuals see the world, how they interpret what they see, both explicitly and implicitly, and why. (Ely et al., 1997, p.17)

This act of "inscription" (Geertz, 1973, p.19) then reified the transient events observed during each day in the field into permanent accounts (Knupfer, 1996), and as this introduced a further element of selection and subjectivity, it represented another early stage of the interpretation process (Ottenberg, 1990).

5.3.3. *Systematic observation*

Throughout the preliminary fieldwork year, my observations were all of a narrative type, and as I reflected over the summer, I decided that my fieldnotes had not enabled me to capture precise enough details of the participants' behaviour during Literacy lessons when activities containing significant amounts of reading occurred. I therefore realised that I needed to find an additional data collection method for the main fieldwork year that would be suitable to use during silent reading sessions and individual written tasks. Video-recording as an observational tool when researching children's experiences in context is discussed in Graue and Walsh (1998), but I rejected its use because when negotiating access I had not mentioned the possibility as I felt it would have been overly intrusive and would have created too much reactivity in the normal classroom situation (Cohen et al., 2000).

Having consulted the literature I decided that the most appropriate unobtrusive method would be to undertake short periods of 'systematic observation' (Croll, 1986). I therefore devised two "instantaneous time sampling" schedules (Croll, 1986, p.72), one for use during silent reading sessions and the other for when individual written tasks were completed in Literacy. These were designed to enable pupil activity and interaction to be coded at ten second intervals, and in order to simplify the conversion into percentage of time engaged in the different behaviours, both schedules allowed for fifty or one hundred codings depending on the time allocated by the teacher for the task. I used categories inspired by those developed by Pollard and Triggs (2000) for the PACE study, but whereas they coded activity and interaction separately, I combined these into double letter codes, for example 'TP – on task interacting with pupil/s' (See Appendix 4 for schedules and details of codes).

During Y6 I coded the behaviour of the participant who was being followed whenever silent reading took place during Literacy, and by the end of the fieldwork period I had achieved a total of fourteen systematic observations. The individual

Literacy task schedule was used more opportunistically whenever I judged from the introduction to a written activity that a significant amount of reading would be involved, and by the end of Y6, twenty-seven systematic observations had been completed which were reasonably evenly spread between the four participants. Croll (1986) and Galton and Delamont (1985) discuss how narrative and systematic observational techniques may both be used in the same study, but unlike their ORACLE project which used systematic observation as the prime data collection method and narrative as subsidiary, in my study the functions were reversed as the systematic observation was used to add detail to and enhance the narrative observation (Graue and Walsh, 1998). This type of supplementary usage is rare in the literature, but was employed successfully by Blease and Cohen (1990) in their ethnographic study of the impact of the introduction of computers into schools, and as will be shown in the empirical chapters, the data generated became an important means of enriching the findings in this research.

5.3.4 Interviews

The inclusion of participants' voices is an important way of bringing a study to life (Winn Oakley, 2000), and so opportunistic discussions at various times of the day and individual unstructured "informal conversational" interviews (Cohen et al., 2000, p.271) at lunchtimes were a vital element of both fieldwork years. It is important to remember though that, however informal an interview, it is an unusual form of interaction because it is "a one way pseudoconversation" (Fontana and Frey, 1998, p.64) where the normal rules are completely altered in that most questions are asked by the interviewer and most responses provided by the interviewee. In addition to the ever present danger of inadvertently asking restrictive, leading or loaded questions (Wellington, 1996) and thereby "putting words into their mouths" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 122), the interviewer must be aware that the way he/she frames the questions may influence the way interviewees answer. In fact, where there is a significant status imbalance this may even lead them to feel they must answer ones which are in fact unanswerable (Waterman, Blades and Spencer, 2001).

It is important too to keep in mind Powney and Watts' (1987) assertion that "one basic and well known hazard in interviewing is the discrepancy which can often appear between what people say and what people actually do and think" (p.190). A prime example of this occurred when one of the girl participants told me she read at home to her parents for an hour every day, which I did not challenge, but was certain must be an exaggeration of the time spent. Graue and Walsh (1998) state that when something like this happens even if a story is being told, it will have a cultural function and will possess "an element of truth even if the details are not true" (p.120). In this case I think the girl's motivation was to provide what she thought was an "orthodoxly correct answer" (Rich, 1968, p.122) in order to present herself as a conformist pupil who dutifully practised her reading as exhorted to frequently by the teachers.

The anecdote related above confirms that data gathered from interviews is of a different nature to that derived from observation, and so should be viewed as narratives that the participants construct from memories of their experiences (Silverman, 1993; Luttrell, 2000), which will be affected by their language skills (Dockrell, 2004). Beame, Grainger and Wolstencroft (2004b) discuss how pupils' level of metalanguage can affect how they talk about literacy matters, and Hall and Myers (1998) suggest that better readers tend to be most able to use metacognition to monitor the strategies they use when reading. If this is so, then the participants' difficulties with literacy may have affected the way they were able to talk about their reading, and I would also contend that cultural differences regarding how much importance is attached to educational matters within families may also have affected their responses. For example, when asked about memories of learning to read, the participants in the current study were able to remember very little by comparison with the higher socio-economic status independent school pupils in Anderson (2001) who spoke at length. Overall, however, the four pupils were willing to expend a great deal of time and effort discussing their experiences with reading with me, and, like Christensen (2004), I found that towards the end of the project they had developed such a finely tuned understanding of what I was trying to find out that

they started to be “able to guess my questions and often began to answer them before they were spoken” (p.170). I do of course acknowledge that the information the participants chose to reveal to me was bound to have been affected by the fact that they knew I was a teacher at another school, and so was imbued with educational discourse (David et al., 2001), and by what they thought I wanted to know about their experiences with classroom reading (Ropers-Huilman, 1999).

The main purpose of the interviews was to discuss activities involving reading observed during the morning, and I used photocopied texts as props to aid the conversational flow (Wixson, Bosky, Yochum and Alvermann, 1984). Throughout the preliminary year I relied on my memory of what the participants had told me and then annotated my fieldnotes afterwards. The reason I did not attempt to make notes at the time was because I wanted to maintain an informal feel to the interaction, and avoid the act of writing potentially becoming a “dangerous distraction” (McCracken, 1988, p.41) that would have prevented me from listening properly and moving the interview on effectively. At that stage of the study too, I did not feel it was fair to risk making the pupils feel uncomfortable by using an audiotape recorder, but increasingly I felt frustrated that the rich data could not be captured verbatim, and so I decided that it would be useful to have a permanent record of the sessions. Therefore at the start of the main fieldwork year, by which time I felt that good rapport had been established between the participants and myself, I asked each of them for permission to tape the interviews using the rationale that they were telling me such interesting things that I wanted to be able to listen again at home and write down exactly what they said so I could tell other teachers. I emphasized that if they were not happy that was fine and we would continue as before, but they all readily gave their permission, and as in Anderson (2001) although both they and I were obviously aware of the presence of the tape recorder, I never felt it inhibited the pupils’ responses (Rich, 1968).

I was then able to transcribe the interviews in full, but this act made me very aware that taping simply provides a record of the verbal responses which, in any interaction

between two people, only make up 40% of the information received (Powney and Watts, 1987). As I was aware that “non-verbal elements are important in interviewing” (Fontana and Frey, 1998, p.68), I realised that it was essential, if the entirety of the interview “black market” record of researcher impressions (Hull, 1985, p.27) was to be captured, that I should transcribe the interviews quickly while any significant non-verbal communication remained fresh in my mind (Woods, 1986). When transcribing, as in Anderson (2001), it quickly became apparent that the resultant scripts were a reductive approximation of the interviews (Powney and Watts, 1987) as I strained to accurately hear muffled speech, decided how to mark pauses, tone of voice and emphasis (Graue and Walsh, 1998) and struggled to find ways to represent dialect speech forms (Crystal, 2004) (See Appendix 5 for transcript conventions and interview extract). The experience also made me acutely aware of the profound differences between written and oral language forms (Silverman, 1993; Carter, 2006) and because of the subjectivity involved in encoding, the truth of Wellington’s (1996) assertion that each transcription is just one person’s version of the actual interview, which will reflect their perceptions and opinions, and as such, like the writing of fieldnotes, is an early stage of the interpretation and analysis process (Powney and Watts, 1987).

From the start of the study I tried to overtly position the participants as “key informant” type experts on their school (Anderson, 1998, p.191) who could teach me about the cultural practices around literacy (Spradley, 1979). However an ethical dilemma soon revealed itself concerning an essential part of the data collection, namely asking the children to read extracts from texts I had observed them engaging with during the morning so I could judge how they had found the reading level (Gambrell, Wilson and Gantt, 1981). I felt I lacked a plausible reason for asking them to do this, and I worried that in the absence of a rationale, the pupils’ self-esteem might be damaged if they found that the text was too hard, even though I always immediately supported them if they stumbled over words. It then occurred to me that I could preface my request by asking them to ‘tell the tape’ exactly which piece of work we were discussing so I would know when I listened at home. I

acknowledge that this tactic drew attention to the tape recorder, but once I started to do this the awkwardness disappeared, and I have since been reassured to discover that the same rationale was used during interviews for the 'ScreenPlay' project (Facer et al., 2003).

In addition to discussing texts that had been used in lessons, during the main fieldwork year I wanted to probe wider issues to do with reading, and as McCray et al. (2001) believe that students in this age range find it hard to talk extensively about their experiences without prompts, I began to structure part of the interviews somewhat more (Wellington, 1996) by compiling a list of questions, such as "what sort of a reader do you think you are?" (See Appendix 6 for list of questions). Then during each interview, I asked one or two of these when it seemed appropriate, and noted that I done so, such that by the end of the study I had responses from all the participants for all the questions. The inspiration for the questions came from the participants' own comments in earlier interviews and from the semi-structured schedule used in Anderson (2001), but I also acknowledge the influence of other researchers (Myers and Paris, 1978; Wixson et al., 1984; Millard, 1997; Hall and Myers, 1998; McCray et al., 2001). In order to increase the participants' sense of agency within the research process, I felt that in addition to responding to my agenda, they should be allowed space to discuss other issues of concern to them should they wish to raise them (Mauthner, 1997). In the event, both in Anderson (2001) and in this study, as mentioned above, one participant divulged bullying, and all four from time to time chose to talk to me about general events at school and in their home life.

During the preliminary fieldwork year if I asked the participants for the title of their school reading book during lessons, they often asked if they could read it to me. I always declined, but found this ethically hard (Nind et al., 2004) because it was obvious to me as a literacy support teacher that what these pupils desperately needed, but were not getting, was individualised reading tuition. The angst I felt reveals how imbued I am with the need to "provide positive experiences for children

that are 'good for them'" (David et al., 2001, p.361), but I knew that it was important not to provide tuition as it would have compromised the integrity of my research by contaminating the data on coping due to the potential effect on their reading level (Julia Davies, personal communication, July 2004). However, so the participants did not feel rejected, I decided I would conclude each interview by asking them to read a short passage from their reading book, but that, as with other texts they read to me, I would simply correct errors or supply unknown words in order to maintain sense. It could be argued that this may have been enough to affect their reading level over time, but as these sessions only lasted about three minutes for a maximum of fifteen times over two years, I do not believe that they were of sufficient duration to have had a significant influence. I was re-assured that Ivey (1999a) had included a similar data collection method in her study of middle school readers that was discussed in Chapter Four, and in fact, during the main fieldwork year when silent reading sessions became a regular feature of Literacy lessons, as will be described in Chapter Eight, the passage reading became an essential tool as it was the only way I could find out if the participants were choosing books at an appropriate reading level or selecting ones that were too difficult.

5.3.5 Document collection

Delamont (2002) suggests that in addition to observation and interviews, documentary evidence is needed to produce a richly detailed ethnography. In my research, documents formed a vital part of the data collection process because they provided the 'hard' evidence of the texts the participants encountered at school, and I usually collected ten to fifteen items per pupil day which I carefully indexed, and cross-referenced within my fieldnotes. I photocopied all reading matter encountered by the participants on the days I followed them, including the passage they read during their lunchtime interview. As this was captured on tape I was able to conduct miscue analyses on the reading samples using the typology and conventions suggested by ILEA (1988) and Campbell (1993), and I also calculated reading rate in words per minute and total error percentage. This numeric data, taken together with that generated by the systematic observations, has therefore provided another

“element of enrichment” (Ely et al., 1997, p.199) in this otherwise entirely qualitative study.

I also photocopied all the written work produced by the participants on the days I observed them as these were also part of the total textual load, and they soon became used to the routine and always willingly lent me their exercise books and worksheets. While analysing the data, I began to wonder about the ethics of asking them to hand over their work if it was obvious there had been a poor task response, but at the time this dilemma totally passed me by because I was so wrapped up in the fieldwork situation. However, conversely there were times when I felt my practice enabled the participants to receive a boost to their self-esteem because if they felt they had done well they were able to engage in a competence display and have their work validated by showing it to me. Additional documents that were collected were printouts of website pages visited during ICT and during the main year, once I had obtained permission from the staff, digital photographs of writing on blackboards, whiteboards and displays. In order to maintain my overall familiarity with the school, I also collected newsletters and visited its official website from time to time, but was always mindful of Delamont’s warning (2002) to be somewhat sceptical of content because of her belief that such publications are always “written in a social context, with some audience in mind” (p.123), in these cases the current and prospective parent and pupil bodies.

5.4 Techniques of data analysis/interpretation

In this final part of this chapter I set out my data analysis techniques in detail as it is vital that the stages of this part of the research process are made transparent in order to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the findings (Bryman and Burgess, 1994a; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Ely et al., 1997). Ely et al. (1997, p.61) remind us that the ultimate purpose of data analysis and subsequent reporting is to “make ongoing meaning for ourselves and to communicate that meaning with people in order to involve them in thinking about and living our research experiences”. According to Coffey and Atkinson (1996):

Qualitative data analysis requires methodological knowledge and intellectual competence. Analysis is not about adhering to any one correct approach or set of right techniques; it is imaginative, artful, flexible, and reflexive. It should also be methodical, scholarly and intellectually rigorous. (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p.10)

In view of the above statement which puts ‘flesh on the bones’ of McCracken’s (1988) assertion that analysis “is perhaps the most demanding... aspect of the qualitative research process” (p.41), as a novice I found it useful to keep in mind the ten summarised ‘principles and practices’ that Tesch (1990) believes “hold true” (p.95) for data analysis, or ‘interpretation’ as it is sometimes called. The two terms are often viewed as synonymous in the literature (Silverman, 1993; Graue and Walsh, 1998), but Wolcott (2001) sees them as distinctive. He confines his use of ‘analysis’ to “the examination of data using systematic and standardised measures and procedures” (Wolcott, 2001, p.33) with a scientific bias such as ‘content analysis’ (Cohen et al., 2000), and therefore uses ‘interpretation’ as the broader term, which he defines as a humanistic endeavour of “sensemaking” (Wolcott, 2001, p.33) involving originality and creativity. I have found Ely et al.’s (1997) way of viewing these terms as more helpful as I have endeavoured to ‘make sense’ of my data, as they see ‘analysis’ as the initial working of data into categories and themes and reserve ‘interpretation’ for the later stage where themes are combined into meta-themes or concepts and may be linked with theory.

5.4.1 Preliminary analysis during fieldwork

In ethnographic studies it is generally agreed that it is impossible to separate out data collection and analysis/interpretation (Bryman and Burgess, 1994a; Christensen, 2004). However the process can be viewed as consisting of several increasingly sophisticated levels, and although he admits that not all studies progress through his six stages, Woods (1986) provides a useful structure. He suggests that “speculative analysis” (Woods, 1986, p.121) takes place during the fieldwork period, and as already mentioned, I interspersed my narrative fieldnotes with comments. I also found it was useful to write personal reflections on the research experience in a

handwritten journal after each school visit (Woods, 1986), and I discovered that it was even more important that I regularly reviewed my methods and re-read my data set after each half term prior to constructing analytic memos (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Ely et al., 1997; Graue and Walsh, 1998). I viewed these memos as a vital early stage in the analytic process because they are a form of ‘thinking aloud’ as the lived experience being studied begins to be shaped in the mind of the researcher (Ely et al., 1997), a process which, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), represents the essence of reflexive ethnography. Put simply, it was in the composing of these memos that I was forced to stand back and think about emerging themes, connect up the fieldwork with literature I had recently read (Bogdan and Bicklen, 1992) and thereby discover the questions that needed to be asked as the fieldwork unfolded. At the end of the preliminary year I re-read the entire Y5 data set, and then wrote a learner identity profile for each participant, and noted ‘emerging themes’. At that stage I found it useful to take heed of Ely et al’s (1997) caution that the above term may give the impression that:

... themes reside in the data, and if we just look hard enough they will emerge like Venus on the shell. If themes ‘reside’ anywhere, they reside in our heads, from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them. (Ely et al., 1997, pp.205-206)

During the main fieldwork year I continued to write my personal journal and periodic analytic memos, but Woods (1986) suggests that it not until after that stage of the research process is complete that more systematic “classifying and categorizing” (p. 121) of the data can take place.

5.4.2 Main analysis after fieldwork

After the fieldwork period was over the resumption of my professional teaching duties dictated that the research had to be put on one side for about two months, and although I found this frustrating, Hughes (1994) feels such a break is beneficial as during the fieldwork one is too close to the data to stand back from it. Anderson (1998) also recommends a gap before starting analysis because the distancing from

the situation ensures that on return to the data “you will have a fresh perspective and be mentally prepared to tackle the post-field analysis” (p.132). However Bogdan and Bicklen (1992, p.165) caution that “taking too long a break has drawbacks ... [as it] can cause you to lose touch with the content of your notes”. This was a real fear of mine during my enforced exile from the data, and when I was able to begin the post-fieldwork analysis, I felt a sense of trepidation due to the sheer volume of written material that the main fieldwork year had generated, a mental state that is common at this stage of the qualitative research process according to Wolcott (2001). It could be argued that I had brought this feeling of being overwhelmed by the enormity of the task on myself because of my decision at the start of the study that I would go against advice (Tesch, 1990; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), and not use a computer package to assist with the coding and classifying stage of the analysis process. This was because I felt that such tools inevitably lead to a fragmentation of the data, and it is my belief that “the importance of context in qualitative research to interpreting social interactions” (Ely et al., 1997, p.171) cannot be over-emphasised when creative thinking with data is seen as the heart of the analysis process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). I also agree with Ely et al. (1991) that there is a danger that computer packages may be seen as a substitute for analysis whereas their principal function is as an aid to data management.

I knew that somehow I had to find the courage to begin to “tame the chaos” (Ely et al., 1991, p.140), and so I revisited the methodological literature in order to tap into the reassuring advice of experienced qualitative researchers sympathetic to the plight of the novice engaged in the analysis and writing up of a major project (Becker, 1986, 1998; Bogden and Bicklen, 1992; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Delamont, 2002; Ely et al., 1991; Ely et al., 1997; Graue and Walsh, 1998; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Wolcott, 2001; Woods, 1986, 1996). I decided that the Y5 data set had fulfilled its purpose in allowing me to generate emerging themes, but that, as it was less rich due to the lack of interview transcript and systematic observation data, I would confine my attention during the main analysis to the much larger Y6 data set. I decided that the most effective way to begin the task was to immerse myself in

the totality of the data in order to re-establish a sense of the whole (Delamont, 2002; Wellington 1996). So, with the broad 'thinking units' (Ely et al., 1991) generated via my research questions and proposed thesis chapter headings in mind, I read through all the Y6 field notes, memos and my reflective journal and listened to the taped interviews alongside the written transcripts. As I did this I assigned broad descriptive categories to help index the data (Bryman and Burgess, 1994b), and made marginal notes in order to capture fleeting thoughts, but at this stage I did not engage in more formal coding. I then wrote short descriptive pieces on the learner identity of each participant, and also began the task of making sense of the data by listing the books the pupils had read to me and by tabulating statistics derived from the readings and from the systematic observations carried out in the classroom.

I then felt ready to return to the full Y6 data set, and using both ideas that had emerged during the fieldwork and those derived from the theoretical underpinning of symbolic interactionism firmly in mind, I allocated conceptual codes to relevant data segments (Bryman and Burgess, 1994b) for all the observations and interviews with each pupil. My intention was to formalise the process more at this stage by generating patterns via the constant comparative method originally developed as part of the grounded theory approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). Throughout I was mindful that I must not fall into the trap of merely looking for supporting examples to illustrate emerging concepts (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), but must take note of discrepant or negative cases, as according to Ely et al. (1991), these are the key to refining and refuting earlier analytic ideas. As I proceeded, I reminded myself that:

Coding usually is a mixture of data reduction and data complication. Coding generally is used to break up and segment the data into simpler, general categories *and* is used to expand and tease out the data in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation (Coffey and Atkinson, 1995, p.30)

As I went through the fieldnotes and transcripts marking segments with codes, I developed a system of indexing and cross-referencing (Delamont, 2002) that worked

well as it allowed me to rapidly locate all the data allocated to particular categories when needed but meant that the data set was retained in its original form. This method therefore both allowed me to bring a semblance of order to the mass of data and enabled me to generate patterns that Ely et al. (1997) call 'themes' which they define as "statement[s] of meaning that run through all or most of the pertinent data" (p.206) for each category. I then felt that the time was right to put together what, inspired by the subtitle of Miles and Huberman's (1984) book, I called 'source books' of data extracts and descriptions for each 'thinking unit'. I regarded this as a first step in the thesis chapter writing process, as I am convinced that if the creative adventure of crafting the research narrative is to proceed effectively, analysis and writing up should be viewed as inexorably intertwined rather than discreet stages (Becker, 1986; Fetterman 1989; Wolcott, 2001).

5.4.3 Interpretation

With the data 'tamed' in this way, it was then possible for the more creative interpretative stage of this final part of the research process to begin. Ely et al. (1997) suggest that it is at this stage that 'metathemes', which they define as "major constructs that highlight overarching issues in a study" (p.206) are developed. Woods (1986) however conceives of the later stages of the analysis process rather differently and suggests that progressive levels of "abstraction and generality" (p.121) after classifying and categorising data lead to the development of concepts, models and typologies, and possibly on to theory. This study should be regarded as being mainly at a descriptive level of interpretation in which theoretically informed "understanding and accumulation of knowledge" (Anderson, 1998, p.9) is the main purpose rather than the generation of theory. Anderson (1998) regards this as a necessary stage in an area about which there has been little prior research, and Thomas and James (2006) have recently stated that the conclusions of ethnographic studies based on these type of findings should not be judged as somehow inferior. It is important to make it clear though, that, although I did not use the techniques as originally devised, I have been influenced by the methods of 'grounded theory' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), as evidenced by my use of coding systems during the

final analysis. However, a basic tenet of grounded theory is that analysis is a purely inductive process, but my position differs in that I agree with Geertz (1973), Woods (1986, 1996) and Thomas and James (2006) that it is impossible to formulate research questions, collect data and engage in analysis/interpretation without being influenced by earlier theorists. I therefore acknowledge that the findings of this study have been generated via an interweaving of deductive and inductive analytic processes.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the stages of, and issues surrounding, the design of this research study, and have also described the particular data collection and analytic techniques used. When I compare this project with my earlier interview study (Anderson, 2001), I am aware that the addition of observational evidence has produced much richer and more detailed data sets, and I can now see the truth of Sarah Delamont's witty metaphor:

Proper fieldwork is like a casserole; it should simmer for a long time on a low heat. Interviewing is a take-away chow mein; it lacks authenticity and does not satisfy for long – 'data to go'. (Delamont, 2002, p.122)

It is now time to move onto the empirical part of the thesis in which the findings generated by the research methods outlined above are set out in detail. However in order to enable the reader to make full sense of the lived classroom experiences that will be discussed, it is necessary first to provide a short introduction to the school and four participant pupils, and so it is to that subject that I turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SCHOOL AND PUPIL CONTEXT

6.1 Introduction

If the findings of qualitative case studies are to be presented effectively it is vital that they are clearly situated within the particular context in which the research has been conducted (Graue and Walsh, 1998). When planning the structure of this thesis, I decided that the previous chapter would have become unwieldy in length if I had included the necessary level of detail there, but that it would also be unsatisfactory to attempt to provide basic contextualising information on an ad hoc basis as the findings are discussed in the following chapters. This chapter therefore functions as a bridge between the methodological and empirical parts of the thesis by firstly discussing a number of aspects of the school setting and then by introducing the four participating pupils via pen-sketch type profiles.

6.2 The school context

In this section I describe the school context by drawing on information taken from an OFSTED inspection report which appeared just before the fieldwork began, published data from DfES, discussions with the headteacher and staff, and general observations captured in fieldnotes during my visits.

6.2.1 *The school setting*

Granville Primary School is situated on the edge of an ex-mining village in an area of former social deprivation, which as a consequence of urban growth now forms part of the outer suburbs of a northern city. In the recent past unemployment has been high, but due to service industry job opportunities locally, this situation has now improved, and according to the OFSTED report the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) at the start of the project was around the national primary average of 14%. This information is provided by OFSTED to give a rough idea of socio-economic disadvantage (Dockrell and Shield, 2006) and on this indicator, therefore, the pupils at Granville do not appear to be at risk. However,

given that, as will be revealed in the pupil profiles, both girl participants were eligible for free school meals, it is important to draw attention to the findings of a recent large survey of reading habits and preferences conducted by the National Literacy Trust (2005). This survey of primary and secondary pupils found that self-reported uptake of free school meals (FSM) was associated with negative attitudes to reading on a number of criteria and unsurprisingly, a lack of resources in the home, both in relation to books and electronic media. These factors are likely to have a bearing on literacy development, and it is also important to point out that the OFSTED report mentioned that many of the pupils at Granville were not well supported at home where their learning was concerned. The head confirmed this when she told me that many of the parents were, to use her words, 'apathetic' about involvement in their children's education, in that, in her opinion, they did not put a high value on the importance of making the most of schooling in order to maximize life chances.

During the period of the project there were approximately 300 pupils aged between 4 and 11 years on the roll at Granville, and they were almost all of White British origin, this being the ethnicity of the four participants. The majority of the pupils lived on the nearby council estate which comprised run-down looking 1950s semi-detached houses, but some pupils came from a modern private housing development which was also close by. The 'village', as it was still referred to by many residents, had retained some cohesion as a community as people tended to live there all their lives, and because of this the school population was very stable during the period of the research, with the majority of the pupils spending their entire primary school career at Granville. Before the present head took up her post around the time of the millennium, the school had been through a difficult period which had resulted in an adverse OFSTED report. However, when the school was inspected again just before the project commenced, both teaching and learning were deemed satisfactory, as many improvements had been made.

6.2.2 *The cohort of pupils*

During the period of the project the KS2 department at Granville was organized into Lower and Upper Junior 'teams', and the consequence of this was that, perhaps unusually for a large school (Hallam, Ireson and Davies, 2004a), the classes were vertically grouped, each composed of about 30 pupils. At the start of the research the participants had just entered the Y5/6 Upper Junior classes as Y5s (age 9/10) and their cohort of 58 pupils was atypical in that its sex ratio was approximately 3: 1 in favour of boys. In the preliminary fieldwork year there were four Upper Junior classes, but in the main year when the participants were Y6s (age 10/11) this was reduced to three as the new Y5 cohort was unusually small. Many pupils were able to stay in the same class but inevitably there was a certain amount of adjustment necessary and two of the participants found themselves with a different class teacher and all four were separated from some of their friends. The cohort was also unusual, and considered 'challenging' by staff, in that there were 20 pupils, over a third of the total, who had been assessed as having Special Educational Needs (SENs). This was a much higher number than in the years above and below, and although some of these pupils, including the participants, were well behaved, there were others who had the potential to disrupt lessons.

The consequence of the large percentage of pupils with SENs and over-representation of boys was that the results of the 2005 SATs, which were the ones taken by the participants, were disappointing for the school. The proportion of pupils gaining the expected level 4 or above in English and Maths (but not Science, which was high and stable) was considerably lower than in the two preceding years, and was well below the average for the LEA in which the school was situated. The recent *Independent review of the teaching of early reading* (Rose, 2006) has drawn my attention to the fact that the participants' year group was "the first cohort to have been part of the NLS from the beginning, i.e. when they were in the Reception year" (p.11), but the 2005 results for Granville certainly did not mirror the national 15% rise since 1998 in the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in English.

6.2.3 Curriculum organization

In the KS2 department at Granville, Literacy, Numeracy and Science were taught in cross-class and in some cases cross-year ability groups, an arrangement which is common at present in primary schools (Davies, Hallam and Ireson, 2003; Bibby et al., 2007). William and Bartholomew (2004) state that schools usually assign pupils to ability groups in the hope that this will help to raise their educational attainment, but they state that the outcome is not necessarily what is intended, and Hallam, Ireson and Davies (2004b) suggest that this practice can be particularly detrimental for low ability pupils. Certainly an ethnographic study by Borko and Eisenhart (1989) that looked at reading ability groups in an American 2nd Grade (Y3) classroom, confirmed Allington's (1983) conclusions that pupils with different standards receive different reading instruction. Borko and Eisenhart (1989) found that the groups functioned as separate literacy communities that prioritized different aspects of reading, and that the concentration on decontextualised texts and decoding skills in the lower groups led to behaviours and views of reading, which, rather than accelerating progress, acted as an inhibiting force on movement between groups.

The pupils at Granville were assigned to Literacy and Numeracy groups according to scores on NFER tests that were taken at the start of each school year, and inevitably the participants found themselves in the lower ability groups which contained some pupils with generalized and some with specific learning difficulties. In the Literacy group during Y5 this mixture of pupils with very different needs, but often similar attainment, were given a curricular diet consisting largely of reductive skills practice, and this concerned me as I felt that the participants were denied the chance to take part in the more stimulating work provided for the higher ability groups. However an advantage of this arrangement was that the lower groups were much smaller than the higher ability groups and the adult: pupil ratio was good because the school had recently invested heavily in classroom assistants (Blatchford et al., 2007), so at least one was always present in addition to the teacher. There was also less expectation that pupils would be able to undertake reading independently than in class lessons, which was another benefit for the participants . As an aside, it is

thought provoking to note that although the Y6 Literacy group, contained several pupils with generalized MLD, an autistic boy, a boy with ADHD and another with EBD problems, my subjective opinion was that three of the four participants' word reading ability was lower than that of any other pupils. This, given their good oral ability and overall greater understanding of concepts compared with the rest, graphically illustrates the challenges pupils with dyslexic-type difficulties face in their daily struggle to cope with school reading demands.

The participants were in rather a different position with regard to the four Y6 Science groups, as allocation had been via practice SATs scores, and as three of the four had done well, they were placed in the second highest group. It was noticeable that, despite the fact that most of the other pupils were in the higher Numeracy and Literacy groups, the participants often seemed sharper when explaining concepts verbally in the course of class discussions than did many of the rest. The above discussion problematises the issue of where pupils with dyslexic-type difficulties should be best placed when subjects are taught in ability groups. Certainly at the end of the year when transition work in preparation for the move to secondary school was presented to mixed ability groups, the participants struggled somewhat with the Numeracy work, but thrived on the literature based Literacy work and produced task responses that exceeded the expectations of their teachers. This must surely give rise to the reflection that they may not have been most effectively supported through their KS2 years by being placed in the lower Literacy groups (Hallam et al., 2004a, Hallam et al, 2004b).

A further impact of attending ability groups was that on most days the participants were taught by several different teachers who therefore were bound to have less intimate knowledge of their reading problems than if they had been taught mostly by their class teacher, as in the traditional primary model (Bibby et al., 2007). The use of cross-class groups also meant that the timetable was strictly divided into subject lessons which lasted around an hour, in effect a 'junior' version of the traditional secondary school model (Bibby et al., 2007). This meant that quite frequently the

participants were expected to complete work at a very fast pace in order to finish tasks, and this sometimes caused them problems. All four also attended small group sessions with classroom assistants for all or part of the two year fieldwork period in which a mixture of pupils with specific and generalized learning difficulties were withdrawn in order to receive extra support with basic literacy skills. In addition to these sessions, at the start of Y6, a new 'Einstein Group' for pupils identified as having dyslexic difficulties was formed by the peripatetic SNSS teacher, and the participant with an LEA SEN statement also received 'one to one' support on a regular basis.

6.3 The pupil context

Before presenting introductory profiles of the four participating pupils, Amy, Janie, Emie and Russell, it is important to provide some preliminary explanations. Although not central to my research questions, at the start of the project I had hoped to obtain contextualising information about the participants from their individual annual progress reports, SEN Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and in the case of one boy, his SEN statement, but as in Dockrell and Shield (2006), access was not allowed because of the headteacher's concern over confidentiality implications of recent Data Protection legislation. The profiles below have therefore been assembled from ad hoc information provided either by staff or the pupils themselves, and from fieldnotes and interview transcript data. As would be expected in view of the above, no test results of any kind were offered at the start of the project, but the headteacher relaxed her position just before the end of the study and did allow access to the participants' KS2 SATs results and scores on the SPAR sentence completion reading test, which had been administered during the summer term of Y5 and repeated about a year later in Y6. For the same reason of privacy, I was not able to find out as much about the family and home circumstances of the participants as I had hoped to during the project, but again, unexpectedly, just before I left the school, the headteacher told me their eligibility status with regard to free school meals (FSM) and so I am including that information in order to give an, albeit crude, indication of possible social disadvantage (Dockrell and Shield, 2006).

In Chapter Five I set out my reason for allowing the four pupils to choose their own pseudonyms, but I acknowledge Delamont's (2002) concern that if family or friends' names are selected, there is a danger that participants are traceable. As I have no way of knowing if such choices were made, I have disguised some specific contextual details in the profiles below in order to provide a further safeguard with regard to anonymity. It is also important to explain that at times, for the sake of clarity, in the pupil profiles and empirical chapters, it has been necessary to refer by name to other pupils with whom the participants interacted, and I have chosen their pseudonyms by locating ones, again with the same initial and with a similar frequency around their birth year using charts in *The Guinness book of names* (Dunkling, 1993).

6.3.1 *Introductory profile of Amy*

Amy, who was of average height and medium build, was always well dressed in the official school uniform and had a neat, cared-for appearance. She lived on the adjacent council estate and was eligible for free school meals. Her parents had split up prior to the start of the study, and her family now consisted of her mother, her stepfather, a younger sister who also attended Granville, and twin baby step-sisters who were born just after the start of the study. Amy's mother appeared to be supportive of her learning in that she sometimes bought her books, but she had little time to devote to reading practice or homework, and Amy once confided that her younger sister was a better reader than she was and sometimes helped her. Amy had experienced problems with literacy learning since being in the Infants, but although she was on the SEN list, she had never had a formal diagnostic assessment at school. Amy achieved a Reading Age on the Y5 SPAR test of 7.5 when she was 10.3 years old, and 8.7 when in Y6. This improvement in one year is impressive as it suggests that she was starting to close the gap between attainment and age, but her oral reading continued to be hesitant and slow paced with little fluency or expression and this gave the impression that she was not reading for meaning. Amy was very nervous before the Y6 SATs and only achieved level 3 in all the subjects. However,

she was only one mark off level 4 in both the reading and writing tests of the English assessment, which made her the highest achiever of the four participants in that subject.

Amy was a naturally quiet, kind-natured, reliable girl who appeared to be well integrated socially amongst low and mid-ability girls, but she seemed to prefer to have one 'best' friend rather than a larger and looser group. For much of Y5, when they were in the same class, Janie fulfilled this role, but their close relationship began to disintegrate with the arrival of two new girls who destabilized a number of existing friendships. This may have been the reason that Amy was moved into a different class at the start of Y6, and from then on she formed a strong bond with Emma, a physically larger motherly girl whom she sat next to. The arrival of the step-twins inevitably had a major impact on Amy's home life, and she seemed devoted to the babies, such that for much of Y5 I felt she was so preoccupied with family matters that she often seemed to daydream rather than engage fully with classroom activities. However, during Y6 she started to always work very hard on individual tasks and her dutiful conformist personality and strong need for adult approval meant that she began to ask more readily for support when she needed it. She did though remain the sort of child who liked to fade into the background during class discussions, rather like the quiet passive pupils in Collins' (1996) study, and if public attention was on her for some reason she would tend to become awkward and embarrassed looking. As Amy progressed through Y6, her conscientious attitude and high level of engagement with tasks meant that her level of attainment rose steadily in most subjects, and as she became a more successful learner, her confidence, which had previously seemed very low in all areas of school life, grew too, and she began to contribute more in class discussions. At the end of the year Amy was rewarded for her hard work when she was one of only 6 out of the cohort of 58 pupils who received an award for 'good progress through effort' at the Leavers' Assembly.

6.3.2 Introductory profile of Janie

Janie, who was rather small and slightly built, was usually dressed in a fashionable approximation of the school uniform, but at times looked somewhat unkempt. Her family consisted of her parents and a younger brother and sister, who also attended Granville, and she lived on the adjacent council estate and was eligible for free school meals. Her mother was at college during the course of the project, and Janie said that the reason for this was that she had not been to school. At the time I presumed she meant she had truanted, but I acknowledge that this may be an erroneous assumption as it could have been for reasons of ill-health (Jackie Marsh, personal communication, August, 2006). Certainly there did not seem to be much support at home for reading or homework, and at the start of Y6 Janie told me that her father found some words difficult to read. Although I was not able to find out, this led me to wonder if one or both of her parents also had dyslexic type literacy difficulties, as it is widely accepted that a heritability factor is involved (Miles and Miles, 1999).

Janie's literacy difficulties were not detected until she entered Y3, and although in my opinion she exhibited classic dyslexic-type traits (Miles, 1993), she had never been given a label for her problems even though she was on the SEN list. Janie achieved a Reading Age of 8.0 in the Y5 SPAR test when her chronological age was 9.11 years. To the horror of the SENCO, when the test was repeated in Y6, Janie's reading standard appeared to have regressed, as her new Reading Age was 7.10 years. This may have been an artifact of the test as I was told that Janie had got to a certain point and defensively refused to do any more because she said it was too difficult. However, I knew that her reading was still hesitant and slow-paced with many inaccuracies and so it did not surprise me that her reading appeared not to have improved. Just before the Y6 SATs Janie told me that she was scared because the tests were so 'big', by which she meant there were a lot of them, and afterwards she became upset when she told me she how disappointed she had felt when she discovered she only achieved level 3 for all the subjects.

Janie, like Amy, was always quiet in class discussions and exuded a general lack of confidence in all areas of school life except sport and dancing. However she was a much more difficult character to understand, as particularly in Y6 she was like a chameleon, sometimes dutiful and well engaged with tasks, but at other times disinterested in learning and a challenge for staff to deal with. Perhaps an idea of the complexity of Janie's character was revealed in her tendency to 'romance' during interviews about family matters, while at the same time often being the most analytically insightful of the participants when discussing reading or organizational issues related to the project. During Y5 Janie had been conformist most of the time and often engaged in teacher-pleasing behaviour, but there were signs that passive resistance was setting in, and in Y6 this developed into a more active disaffection with school and general unhappiness, which was particularly marked in the spring term.

It seemed to me that at least some of Janie's angst was related to her learning difficulties, and particularly to her dislike of attending withdrawal groups, but the staff felt that friendship problems were mainly to blame, as although she was well integrated socially with a group of low and mid-ability girls, there were constant rivalries and jealousies. Janie divulged to staff and to me that she was being bullied by a miscreant girl who formed part of this group, and during the spring term of Y6 the SENCO decided that Janie would benefit from a new start socially and advised that she should consider going to a different secondary school from the one that most pupils from Granville moved on to. She decided to do this and it seemed to act as a turning point, and from then on she seemed much happier, especially when she was given responsibility as one of the main carers of new school pet guinea pigs. Even when at her most disaffected, Janie, perhaps surprisingly, had continued to work reasonably hard on individual tasks, although she often intermittently chatted to friends, and in the summer term of Y6 openly flirted with boys, as well as indulging in other diversionary behaviour such as frequent toilet trips. However by the end of Y6 she seemed to approach individual tasks in a more sustained way, and was involving herself in some extra-curricular activities, but worryingly for her sense of

self and disposition towards school in the future, she was the only one of the four participants who was not selected to receive any kind of award at the Leavers' Assembly.

6.3.3 Introductory profile of Ernie

Ernie, who was slightly overweight and below average height, which gave him a stocky appearance, was always well dressed in the official school uniform. He lived in a small town some miles away, and his socio-economic circumstances were much more favourable than the other three participants in that he was growing up in a professional family. Eddie's home situation was very different in another fundamental way too in that his immediate family had gone through a difficult and traumatic time when he was younger, with the result that he and his teenage brother and sister now lived with his maternal aunt, who was an Infant teacher at the school, and her husband. This arrangement seemed to provide him with a stable home situation, and his aunt was highly supportive of his learning needs and spent a considerable amount of time helping him with reading and homework. Ernie was on the SEN list and had been assessed as primarily dyspraxic but with dyslexic tendencies, and it is generally accepted that there can be overlap in the difficulties experienced (Portwood, 1996).

Ernie achieved a reading age of 7.9 on the Y5 SPAR reading test when he was 10.0 years old, and when the test was repeated in Y6, his reading age had risen to 9.1 years, which meant he had made almost 18 months progress in one year. This impressive improvement, which exceeds the annual rate reported in a study of pupils who had specialist tuition with the Dyslexia Institute (Rack, 2004), did not surprise me as I knew that during the main fieldwork year his reading had become much more fluent and accurate. Ernie's experience with regard to the Y6 SAT tests was rather different to the other pupils because his aunt was able to explain their true purpose and diffuse anxiety, and just before them when asked how he felt about them he simply said that he was glad they were close because they would soon be over. Like all the other participants he only achieved level 3 in Maths and English,

but he did get a level 4 for Science and was very keen to tell me that his mark was only just below that needed for level 5.

Ernie was a co-operative and conformist pupil who was the most school-orientated of the four participants in that he was always enthusiastic about the experiences on offer, and this was perhaps unsurprising given his family circumstance. However, although he seemed to put more value on academic tasks than the other three and usually attended well and worked hard during lessons, he did engage in intermittent off-task chatting. He also indulged in minor misbehaviour at times, for example, whistling quietly but audibly during individual tasks, in both Y5 and Y6, and it is interesting that this was usually ignored by staff when I am sure they would have reprimanded known miscreants. Perhaps the reason for this was his 'insider' status, and certainly of the four participants he seemed the most at ease when interacting with adults around school. However, Eddie could form friendly relationships with his peers and he seemed to be well-integrated socially within a loose knit group of mid-ability boys which included Russell. Verbally he was able to express himself articulately and had good general knowledge, which perhaps gave him the confidence to often want to contribute during class discussions provided no reading was involved. As this would suggest, overall he was the most self-assured of the four participants, and when chosen for a leading role in the school Christmas production he played the part with obvious enjoyment, and his acting ability was officially acknowledged at the end of Y6 when he was given the class award for drama at the Leavers' Assembly. Ernie also increasingly showed musical talent and was learning to play the clarinet at school, and it is perhaps significant that in this domain he exhibited a much higher level of self-esteem than he did in most areas of school life.

6.3.4 Introductory profile of Russell

Russell, who was of average height and slim build, was always neatly dressed in the official school uniform. He lived on the private estate close to the school with his parents, who were both in work, and his older brother and baby sister. Russell's mother was supportive in that she bought him books and spent time helping him

with reading and homework, but questions must be asked as to the value his parents put on education as holidays were always taken in term time. About two years before the project began Russell had been formally assessed as dyslexic, and due to the severity of his short-term memory problems and literacy difficulties was made the subject of an LEA SEN statement which entitled him to a number of hours of additional adult support. Russell achieved a reading age of 7.3 years in the Y5 SPAR test when his chronological age was 10.2 years, and when repeated in Y6 his reading age was recorded as 7.5 years, which suggests that his literacy functioning had hardly changed. As with the other participants, his score confirmed my subjective impression of his reading level, as I knew he still read at a very slow pace with many inaccuracies and found most texts far too difficult to read independently. Russell regarded the SATs as high stakes assessment tests, and accorded them similar status to GCSEs, as he believed he had to do well in order to get the 'good' job as an astronaut, or more feasibly, an airline pilot, that he aspired to when he grew up. Understandably then he was rather anxious as the SATs approached, and just before the tests, made himself an A4 poster which read "Don't worry". Like the other participants, he achieved level 3 in Maths and English, but he told me he was very relieved and pleased when he discovered he had got level 4 in Science.

Russell was an affable, kind-natured pupil who was highly conformist and teacher-pleasing and this led him to become worried and tearful if he thought he was in trouble. He appeared to be well integrated socially with a loose knit group of mid-ability boys which included Ernie, but he also liked to cultivate adult friendships and was perhaps over close to the classroom assistant who had supported him for a number of years. Russell was the only participant who felt able to have a joking relationship with me about my role, as was shown by the way he would often say "Still scribbling then!" with a twinkle in his eye when he saw me around school with my notebook, but it is important to make it clear that he never came over as anything other than polite. He often gave the impression in class of being easygoing, but this was a smokescreen to hide the fact that he often felt worried and panicky if he found work hard, which I believe was the result of his general lack of confidence.

However, this did not stop him sometimes making contributions in class discussions, particularly in Science, a subject about which he was very knowledgeable, and in fact this was the only school domain in which he seemed to have high self-regard.

Because of his SEN statement Russell had always been given a lot of adult attention, and the result of this was that during Y5 I often noted that he lacked self-belief in his ability to function as an independent learner. The school staff seemed to become aware of the problem, and support was not offered as readily in Y6, and as the year went on, largely due to attendance at the self-esteem boosting Einstein Group mentioned above, Russell became somewhat more self-reliant. He always worked hard at individual tasks, although his pace was very slow when a written product was required, but at times, like Emie, he would indulge in off-task chatting with friends. Nevertheless he always completed tasks conscientiously and, like Amy, he was one of only six pupils in the year group who received a 'good progress through effort' award at the Leavers' Assembly.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have set the scene for the empirical chapters by providing contextualising information both about the school and the participating pupils. I have gone into considerable detail because my symbolic interactionist position underlies my view that the 'nested contexts' (Graue and Walsh, 1998) that surround a child as they "create, maintain and shape their pupil identity" (Pollard and Filer, 1999, p.303) during their progression through primary school, should be kept firmly in mind as findings are presented. In Chapter One, I set out my belief that children can act as competent reporters of their school experiences, and stated that overall the pupil voice has been neglected in research. SooHoo (1993) has suggested that the reason for this may be that, as educationalists, we tend to be over-ready to "listen to outside experts to inform us, and consequently, we overlook the treasure in our very own backyards: our students" (p. 390).

It is now time to foreground the pupil perspective, and allow this ‘treasure’ to ‘inform us’ as I answer the research questions set out in Chapters One and Four. It is perhaps useful at this point to remind the reader of the structure of the empirical chapters that was outlined at the end of Chapter One. The areas of interest are discussed in the same order that they appeared in the research questions, and so in Chapter Seven, I focus on the reader identities of the four participants, and in Chapter Eight their presentation of selves as readers is investigated. The exact coping strategies used for classroom reading are set out in Chapters Nine and Ten, and finally, the impact of electronic multimodality is discussed in Chapter Eleven. In the next chapter, then, I begin the exploration of the participants’ school experiences with a discussion of how their individual reader identities were affected by their dyslexic-type literacy difficulties.

CHAPTER SEVEN

READER IDENTITY AND MARGINALISATION

7.1 Introduction

In 2002, McCarthy and Moje, writing from a socio-cultural constructivist perspective, discussed the reasons that identity matters when the subject of literacy is researched. In the introduction to their article, which is written in the form of an extended conversation, they state that:

Identity matters because it, whatever *it* is, shapes or is an aspect of how humans make sense of the world and their experiences in it, including their experiences with texts. (McCarthy and Moje, 2002, p.228)

Later they state that the converse is also true in that “literate practices play a role in identifications and positionings” (McCarthy and Moje, 2002, p.229). If this view is taken, then it is clear that having dyslexic difficulties will profoundly affect an individual’s reader identity both because of the way that the self-concept is affected, as discussed in Chapter Four, and because engagement in literate practices is limited by the less than proficient reading levels. My symbolic interactionist stance with its emphasis on a Meadian social self, as set out in Chapter Three, means that separating out psychological and sociological aspects of identity creates a somewhat artificial duality. However in order to structure the data analysis in as clear a manner as possible, in this chapter I will focus on the participants’ reader identities as revealed by their individual self-perceptions, and I will reserve discussion of their presentation of self as members of the classroom community of literate practice until the next chapter.

The participants have already been introduced as learners in pen portraits provided in Chapter Six as part of the contextual background to the study, but in this chapter I narrow the focus in order to specifically address the first research question:

What is the effect of having dyslexic difficulties on upper junior aged pupils' identities as readers at school?

In the first part of the chapter I will present each participant's reader identity in the form of what I term a 'voice vignette', as I agree with Ely et al., (1997) that the use of these constitutes an original but effective way to put across certain types of qualitative findings. In this case I also see the use of the vignettes as a demonstration of my commitment to foregrounding the pupil perspective, as discussed in Chapter One. This is because I believe that at this point in the thesis they bring alive the voices of the four participants more vividly than short quotations from interview transcripts interspersed with analysis would have done. After the vignettes I return to the conventional form of presentation as I discuss how the participants' dyslexic difficulties adversely affected their self-concept as readers. I will then provide a brief introduction to how this resulted in marginalisation in the classroom, and in the final part of the chapter I will look in detail at how the exclusion the participants experienced was intensified by attendance at withdrawal tuition groups.

7.2. Reader identity voice vignettes

The voice vignettes (Ely et al., 1997) presented below have been written in the first person, and aim to give an idea of what the participants might have said if they had talked to an unfamiliar adult about their reading as they left primary school. They have been constructed almost wholly from the participants' exact words in answer to the questions on reader identity listed in Appendix 6, and from other interview responses. I have sometimes altered verb tenses from present to past, and have also changed dialect phrases into a more standard version of English when I did not feel at ease attempting to replicate the participants' forms of speech (Crystal, 2004). In order to produce a coherent narrative, this interview data has been interweaved with a small amount of additional material, mainly on the participants' book choices, derived from observational evidence. In these instances, I have in effect 'put words in their mouths', and Ely et al. (1997) state that researchers are wary of writing vignettes in this way because in the act of imagination they fear misrepresentation of the participants' thoughts and feelings. This is a distinct danger, but I would argue,

as discussed in Chapter Five, that all ethnographic research writing, however conventional, consists of constructed rather than descriptive narrative (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Atkinson, 1990, 1992). However, I am aware that validity would have been improved if the vignettes had been presented to the participants for their comments and approval (Ely et al., 1997), but this was not possible as they were written after the fieldwork was completed, and I was no longer in contact with them. I also acknowledge that the inclusion of such vignettes in a doctoral thesis could be considered a dangerous “break away from the accepted guidelines” (Nisbet, 2006, p.13) because the data extracts used are not tied to their exact sources, but my defence is that the immediacy I was trying to create would have been destroyed if I had constantly interrupted the narrative with dates of interviews in parentheses.

In addition to presenting the participants’ perceptions of themselves as readers in the voice vignettes, I have attempted to also give an indication of their textual preferences, as I believe that through book choice another important element of reader identity is revealed. Although none of the four participants could be described as experienced readers according to the criteria set out in the Primary Language Record (ILEA, 1988), nevertheless, as Ivey (1999a) also found, despite their literacy difficulties, they had developed particular tastes, and a complete list of the books from which they read passages to me during their lunchtime interviews is provided in the Reader Statistics that form Appendices 7 to 10. In the voice vignettes, each participant talks about a book I purchased for them from the school Book Fayre, and it is important to explain how this came about, as it is a good example of how serendipity can enrich research studies conducted in real world contexts (Fine and Deegan, 1996). I discovered on arrival back at Granville after a break during the KS2 SATs period that the annual school Book Fayre was due to begin that day, and on the spur of the moment I decided to ask the headteacher if she thought it would be appropriate for me to buy books for the participants. I had always intended purchasing a book for each of them at the end of the project as a way of thanking them for their time, but I realised that the Book Fayre would give me the opportunity to increase their sense of agency by allowing them to make the choice themselves.

The headteacher reacted positively, and suggested that I might like to write a personal dedication in each book so they would act as a memento of participation in the project.

The Book Fayre was organised such that the pupils in each class recorded a 'wish list' of books during a fifteen minute browsing only session on the first day, and then revisited later in the week with their parents if they wanted to make purchases. I decided that I would not say anything in advance to the participants, but would accompany each Upper Junior class during their browsing session so I could firstly observe unaffected behaviour. Just before the end of each session, I took the participant on one side and explained that the headteacher had given me alone permission to buy books that day, and that as a 'thank-you' for helping me they could choose anything they liked up to a value of £5. All seemed genuinely touched by my gesture of generosity and chose books which reflected the reading tastes and interests that I had noted during the fieldwork, and in the week afterwards they appeared to be highly motivated to engage with them. The event also had the self-esteem boosting effect of giving the participants privileged status within the pupil cohort, as they were the only children in the school who left the Book Fayre that day with a book, and this led to a wave of envy as the news spread and they showed off their gifts and read out the dedications to their friends.

It is now time to allow the voices of the participants to come to the fore as I present their reader identity vignettes:

7.2.1 AMY

When Mrs Anderson asked me if I liked reading I said "yes and no" because books are interesting but I often can't read the ones at school and it gets annoying. I know I can't read very well because if it's a short word or a big word – I can't even read it, and people at school who are good readers are much faster than I am – they can read three pages and I'm still on page one. When I go to my new school, I will tell the teachers that I am an exciting quiet sort of reader. If they ask what that is I will tell them I like to read alone with not a lot of people shouting and that I like a book that's exciting and not boring. I think I'd need to start on easy books and then go on to medium books,

because I might not be able to read hard ones - but I think that if I keep on trying then my reading will be better when I grow up. I like books to have some parts that are easy and some parts that are hard and it really helps if they have pictures. A good book is one that is just right and you can understand the words instead of thinking "what does that mean?". In Literacy this year when we had silent reading we had to choose story books from a table in the room and I think the teachers chose ones they thought were interesting but they didn't think if they were of interest to kids. Then even if they were too hard, when we had started a book we had to finish it - usually I could read them a bit, but I wished there were more easier books. If I couldn't read a word I tried my best to sound words out but sometimes I had to miss bits out. We had guided reading groups in Literacy and I liked that better than silent reading because it helps you when the teacher tells you you've got a word wrong.

At the start of the year when I moved classes Miss E told me to sit next to Emma and she's a good reader so I always ask her to read hard things, and she says "OK" - she doesn't just go "Ooh - but why can't you?" - but she's in a different Literacy group so I always ask an adult in that lesson because sometimes children might tell you wrong. When we were doing the work to take with us to the comprehensive after the SATs, Emma let me have her 'Suitcase Kid' book when she had finished it. I thought Jacqueline Wilson books would be too hard for me but I really liked that one because Mrs F used to read it out to us every day in Literacy so I knew the story. I like books that have a lot of expression in, and I really got into the 'Kitty and Friends' series this year - I could read those OK and my mum bought them for me from the co-op. My sister got me two for my birthday and I've got nine now but I want the whole set. I also like books with magic in and so when Mrs Anderson bought me a book from the school Book Fayre I chose one called 'Stardust' about a girl who turns into a fairy. I wrote down the names of some books that I wanted my mum to get - a Jacqueline Wilson fun file for me and a picture book for the twins, but she didn't come in the end.

7.2.2 JANIE

One day Mrs Anderson asked me what sort of a reader I would tell the teachers at my new school I was and I said I would say that I am not very good. I said that because I think good readers do lots of practice and I don't like reading. It's funny because I could read real good when I was in the infants but when I got into the juniors the books got harder. You can tell when a book is going to be hard when you read the first bit - it's just boring when there are lots of hard words and it takes so long. I did like to read poem books with rhymes and once I had a 'Goosebumps' book that had been on telly and I read that three times. You know when a book is good because of the way it is set out and it has good words in - because if it's just like "I - saw - a - car" it's not interesting. I used to go to groups every day and sometimes we did

Wellington Square books and they were really boring, but I think it helped me to read a bit better.

I liked the book Mrs Anderson bought me from the school Book Fayre. It's called 'Fame school' and it's actually helping me because it's a lot easier for people who know a lot about them - I do because I used to do dancing on Saturdays. If I got stuck on a word I read on and then got back to it, and it was easier to guess words with that book, and I know that's how to improve at reading. So if I read books like that I think my reading will be a lot better when I grow up. I was really pleased I got 'Fame school' because I knew my mum wasn't coming to the Book Fayre, so I didn't think I would be able to get any. I told Mrs Anderson that I didn't like reading out loud to people, and so sometimes I wouldn't read to her when she had the tape on at dinner times - quite often I had things to do with my friends, so I didn't want to be long talking to her. I didn't mind guided reading groups in Literacy because then you only had to read a little bit and then other people read some more. I would rather read to myself though because it's much easier and I can get through it faster, but when we had silent reading in Literacy the books we had to choose from were too hard for me. So at school mostly I didn't really read anything, but sometimes I did read at home to my dad - he's a good reader but he does get stuck on some words. My mum helped me too, but she never went to school and she says it ruins your life because now she has to go to college and so she hasn't got much time, and I don't want that to happen to me. I'm going to a different school from most people because I've heard bad reports that you get bullied on at that one, and even at this school I've been upset this year a lot of the time because of the new girl causing so much trouble and making my friends fall out with me.

7.2.3 ERNIE

If a grown-up at school asked me about my reading this year, I always said I was rubbish because I didn't used to be very good at reading. I still make mistakes and sometimes I have to stop to work words out, but I do like reading. I think I am getting better because a good reader is someone who can read a long hard book like Harry Potter quickly, and I read 'The goblet of fire' after Christmas and it didn't take me very long. But if a teacher at my new school asks me what sort of a reader I am, I will say that I still don't think I'm that good because I need to practise doing voices. I used to sit at the kitchen table while Auntie was making dinner and every day I would read to her. Uncle sometimes heard me too and once I read to him sitting on his knee. At school I liked doing guided reading better than silent reading because they helped you with words and you got to hear other people read and you could see their expression. I think the best way for someone to improve their reading is to start with easy books and then get harder and harder and harder and harder - and so if I keep on like this I think my reading will be better when I grow up - but it might not be as good because I probably won't practise as much then.

I think a good book is one that has good description in and I quite like looking at pictures because that helps with the words. But if it's really easy like some baby books – like you'd say “ Amy – is – sleeping – Ernie – is – downstairs – cook – ing” – that's boring to read. I really like books about films and cartoons so I chose a 'Shrek' one when Mrs Anderson bought a book for me from the Book Fayre. I wondered whether to get an 'Incredibles' one, but I had a look at it and there were lots of hard words so I decided to stay with Shrek. I flicked through and I could see the words were exactly the same as in the films, and that week I read it at home loads of times because it added some extra bits that made it even funnier. I gave Mrs Anderson a 'thank-you' card afterwards, and my auntie gave me some money to spend at the Book Fayre too and I got 'Bartman'. When we were doing the work for the comprehensive after the SATs I liked the tape of 'Kensuke's kingdom' so much that I asked my auntie to buy it for me at the weekend, and now I'm reading it and it's my favourite book. But sometimes novels get boring because they don't tell you anything real, so I do read fact books as well - like 'Horrible histories' and then I read the cartoon bits because they're easier.

7.2.4 RUSSELL

I'm not very good at reading because I can't read like big big big big words and I've got these special blue glasses so the writing doesn't look blurry – I thought they were just for books, and I often forget them, but one day when we were looking at a whiteboard I put them on and I could see better – so if it keeps on like that, I've got to wear them 24/7 – but I suppose it will be alright because people will think I am wearing sunglasses. Ages ago I had loads of tests and they found out my brain forgets things and so that's why Mrs W used to help me a lot in lessons, and she's the best helper. When it was silent reading in Literacy, me and Ashley used to go out with her to do spellings, so I didn't get much chance to read and I think that it would have been useful to have been there because it helps you to learn when you have peace and quiet. Guided reading in Literacy was good too because everyone joined in, but I used to go out to groups quite a lot and I liked that because things like Wellington Square work helped me with my reading. I think that learning about vowels and splitting words up like “con- so- nant” is the best way for someone to get better at reading – we used to do that in that Einstein selection group – it was called that after that man who was very clever but couldn't do schoolwork. I used to go out quite a lot on my own too because I did Toe by Toe and touchtyping.

I don't like reading much - some books are rock solid with hard words, but it's alright when it gets good when I'm into a very very very good book like 'The lion, the witch and the wardrobe'. I can tell if a book will be good if it has good pictures inside and a good cover that gives me an idea what it might be about – like that shark on that 'Jeremy Brown' spy book. It was hard but I had

a go at the words and then when I got to the end of the sentence I went back and tried it again – and then if I couldn't do it, I just left it and missed pages out. Once I had a book called 'Morris and the cat flap' and I liked that because it had good pictures and it was very very easy to read – a good book like that that was just a slight bit harder would be the right book for me. It's OK too when I'm reading about things like motorbikes and space-travel. I want to be an astronaut when I grow up so I chose a book about life in space and aliens when Mrs Anderson bought me a book from the Book Fayre. When I read it to her she helped me a bit because she said it was hard - and when I got to the bottom of the page I said "phew" because I was tired, but I know a lot about space so I knew some of the words. We used to talk to Mrs Anderson at dinner time and I really liked doing that - it was funny because she used to scribble in a notebook all the time in lessons and sometimes I teased her but she was alright about it because she's a kind teacher. My mum used to help me with my reading and my homework and she came to the Book Fayre and bought me a spies kit, and then Joe and Matthew that I sit with got this really good story – it was called 'Fire and ice' so I got it as well and it's brilliant. Mrs Anderson asked me what I thought my reading would be like when I grow up, but I said that I didn't know because you can't look into the future. I know that I will still need help when I get to my new school so I will tell the teachers that I don't really understand big words and that I like a book where it's hard and easy - like in the middle.

7.3 Reader identity and self-concept

In the voice vignettes above, I have allowed each participant's low self-image of themselves as a reader to 'speak for itself' (Ely et al., 1997), but in this section I return to a conventional discussion of how their dyslexic difficulties had a negative effect on their reader identity. It was clear when I asked the participants during lunchtime interviews about their image of themselves as readers, that spending years experiencing difficulty with literacy learning had damaged their self-concept in this area of the academic domain (Burns, 1982). This did not surprise me as I had discovered many examples of low self-worth in the dyslexia-related literature discussed in Chapter Four. As is apparent in the voice vignettes above, when I asked the participants what sort of readers they thought they were, they based their evaluation on their deficient decoding ability, and Amy was the participant who articulated this most clearly, as is revealed in the following Y6 interview extract:

- RA: If there was a new teacher and you felt they needed to know what sort of a reader you are – what would you explain – what sort of a reader would you tell them you are?
- A: That I can't read very - (pause as Amy sighs) well.
- RA: ... Why do you think you're think you're not very good then Amy?
- A: Cos erm – I've been reading some books and every time like it's a short word or a big word – I can't even read it.
- (Interview transcript, 28.1.2005)

Of the four participants, Janie's self-worth seemed to be more adversely affected than that of the other three, despite the fact that her reading standard at the start of the project and experience of schooling was similar to the rest. It can only be conjectured as to why this should have been, but her generally unhappy state and disaffection with school for much of Y6 suggested that she may have been experiencing other problems in her life, and if so they may have been the reason she was less able to keep her specific difficulties with literacy in proportion. In the research referred to in Chapter Four, Burden (2005) also found that, although his sample of boys all attended the same independent school, some seemed to express more negativity about their experiences than others, and he too suggested that it was possible that factors other than their dyslexia may have been responsible. It seems likely that it was Janie's low self-regard that caused her to passively opt out of reading during lessons (Collins, 1996) more and more as Y6 progressed, and during her lunchtime interviews she engaged in a more active form of resistant behaviour by sometimes refusing to read a passage to me from her reading book, as her Reader Statistics, given in Appendix 8, show. The following extract from an interview during the spring term, when she was at her most uncooperative, reveals how she succeeded in avoiding reading despite my somewhat unethical efforts to persuade her when it was obvious she did not want to:

- RA: Oh – you like poems don't you – yes – what have you got then at the moment?
- J: It's a wicked witch poem.
- RA: Is it right – right is that in your classroom ?
- J: Yes - I don't know if it's gone now.
- RA: What from where was it – in your tray or?

J: No.
RA: No, just on the wall – would you like to fetch it and read it to me or ?
J: I don't know where it is.
RA: Don't you – oh that is a shame – right – what are you going to ?
J: I don't read nothing really ?? (inaudible)
RA: Don't you? I was going to say - what are you going to read when it's silent reading in a few minutes, cos usually is when it's register isn't it? What do you think you'll read?
J: I don't know. I need toilet.
(Janie goes out the room and the interview ends)
(Interview transcript, 7.2.2005)

Janie would also decline at times during lunchtime interviews to read extracts from worksheets, and this was usually when she knew she would find the text difficult, even though I made sure the participants knew I would support them if they experienced decoding problems. She was however, always willing to read out her own written work if she knew she could give a competent performance, and so it would seem likely that when she was uncooperative, it was because of her low self-esteem in this area of the academic domain (Burns, 1982), as she did not want to draw attention to what she perceived as her poor reading standard (Fredrickson and Jacobs, 2001).

Each individual negotiates a unique 'pupil career' within the school context in which they find themselves (Pollard and Filer, 1999), and so it is important to state that, despite the fact that the other three participants also experienced low-self esteem as readers, as is apparent in the voice vignettes above, they always agreed to read to me during lunchtime interviews even when the text was difficult for them. In Amy's case, this compliant attitude could be seen as evidence that her conformist 'teacher-pleasing' character meant that the power and status difference between researcher and participant, as discussed in Chapter Five, made her feel she had no choice in the matter. However, this would not seem to be the case, as she sometimes pro-actively asked me to hear her read during class sessions when my chosen observer role meant it was inappropriate and I had to decline, despite feeling uncomfortable because I believed she desperately needed individualised tuition (Nind et al, 2004). Of the four

participants, Amy was the one who most often engaged in competence displays when she had produced school work she knew was of a good standard, so her requests to read could be interpreted as evidence of high self-esteem designed to enable her to show off her ability (McCarthy and Schmeck, 1988). However, this seems unlikely as the interview extract above reveals that she was well aware she was not good at reading, and during performances it was obvious she lacked confidence. Therefore I would conjecture that, whereas experiencing low self-esteem in this part of the academic domain (Burns, 1982) led Janie to increasingly avoid reading, it had the opposite effect on Amy in that it caused her to solicit support because she believed that as a novice, practice with an expert reader was the key to improving her standard (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Russell's dutiful nature meant that he was also always willing to read during interviews, but his low self-esteem in this area was revealed in the way he sometimes attempted to make a joke of his problems. He did this at the start of Y6 when I asked him to choose what to read to me from his reading book:

RA: ... is there any of that you could read to me?

R: Er – not a lot! (Russell laughs in an embarrassed way).

RA: Not a lot – why is that ?

R: (laughing) Cos there's a lot of words in here!

(Interview transcript, 28.9.2004)

As time went on I realised that this use of embarrassed laughter during awkward situations involving texts was habitual, as he often would giggle if asked to read something that was difficult, and I also observed him do this on a number of occasions when having written work assessed by staff. As discussed in Chapter Three, according to Goffman (1956), embarrassment occurs if there is a mismatch between an expected and actual public performance of some kind, and so seen in this light, Russell's behaviour can be interpreted as indicative of low self-concept in this domain of his school life. This may have been related to his attributional belief (Fredrickson and Jacobs, 2001), as discussed in Chapter Four, as when asked what

his reading would be like when he grew up, Russell said he did not know because “you can’t look into the future” (Interview Transcript, 6.6.2005), which suggests that he was an ‘externaliser’ who felt he had no control over life events (Burden, 2005). Certainly when discussing Dick King Smith’s *The guard dog* during a Y6 interview, his comment about a passage he had difficulty reading was very illuminating:

- RA: In books that look as though they are going to be OK . Do you find that? - sometimes there is an easy bit and then all of a sudden there’ll be a-
- R: Yeah – rock solid.
- RA: What - rock solid with difficult words?
- R: (Russell nods).
- (Interview transcript, 15.11.2004)

Russell’s use of the term ‘rock solid’ indicates that he regarded difficult words as an impenetrable external barrier which prevented him from making meaning from texts. Interestingly, the participant in Anderson (2001) who was mentioned in Chapter Four in relation to ‘learned helplessness’, also spontaneously used a ‘wall’ metaphor when he described what it was like to be a dyslexic reader:

Its like a block, like a dark screen in front of what’s really there ... trying to grab something holographic or something and you can’t grasp it. (Anderson, 2001, p.73)

In the study discussed in Chapter Four, Burden (2005) explored the metaphors that his sample of dyslexic boys used to describe their problems more systematically via an interview question, and he found that they too spoke of barriers, both surmountable and insurmountable. Given that Russell regarded passages of texts in this way, it is unsurprising that his self-esteem in this area of his life was so low that when he had to write an acrostic poem using his name, he put “R - rubbish at reading” (Fieldnotes, 24.11.2004). Evidence of his low self-regard could also be seen when he was talking during an interview at the start of the summer term of Y6 about trying to answer questions related to writer purpose and viewpoint in a

practice KS2 SATs comprehension, the text of which he had found very difficult to read:

R: I don't like them "why did the author do that writing?"

RA: Yes.

R: I do not understand them one bit.

(Interview transcript, 21.4.2005)

Kispaal (2005) states that such question tap into a "core and essential component in the interpretation of text" (p.155), but as Russell always had to devote all his mental processing capacity to decoding (Stanovich, 1986), it is not surprising he found this kind of "text-analysing", to use Wray's (2001, p.14) terminology, difficult. However, it is perturbing that the conclusion that must be drawn is that these contrived and artificial assessment situations (Hall et al., 2004) caused his evaluation of himself to be lowered even further as they confirmed in his mind that he was the type of pupil who was not capable of interacting with texts at this level. That he did have the requisite skills needed was revealed later in the same interview when he spontaneously began to talk about Ted Hughes' *The iron man*, which had been used as a class story the previous year, but it is worrying that he seemed to have no awareness he possessed such critical abilities. There were many times when, like Hall et al, (2004), I felt that these KS2 SAT practice comprehension exercises were damaging to the participants' self-esteem as readers because they found them so difficult, and they will be discussed in more detail in relation to coping strategies in Chapters Nine and Ten. On a more positive note, it did seem that Russell's low self-image was specific to literacy rather than generalized across the academic domain. Certainly his self-esteem in relation to himself as a scientist was high as he regarded himself as an expert on his chosen topics of 'passionate interest' (Fink, 1996), and was always keen to show off the knowledge he had assimilated by studying pictures and diagrams in books.

Ernie, too had a very positive opinion of himself in the musical part of the academic domain (Burns, 1982), as he regarded himself as a talented clarinet player, an

evaluation of his ability which was confirmed by his peripatetic tutor when I observed one of his weekly lessons during Y6. I had told the tutor that my research was about reading at school when I asked for permission to attend, and to my dismay she asked me at the end of the lesson if Ernie was a good reader. I felt very flustered as I felt she needed to know the truth, but realised this was very difficult ethically to handle in front of him. On the spur of the moment I asked him to give his evaluation of himself, and I referred back to this during his lunchtime interview:

RA: ...What she was thinking was you must be a very good reader because you are so good at reading music. But you said – can you remember what you said?

E: I'm a rubbish reader.

RA: Yes I know – why is that then? – why do you think you're a rubbish reader?

E: Probably cos I – I don't know – it's just too hard.

RA: I said that I think you are an improving reader – since the time I've been coming.

(Interview transcript, 25.1.2005)

The extract above shows that because I felt that Ernie had given an unduly pessimistic view of himself as a reader, I had qualified his opinion, in what, with hindsight, I realise was an inadvertent role lapse into 'teacher as assessor'.

It would seem then that Ernie's high self-regard was not transferred to reading as he had obviously continued to have a negative view of his ability even though his standard had improved considerably, and this suggests that the low self-perception of themselves as readers that dyslexic pupils have (Fredrickson and Jacobs, 2001) is deep seated and hard to dislodge even when the situation changes. Originally I thought Ernie was being self-deprecating about achievement in the way that I and my family tend to be, but then I discovered the likely reason for his negative evaluation of himself. I certainly felt that the support he was given with reading at home was largely responsible for his standard improving so much, but an element of irony seemed to be in operation (Ely et al., 1997) as this may have also have been the cause of his continuing negativity about himself. This was because his aunt was

always providing constructive criticism, both verbal and via comments in his reading diary, in order to move his reading forward, but this may have had the unfortunate effect of making him think he was still a 'rubbish' reader. This realisation has also made me wonder if this is the message that we as teachers inadvertently put across to pupils, because the constant progression onto more difficult texts as pupils work their way through reading schemes means they rarely experience the self-esteem enhancing pleasure of fluent reading (Ivey, 1999b). However, despite his low opinion of his standard, Emie was the only one of the four participants who told me he did like reading, and he certainly enjoyed talking about texts he had read at school and at home, and so it would seem that his overall evaluation of reading as an activity was the most positive of the four participants. However, as the above discussion shows, his dyslexic-type literacy difficulties clearly had had a negative effect on his self-concept as a reader, and, as was also the case with the other three participants, this impacted on their experience of many classroom activities and led to marginalisation, and in the next section, I consider the reasons for this.

7.4 Reader identity and marginalisation during classroom activities

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the American researchers Zigmond and Baker (1995) and Klingner et al. (1998) discovered that middle school struggling readers were routinely forced to engage with texts during classroom activities that were too hard for them to read independently, and Gentile and McMillan (1987) found this to be a major cause of stress leading to lowered self-esteem. By asking the participants during their lunchtime interviews to read extracts from reading matter they had encountered during the morning, I discovered that they too regularly experienced the problem of trying to read overly difficult texts. It is also unfortunate that the exclusion this created (Benjamin et al. 2003) was often intensified by excessively fast lesson pace, an inevitable consequence of the SATurated Y6 educational experience (Hall et al., 2004). The double effect of generalized low self-esteem as a reader brought about by years of experiencing difficulties with literacy learning and the daily struggle caused by the demands of specific texts resulted then in inevitable

marginalisation both in relation to class activities and individual tasks that involved reading.

Perhaps the clearest sign of marginalisation during class activities was the way in which the participants faded into the background during class or group discussions where reading was involved, and this phenomenon will be returned to in Chapter Ten during the discussion of coping strategies. What seemed to be particularly significant in terms of reader identity was that if they did pluck up courage to put their hands up to contribute in a discussion which had involved reading, but were not chosen to speak for that turn, they tended not to try again during the session, and sometimes disengaged completely. It almost seemed as if not being called on was interpreted as evidence that their low opinion of themselves as readers was accurate because it confirmed in their minds that the teachers saw them as pupils who would not have anything useful to contribute (Hall et al., 2004). In terms of marginalisation during individual activities, the fact that most texts were too difficult for the participants to read independently meant that they were, per se, excluded from being able to fully engage with the related tasks, and so show their true intellectual potential, unless support was available from other pupils or adults. However, Janie's statement "I don't read nothing really" in the interview extract in the previous section, reveals another more indirect form of marginalisation. As the year progressed the truth of her admission became more and more apparent as she no longer kept a book in her tray, but just picked any from the shelf in the classroom if told to read, and then flicked through with minimal engagement (OFSTED, 2004a). It would seem then that she had begun the same process of systematically excluding print from her life that Johnson's (1985) participants, mentioned in Chapter Four, spoke of. As will become apparent in the detail of the following chapters, the other three participants were also caught up, though perhaps less self-consciously, in this vicious circle of self-marginalisation in which they minimised interaction with texts, and so denied themselves exposure to print and thereby the means of improving their reading (Johnson, 1985).

7.5 Reader identity, marginalisation and withdrawal tuition

As mentioned in Chapter Six, all four participants attended frequent small group withdrawal teaching sessions for some or all of the fieldwork period in order to receive additional support with basic literacy skills. As the following chapters will focus mainly on reading during class and large group lessons, it is perhaps appropriate at this point to take a detailed look at how the withdrawal sessions added to the marginalisation the participants experienced at school. Benjamin (2002) states in her ethnographic study of SEN girls at the start of secondary schooling that identity is adversely affected by being given extra support in school because such pupils are then labelled as ‘failing’ and ‘needy’ by staff, with the inevitable result of limiting the options from which they can position themselves as learners. The participants in my study were in a different situation in that their difficulties were specific to literacy, but given the current achievement orientated culture in schools (Fielding et al., 1999; Hall et al., 2004), Benjamin’s (2002) findings have alerted me to the possibility that their negativity about their identity as readers may have been intensified by being identified by staff as the type of pupils who needed to attend withdrawal groups. Additionally, in Chapter Four, when discussing the literature on the self-concept of dyslexic pupils, I mentioned that children are particularly sensitive to the critical views of peers at the onset of adolescence (Seary, 1988; Ott, 1997), and in view of this, the upper junior stage of schooling is perhaps an especially unfortunate time to be publicly picked out as different and excluded from all or part of some class lessons.

In the previous section of this chapter I mentioned that the texts the pupils encountered during class lessons when minimal adult help was available were often too difficult for them to read by themselves. Wolcott (2001) advocates highlighting “inherent tensions and paradoxes” (p.125) in order “to make the audience look afresh at social phenomena” (Delamont, 2002, p.182). It is therefore important to make the reader aware that, by comparison, the texts the participants engaged with during withdrawal sessions when well supported by adults, were usually within their independent level capacity, to the extent that they were able to read them fluently

without help. In a report on the teaching of reading in primary schools, OFSTED (2004a) drew attention to lack of challenge in many intervention sessions because of overly easy work, and an evaluation of the impact of the Primary National Strategy also recently highlighted concerns about the effectiveness of much withdrawal support (OFSTED, 2005b). The review of inspection evidence of English since the year 2000 similarly confirmed that the current state of affairs is not satisfactory when it stated that:

Too many pupils receive support that does not meet their needs well enough, usually because teachers are not clear enough about what pupils know, and what they need to learn next. (OFSTED, 2005a, p.37)

This lack of challenge was compounded by the fact that the reading diet on offer in the withdrawal sessions consisted almost entirely of reductive texts with controlled vocabulary written specially for older pupils still experiencing difficulty with the basics of learning to read, such as the first stages of the *Wellington Square* programme. Although not experienced readers, conversations with the four pupils revealed that they were able to distinguish between these contrived texts and authentic reading matter, and it is well known that because of the low motivational interest level, shallow engagement results when reading such books or completing closed tasks on the associated basic skills worksheets (Turner and Paris, 1995; Powell, McIntyre and Rightmyer, 2006). The participants were also sometimes required to read scheme books designed for much younger pupils, and an example of this occurred when Russell read a *Jumpstart* Stage 1 book fluently during a Y6 'one to one' session with a classroom assistant. At best it is likely that the participants found these texts boring to read, as Fielding and Roller (1992) and Worthy (1996) suggest is often the case, and if so this may have caused them to feel it was not worth putting in effort to improve their standard. However, I would contend that both kinds of reductive texts had an even more unfortunate consequence for reader identity, for at worst, having to engage with them may well have added to the participants' negative self-perception if they felt they were readers of such limited

ability that this was the only reading matter considered suitable for them (Gentile and McMillan, 1987).

The damaging effects of the above may also have been intensified by another paradox, in that by comparison with class lessons where the pace and progression of learning was often over fast, the withdrawal sessions were often excessively slow (OFSTED, 2004a). This was true both in terms of the amount of work expected to be completed in a session, and in terms of the progression of learning, particularly with phonic skills (Hornsby, 1993), as the work seemed to be tailored to the needs of the members of the groups who had more generalized learning difficulties. Wearmouth (2004) and Burden (2005) have both recently drawn attention to the boredom that their participants felt when in this situation, and certainly, I observed Amy try unsuccessfully to move a withdrawal lesson forward on several occasions when she finished allotted work first and was told to wait for the rest. When asked whether they found the withdrawal groups useful, the participants seemed to have mixed feelings, and this was probably because they were aware of the issues discussed above, but as Janie's response showed during a Y6 interview, they knew the 'official' reason for their attendance:

- RA: When you say the things you do in groups are helpful – can you put that into words a bit – why it's helpful?
J: Cos it helps me to read a bit better.
(Interview transcript, 20.1.2005)

It is impossible to know if Janie really believed the groups helped her to improve her reading, but there can be no denying that the participants' overall confidence levels were much higher during withdrawal sessions than class lessons, and perhaps this was because they felt the atmosphere was more supportive due to the fact that all members had literacy difficulties of some kind. Despite this, however, Russell did not feel entirely comfortable in sessions led by classroom assistants, as was revealed in a Y6 interview:

- RA If you've got a choice and ... you're with another teacher – which do like best to be on your own like you were this morning or to be with other people as well ?
- R: Erm.
- RA: Does it matter to you?
- R: Be on my own with Mrs D.
- RA: Yes, why do you think that is then?
- R: Cos it's a lot quieter and they're not like bossing around me and I think they're talking about me and they're saying (Russell whispers) "why is he not ??? (inaudible)
- RA: Do you feel like that sometimes then?
- R: Sometimes yeah when they like stare at me.
- RA: Yeah.
- R: And they're like whispering to other people and stuff like that ??? (inaudible)
- (Interview transcript, 28.2.2005)

By comparison, Russell was much more positive about the Einstein Group which was led by the peripatetic SNSS teacher, as mentioned in Chapter Six. The objective of the group was not only to provide structured phonic tuition (Hornsby, 1993) but also to raise the self-esteem of pupils considered to be dyslexic via a counselling approach (Lawrence, 1996). Russell always referred to it as "the selection group" (Interview transcript, 1.2.2005) which suggested he felt privileged rather than stigmatised by being chosen to attend, and he seemed to thrive in the atmosphere where mistakes were celebrated as the means of moving learning forward rather than condemned as evidence of failure. For him, the sessions seemed to be the trigger that enabled him to become a more effective independent learner, and on one occasion during the spring term of Y6 his attendance led to a self-esteem boosting situation during the Literacy Hour (DfEE, 1998), as the following fieldnote extract reveals:

The teacher then asked Janie to explain what consonants were to the class. Janie could not answer.

I was very surprised as she has been doing about this ad nauseam in the Einstein Group – it shows how learning often is not transferred from one situation to another, and suggests her level of engagement is very shallow.

Russell put up his hand and explained that there were 26 letters altogether and that 21 of them are consonants.

He by comparison has obviously been much more engaged in the Einstein sessions.

Another pupil was then asked what the 5 vowels were and correctly gave them – the teacher then said that all the rest were the consonants but that “Y” “occasionally flits between”. Russell then said “ IOU a million pounds” and the teacher said “ I’ll hold you to that Russell” and they laughed. The teacher then talked briefly about short and long vowel sounds, and Russell piped up again about the signs he had learnt with the support teacher. The teacher did not seem sure what he was talking about and the classroom assistant explained. The teacher then said “ so we have an expert in the class”.

(Fieldnotes, 1.2.2005)

The above fieldnote extract suggests that, by comparison with Russell, Janie’s level of engagement during the Einstein Group was minimal, and this is not surprising as she obviously resented attending all the withdrawal groups, as can be seen in a conversation during her first lunchtime interview of the spring term of Y6, soon after a daily session using the *Wellington Square* reading scheme had been instigated:

RA: ... Do you miss ICT quite a lot then?

J: (nods)

RA: Yes – how do you feel about that? cos the question I am asking everybody this term is.

J: I like ICT.

RA: Yes.

J: But I can’t do it cos I don’t know like – I like going to that group but sometimes (Pause as Janie sighs) when I’m not very happy I don’t, cos I like ICT.

RA: Um – are you saying cos I try to put into my words what I think you’re saying to sort of help me – are you saying that sometimes you have to go to a group but you would rather stay in the classroom and do the other lesson in the classroom?

J: (nods)

RA: Yes – does that happen quite often then? – cos you seem to have a lot of groups at the moment don’t you now you’ve got *Wellington Square*.

J: (in sing-song bored sounding voice) Thursday - Friday - Monday - Tuesday - and Wednesday.

(Interview transcript, 20.1.2005)

Overall Janie was the most negative of the four participants about the withdrawal groups, and in the weeks after the above conversation, she began to seem more and

more unhappy and generally disaffected with school, as was discussed in Chapter Six. During her next session I wrote in my fieldnotes:

10.05 am As she walked out of assembly, I checked with Janie that it was ICT, and said I had been hoping she would do this today. However Mrs W was waiting outside the door and called her over for the group. Janie then indicated *Wellington Square* worksheets on a table nearby and said to me “This is boring” under her breath.
(Fieldnotes, 7.2.2005)

My fieldnotes then go on to detail how Janie initially sat with her head in her hands as the session began, but then did appear to attend as the classroom assistant read a *Wellington Square* story to the group. However, when the pupils were then asked to read and sequence sentences which retold the story, she was unable to do this despite being able to read the text fluently, presumably because she had not been listening. As it became obvious that the other members of the group were completing the task without difficulty, she became very angry and stormed out of the room just as break began, but before the classroom assistant had drawn the session to a close. This was the only incident of openly defiant misbehaviour from any of the four participants I witnessed over the two year period of the fieldwork, and I think the source of Janie’s annoyance was the reductive literacy work she was being required to do when she was aware that her more proficient classmates were having ICT, a lesson in which she was often able to demonstrate technological skill.

My overall finding then, is that the withdrawal groups at Granville had a negative effect on the participants’ reader identity and so were directly marginalising in that they made them feel worse rather than better about themselves, although I acknowledge that this is less clear cut for Russell than the other three. I am aware that this conclusion can only be considered valid for the particular school context where the research was carried out, as it is generally accepted that specialised tuition, provided it is properly individualised, is the best method of improving dyslexic pupils’ reading ability (Hornsby, 1993; Miles and Miles, 1999). However indirect marginalisation caused by withdrawal sessions, due to missing all or part of

curriculum lessons, affects all pupils who are taught in this way, and the adverse effect on the four participants cannot be disputed, as all spoke of the difficulties they experienced when they returned to the classroom. It seems ironic that the extra support arranged by the SENCO with the best of objectives, namely to assist the participants to improve their literacy skills, not only failed to do that because of the unchallenging tuition, but also quite probably added to their low self-esteem as readers because it made it harder for them to successfully complete tasks in the normal classroom situation. I observed numerous occasions when this occurred, but one incident during Amy's first session of the summer term of Y6 stands out as particularly damaging.

The teacher was conducting a SATs revision science lesson on the parts of a flower, and the hastily scribbled scratch notes made at the time (Sanjek, 1990) document confusion as I observed Amy uncharacteristically not attending to the whole class discussion, but instead constantly writing in her Science book and conferring with her friend Emma. Intermittently the pupils were told to write or draw things in their books, and so as the lesson progressed I assumed that Amy was finding it hard to keep up, but when I talked to her at lunchtime, I discovered that this was not so. In fact Amy was attempting to copy up Emma's notes and diagrams from the previous day when she had not been present due to attendance at a withdrawal group, but at the same time was also trying to complete the written tasks of the current day which involved writing things down from the board. This double demand was the reason she was not attending to the teacher's exposition, and it was therefore not surprising that when I asked her to read some of the scientific vocabulary, she either could not decode the words, or if she could, admitted she had no idea what they meant. There can be no doubt that there was a marginalising effect when the participants found themselves in this situation, and they were aware of the problems it caused, as Ernie confirmed during a Y6 interview:

RA: I wondered in general how you feel about going out for groups?

E: Sometimes it's good – sometimes it's bad cos she comes at different times and like good lessons and bad lessons.

- RA: When you come back in and you've missed part of a lesson – can you explain what that feels like?
- E: Well – its hard er to – but it's quite easy to catch up.
- RA: When you say it's hard what do you mean by "It's hard" ?– I mean I think I know what you mean but.
- E: Because the teacher doesn't tell you what to do – only if you ask em.
(Interview transcript, 1.12.2005)

It is perhaps important to explain that the reason I said in the above extract that I knew what Emie meant when he said "it's hard" was because I had myself observed him some weeks earlier when he came back into an ICT lesson and was ignored by the teacher. He had no idea what to do, and sat passively next to his partner totally disengaged from the lesson for some time. As I watched him I became intensely uncomfortable about the exclusionary situation that the withdrawal session had created (Nind et al., 2003), and so I came out of my usual non-interventional role and urged him to make the teacher aware of his presence.

Russell received more extra support than the other three participants because of his SEN statement, and unfortunately the benefits to his self-esteem as a reader, discussed above, were offset by the fact that he missed all or parts of many class lessons and so was indirectly marginalised in this way to a much greater extent than the rest. Perhaps the worst example of this occurred towards the end of the summer term of Y6 when the pupils were completing transition work in preparation for moving up to the comprehensive school. The group sessions had been terminated by this stage of the year, but Russell was still withdrawn frequently for 'one to one' tuition. Unfortunately this meant that he missed the initial explanation of how the pupils were going to compare and contrast two well known children's novels, and a long explanation of the nature and purpose of reading journals, both vital elements of the work. In subsequent lessons the pupils were frequently reminded that their exercise books would provide the first impression that their new teachers would have of them as learners, and the other three participants rose to the challenge. They seemed much more motivated to engage fully than they had been with the formulaic tasks based on decontextualised texts they had been required to complete in Literacy lessons in preparation for the KS2 SATs (Benjamin et al., 2003). However, the

combination of missing important introductory information and the considerable literacy difficulties that he still experienced, meant that Russell was not able to demonstrate that he could function as a critical reader, and I felt that his self-esteem was bound to be damaged by this.

7.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have concentrated on the individual participants' views of their reader identity, and have concluded that their dyslexic difficulties resulted in low self-esteem, and that this directly and indirectly caused them to experience marginalisation at school. However, viewed through a symbolic interactionist lens, it is clear from the data extracts and analyses in the section above on withdrawal groups that there is always a social element in the construction of identity. The positionings that the participants took up within the community of literate practice (Wenger, 1998) must be considered as an integral part of their reader identity, as relationships with others and changing contexts result in constant renegotiation of the self (Pollard and Filer, 1999). I therefore agree with Hall (2006) that the individual's own view of themselves is only part of what must be studied, and so in the next chapter I use a sociological lens to explore how the participants' reader identity was shaped by the way they manipulated their presentation of self in the classroom via impression management (Goffman, 1959).

CHAPTER EIGHT

PRESENTATION OF SELF AS A READER

8.1 Introduction

In the last chapter I suggested that the participants had a negative view of their identity as readers, and were marginalised in the classroom by their dyslexic difficulties. However, because of the need to present themselves in as favourable a cultural light as possible, they still found ways to bolster their self-esteem via impression management. In this chapter, then, I look at reader identity through a sociological lens in order to address the third research question:

In what ways do dyslexic pupils manage their presentation of selves as readers in upper junior classroom communities of literate practice?

This chapter will draw principally on ideas of Erving Goffman introduced in Chapter Three, and begins with a general discussion of presentation of self via impression management. However, as this was clearest to see during the silent reading sessions that were a regular feature of the lower ability Y6 Literacy group the participants attended, the majority of the chapter will focus on this activity. In order to assist the reader to make sense of the findings on silent reading, I will firstly provide contextualising information, and then discuss each pupil's typical presentation of self via a descriptive typology. In the last part of the chapter, I will conduct a cross-case analysis of the specific impression management strategies used by the participants during these sessions.

8.2 Presentation of self via impression management

As explained in Chapter Three, individuals who have a stigmatising trait, but one which is invisible are constantly in the stressful state of being 'discreditable' if they attempt to disguise their problems, as there is always a danger they will be found out

(Goffman, 1963). However, the background contextual influence of high overall value put on literacy competence in western society (Burden, 2005), taken alongside the current school climate of performativity (Hall et al., 2004) means that dyslexic pupils may feel there is much to be gained in terms of self-esteem as readers if they indulge in impression management in order to present themselves as more proficient than they really are (Goffman, 1959). In this first part of the chapter I explain how the participants did this during their lunchtime interviews by ‘covering’ (Goffman, 1963) in order to ‘save face’ (Goffman, 1955) if they experienced difficulties with specific texts, and how more generally they manipulated the impression of themselves they put across in order to ‘pass as normal’ (Goffman, 1963) within the classroom community of literate practice.

8.2.1 ‘Covering’ in order to save face during conversations about difficult texts

Throughout the fieldwork period there were numerous times during lunchtime interviews when the participants attempted to impression manage by ‘covering’ (Goffman, 1963) in order to divert attention away from less than proficient reading. Perhaps the most fundamental way they did this was to deflect difficulty with text onto spurious reasons, and the clearest example of this occurred during one of Janie’s Y6 sessions when she was talking about her current reading book, Roald Dahl’s *The BFG*. She had mentioned that she wanted to change the book because it was “really hard” (Fieldnotes, 12.10. 2004) before the tape recorder was switched on, so during the interview I referred back to this:

- RA: ... what is it about this one you have at the moment that’s really hard?
J: *The BFG* ... well it’s a bit easy and a bit hard – its just that I don’t like reading it because I don’t like reading at all.
RA: Don’t you like reading much – why is that then Janie?
J: It’s just boring and it takes so long.
(Interview transcript, 12.10.2004)

It may be that Janie really had found that parts of the book were easy to read and other parts were hard, but an impression management interpretation suggests that she

became aware during the interview that her earlier admission that the book was difficult compromised her presentation of self as a competent reader, and that was why she covered by modifying her evaluation of it. This interpretation would also suggest that she then realised this was not sufficient to save face completely, and so changed her reason for not liking the book to that of general distaste for reading as a time-consuming boring activity. At other times when the participants decided to abandon books that turned out to be too difficult, they tended to give a more specific reason for the boredom they said they were experiencing, namely that because they already knew the story there was no surprise element. Russell covered in this way after I had observed him attempting to read C.S. Lewis' *The lion, the witch and the wardrobe*, which had been used as a class story the previous year, and it is interesting that exactly the same reason was given some years ago by one of my dyslexic pupils for abandoning a *Harry Potter* novel, as described in Chapter Three.

The participants also covered during discussions about texts, as when Amy used the excuse of a lapse of memory for being unable to talk about her current reading book when the most likely reason was that it was too difficult to allow meaningful engagement at an independent level. This incident occurred during her first Y6 interview when I asked her if she could retell the main points of the story of Michael Morpurgo's *Farm boy*, and she said " I can't exactly remember the beginning" (Interview transcript, 13.9.2004). When I then encouraged her to look at the illustrations as a way to jog her memory, she seemed to have little understanding of what any of the story was about, but when she read a passage to me I discovered this was not surprising as it turned out to be far too difficult for her. Covering also occurred at the individual word level of reading, as during interview discussions about specific passages of text the participants would sometimes point to a word and say "that one" or use a similar phrase in order to avoid having to admit they could not decode it. This was very clear to see during a Y6 interview with Janie when the text under discussion consisted of written instructions that had been used in ICT to introduce the pupils to the drawing tools on Word:

- J: That was what we had to go on – it were on that and that. (Janie points to “autoshapes” on sheet)
- RA: Yes what do you call that then ?
- J: (reads) “Click on a – (pause).”
- RA: (reads) “Autoshapes”.
- (Interview transcript, 8.11.2004)

As I knew that the participants in Anderson (2001) had been reluctant to openly admit to finding texts difficult, it did not surprise me that when during lunchtime interviews I asked these pupils if they had found specific texts they had encountered during the morning easy or hard, they would usually initially say they had been fine with them. Emie’s Y6 reading standard was higher than that of the other participants, and so on the whole his answers were accurate as much of the reading he had to do was reasonably within his capacity. However, perhaps in an effort to make sure he gave an impression of competence, he would tend to say that particular passages of reading were “quite easy” (Interview transcript, 10.3.2005). He did that once during Y6 when discussing a Geography worksheet on volcanoes even though the reading turned out to be a challenge because of multi-syllabic vocabulary. By comparison, the other three participants frequently covered up more major problems when they told me that they had been able to read the morning’s texts, as if I asked them to read extracts they often needed a good deal of support. Amy’s preferred phrase when she had found reading difficult was to say that she could read it “a bit”, and this is demonstrated in the following extract from a Y6 interview when the text under discussion was a worksheet problem type question in Numeracy:

- RA: Could you read this alright? (RA indicates the first question on the sheet which reads “Use your calculator to help you find out how much fuel was used over the two days. How many fuel trucks would it take to hold this much fuel?”)
- A: A bit.
- RA: Yes – just read it for me now can you – I’ll help you if you get stuck.

Amy begins to read confidently but then slows down and reads word by word. She needs help with “used”, “trucks” and “much”.
(Interview transcript, 2.11.2004).

Janie usually said, as she did in the interview extract above when talking about the *BFG*, that difficult reading had been a “a bit easy and a bit hard”, and Russell also tended to ‘hedge his bets’. He even insisted that a book entitled *Fire and ice* which he found almost impossible to read, and which is discussed in detail below, was “in the middle” (Interview transcript, 6.6.2005), and so by covering in this way, the participants were able to give an impression of face-saving partial proficiency. However, because of their use of this kind of impression management, they constantly put themselves in the stressful position of being in danger of having their stigmatising trait revealed, and I close this section of the chapter with an occasion when this happened to Russell during a Y6 interview. He was obviously aware that good readers read quickly, and so tried to convey an impression of competence by covering when I queried how much he had read of a book we were discussing because he seemed to have got through an impossibly large number of pages in the time available:

RA: Right then – *Tod in Biker City* – you started it on Tuesday - now where you’ve put your card in – it looks like you’ve had quite a lot of time to read ?

R: Yes – I can read right fast.

RA: Right – you can read very fast. Would you like to read a bit of it to me now then ?

R: Yes. (pause as RA moves the tape recorder nearer to Russell as he is speaking in a quiet voice)

R: Sometimes I can’t read fast but - (pause)

RA: Well it depends on the book – doesn’t it really?

R: Yes.

(Interview transcript, 5.11.2004)

Russell must have realised that his covering tactic would be sabotaged by agreeing to read a passage from the book to me, and indeed he did find the text very difficult. He therefore modified his self-evaluation, and as I could sense his awkwardness, I provided the covering comment on this occasion, and so demonstrated a co-operative form of face saving that often takes place during social interaction (Goffman, 1955).

8.2.2 *'Passing as normal' within the classroom community of literate practice*

In addition to attempting to present themselves as competent in relation to specific texts via covering tactics, the participants also bolstered their self-esteem in a more general sense by attempting to 'pass as normal' (Goffman, 1963). They did this in order to give a general impression of community membership in relation to social and cultural practices around reading (Barton, 1994), and a very telling example occurred during the autumn term of Y6. At the start of the school year the pupils were given new reading diaries and told that they should read at home every night, and that whoever heard them should fill in the details and comment on the performance. I knew there was limited time for supporting Amy at home, but I noted that at the start of her diary her mother was writing dated comments. After a few weeks when I asked Amy if I could look at her diary to see what she had read, she was evasive as to its whereabouts, and when I persisted said it was at home. However when I returned her reading book to its tray after her lunchtime interview, I discovered that her diary was there, and although she may genuinely have thought she had forgotten to bring it, it occurred to me that she may have wanted to conceal it from me. I wondered if this might have been because she had not been reading at home and thought she might get into trouble, as the teachers had explicitly told the pupils that practice was particularly important for those whose reading was below the expected standard. During her next session Amy did allow me to look at the diary and I discovered a number of new comments, but the handwriting, spelling errors and use of repeated phrases made me suspicious that she had filled it in herself. During her lunchtime interview I decided to ask her:

RA: ... Whose writing is this then in your notebook? (RA points to the most recent diary entries) Is it yours or is it somebody else's?

A: It's all mine but first couple of pages it's my Mum's.

RA: Right Ok - so is it your Mum that you read to at home then?

A: Yes. (Amy sounds uncertain)

RA: Mainly?

A: Mainly – cos sometimes erm - I can't remember to take my book home.

(Interview transcript, 2.11.2004)

Amy's behaviour could be interpreted as evidence that a climate of fear still exists which leads dutiful conformist pupils to attempt such deception over how much or if they practise reading at home. However, the fact that she was willing to 'confess' to an adult, albeit one who was not part of the school officialdom, suggests that her motivation was to some extent driven by the need to present herself as a conscientious member of the classroom community of literate practice. Either way, if checked quickly by a busy teacher, the entries might well have been thought to have been genuine and could have led to the erroneous belief that Amy was well supported at home.

A few weeks earlier, Janie had also decided to present herself as the type of pupil who dutifully practised reading in the evenings:

- RA: Who do you read to at home?
J: My mum.
RA: Do you yes?
J: When she's not at college...
RA: ...She sounds as though she is very busy – does she have a special time when you read your book to her?
J: (nods)
RA: When would that be?
J: She gets home at 6.
RA: Does she?
J: And then I read at 7 - I read for an hour to her and then she does the tea.
RA: Right - so would you say you read most days then really?
J: Yes, I read every day to her.
(Interview transcript, 23.9.2004)

It is unlikely that any adult would have sufficient time to hear their son or daughter read for an hour each evening, but Janie's view of a good reader was one who practised a lot, so that may be why she presented herself in this culturally valorised way (Graue and Walsh, 1998) in order to bolster her self-image as a member of the classroom community of literate practice. It would seem, though, that Janie's reporting of her behaviour should be viewed as exaggeration of the truth rather than pure invention, as she obviously was doing some practice at home, shown by the fact

that at her next interview she said that her father had heard her read and had suggested she should change her book because it was too difficult.

Despite their dyslexic difficulties all four participants could talk about the type of books they enjoyed reading, and therefore, like the American reading-disabled middle school pupil in Ivey's (1999a) study mentioned in Chapter Four, they had developed clearly defined tastes in authors and fictional genres. Because they were aware that proficient readers could evaluate the quality of texts, they were keen to ensure that they could also 'pass as normal' as members of the classroom community of literate practice in this respect and so overtly presented themselves as discerning readers during conversations whenever possible. This can be seen in the following Y6 interview extract when Russell was talking about the *Wellington Square* books that were being used in the Literacy withdrawal tuition group he attended, as described in Chapter Seven:

RA: So have you actually got to a book yet with words in it or are you still on those books ?

R: No, we are still on the books with no words.

RA: Right – what do you feel about that?

R: It's alright – it's better.

RA: Why is it better ?

R: Cos instead of **reading** it all – if we had words we would have to read it.

RA: Right.

R: And that's bad ? (RA laughs)

R: **Very bad**

RA: Do you think so?

R: Yes.

RA: Why is that then?

R: Cos I don't like reading at all– but when I'm into like a very very very very good book like *The lion, the witch and the wardrobe*, then I like it.

(Interview transcript, 28.2.2005)

As he talked Russell initially presented himself as someone who was anti-reading in general, but then he must have realised this was not the impression he wished to put across, and so he redefined himself as someone who liked reading if 'good' books

were available. Interestingly, one of the participants in Anderson (2001) explicitly stated that he was only prepared to engage with reading if quality literature was available, and in fact in his previous interview, Russell had also been at pains to present himself as a discerning avid reader when I referred back to something he had said earlier in the day about finding books in the school library:

RA: ...you said that you keep finding different ones?...

R: Like well, if you find a good book, you've got to read it – and then you find another good book and you put that in your tray – and then another one and another one – and if you put it in, you've got to read it ???
(inaudible).

(Interview transcript, 1.2.2005)

Russell's definition of a good book was one that had good pictures, and comments made by all four participants when asked how they chose books showed that they tended to concentrate on the same aspects of appearance that Hopper's (2005) adolescent sample recently said they did, namely, "cover, colours, pictures and font" (p.117). In fact it seemed that sometimes Russell based his judgement entirely on the cover, as is shown in the following Y6 interview extract:

RA: How do you know it's good if you haven't started it yet?

(Russell indicates the cover of *Rhyming Russell*)

RA: You like the look of it and the picture?

R: I can tell by the picture.

(Interview transcript, 5.11.2004)

The other three participants were also aware that exciting looking covers attracted them and made them feel that a particular book would be interesting to read, and Ernie spontaneously talked about this when discussing A. J Rowling's *Harry Potter and the goblet of fire* during a Y6 interview:

E: That's what made me want to read it. (Ernie points to the front cover of *Harry Potter and the goblet of fire*)

RA: What – the cover? – that's something else I'm interested in – why do children pick certain books to read ?

E: Cos that looks fun.
(Interview transcript, 10.3.2005)

By making their judgements purely on visual appearance the participants were able to 'pass as normal' and give the impression they were the type of readers who had sufficient experience to be able to critically evaluate texts. However, this was spurious, as 'real' experienced readers are aware that textual content is the vital component that makes a book worth reading (ILEA, 1988), and it is perhaps significant that Ernie, who was the participant who was most positive about what books could offer, was the only one who knew that it was important to preview the storyline of a novel, as he demonstrated during a Y6 interview when I asked him how he chose books:

E: Well I usually just skip through it and see what the pages are (Ernie picks up the book and demonstrates by rapidly flicking the pages with his thumb as if shuffling cards)

RA: Do you? – yes - I'm just interested – I've been asking everybody.

E: I read the back. (Ernie turns the book to the back cover)

RA: Do you? – do you read the blurb on the back? Can you just read it on that one then for me ?

E: (Ernie reads the blurb with obvious relish) "Billy Beast can't wait to meet Beauty – the bride of his dreams - but will she be as disgustingly beastly as Billy hopes".

(Interview transcript, 1.12.2004)

In addition to talking to me, the participants also discussed their choices of books with other pupils with whom they had social relationships and this allowed them to 'pass as normal' in the informal classroom 'book clubs' that developed from time to time. I end this part of the chapter with an extract from a Y6 interview in which Janie was very keen to present herself, Amy and Ashley, a boy with generalized learning difficulties, as full members of the community of literate practice who could recommended titles to each other and swap books around:

J: ... we've got same author on that book.

RA: Have you right?

- J: Yes - there's three people have got same author on that book. I had first one that Amy's got now.
- RA: Right.
- J: We're going to swap over with Ashley. Amy's going to have this one (Janie points to her book, *The fried piper of Hamstring*) and Ashley's going to have the other.
- RA: So it's like a book club – you are all sharing books around?
- J: Yes.
- (Interview transcript, 8.11.2004)

Janie was referring to a series of humorous spoof fairytales which had been provided for the pupils in the lower ability Y6 Literacy group to read during the period of silent reading that was a regular feature of this lesson. Particularly rich findings on presentation of self and impression management techniques emerged from the data on these and other silent reading sessions, and so for the remaining part of this chapter, I focus entirely on them.

8.3 Contextualising the silent reading sessions

In order to enable the reader to contextualise the findings on silent reading it is necessary to provide some introductory information. On most days the sessions took place for a period of up to ten minutes at the start of Literacy, and during the second half of the autumn term of Y6 the lower ability group of pupils were taught by a student teacher who introduced a new initiative in an effort to increase motivation to engage with the texts. Prior to this the pupils had brought their class reading books, which had been chosen from the school library, but now titles considered suitable had been gathered on a table at the back of the room, and selection was confined to these. The books were mainly 'Young reader' type novels and classic children's stories, and each time one was completed the pupils wrote a short review in new 'Reading Challenge' booklets. These consisted of single sheets of A5 sized paper clipped together and had a twenty-five space chart on the back on which the pupils stuck a star when they completed a book, and were rewarded with small prizes when each row of five was filled in. It is important to note that, with the exception of two titles from the *Barrington Stoke* series of novels, which are published specifically for

dyslexic pupils of the age group of the participants, no other high interest/low reading level books with controlled vocabulary (Hornsby, 1993) were provided.

In 1992 Fielding and Roller published an article entitled 'Making difficult books accessible and easy books acceptable' and their thought provoking comments about silent reading are highly relevant. The authors did not report a specific ethnographic study, but rather used examples from their professional work in the American school context with pupils aged 8 to 13 who experienced literacy difficulties. They make the important point that, "that while most children are quiet, engaged and reading during independent reading times, there are always a few children who are not" (Fielding and Roller, 1992, p.678). They suggested the reason for this was that for pupils with literacy difficulties, age appropriate books were too difficult, but easier ones were viewed as boring. OFSTED (2004a) have also recently highlighted this problem in relation to British primary schools:

Lower attaining pupils often found that the books they really wanted to read were too difficult. Schools also believed that, while the quantity and quality of reading materials had improved recently, there were still too few suitable books for low-attaining pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2. The books they were able to read often had an interest level that was well below them. (OFSTED, 2004a, p.13)

In fact, this phenomenon was already a cause for concern with regard to upper junior aged pupils in British schools over half a century ago. Recently I came across a 1964 paper in which Joyce Morris reported the findings of a large longitudinal study of reading in primary schools which had been conducted with pupils born in 1946. In the course of her discussion of 'library facilities and reading material', she stated that:

Not only were the poor readers found to be at a distinct disadvantage with regard to class libraries, but, the books generally available to a sizeable proportion were both insufficient in number and unsuitable in content. Moreover closer inspection of the books on which the children were actually engaged as upper-juniors indicated that those given to the most backward (*sic*), in particular, were more likely to hinder progress than promote it. Besides being too difficult, they were not always selected with the previous

experiences and current interests of the children in mind, nor were they changed frequently enough to prevent boredom. (Morris, 1964, p.7)

It would seem then that if upper junior aged pupils with significant literacy difficulties do not engage with their books during silent reading sessions, the reason may well be that they have been forced into a position where they have no choice but to try to read texts set at much too high a reading level for them to independently make meaning.

Hatcher (2000) has suggested that 95-100% word reading accuracy suggests easy reading material, 90-94% instructional level reading material, and under 90% means hard reading material. Fielding and Roller (1992) express these percentages in opposite terms and suggest a 5% error rate as the cut off point for extracting meaning from text during independent reading, and according to ILEA (1988) a text is at frustration level if the rate rises above 10%. The list of books from which the participants read to me during their lunchtime interviews are detailed in the Reader Statistics provided in Appendices 7 to 10, and the majority of these were the texts they had engaged with during silent reading. Each Appendix also details the participant's error rate on each passage read, and these show that apart from Ernie, whose average error rate of 6% was on the borderline of acceptability for independent reading, their rates of 17.5% for Amy, 16% for Janie and 23% for Russell were considerably above even what is usually considered frustration level.

Related to high error/low accuracy rates are slow speeds of reading, which according to Rasinski (2000) can impair comprehension, and he has drawn attention to the fact that in the USA, 5th graders (Y6) are referred for support if their reading rate falls below 58wpm, a speed he suggests is roughly half that of pupils functioning at an age-appropriate level. Reading speeds were also computed on the passages the participants read to me and are provided in Appendices 7 to 10, and they show that they all read much more slowly than would usually be expected for pupils of their age. In fact only Ernie's average, which worked out at 71 wpm, was above Rasinski's

(2000) cut-off point and the averages of the other three participants were all under 50wpm, which meant their reading usually sounded extremely laborious. It would seem then that these pupils were attempting to read overly difficult texts, with the result that impression management (Goffman, 1959) was necessary if they were to appear to be competent members of the classroom community of literate practice, and I now turn to a consideration of their presentation of self during the silent reading sessions.

8.4 A typology of silent reader identity

I completed Systematic Observations for the participants during silent reading sessions throughout the year, and the behaviours captured will now be discussed via a descriptive typology (Woods, 1986) of their chosen silent reader identity which is set out as a 2 x 2 matrix in Figure 8.1 below. Two dimensions have been chosen as the most salient variables affecting the participants' presentation of self during silent reading:

- Whether the pupil had a high or low level of motivation to engage with the book.
- Whether the book was set at an appropriate independent reading level or was inappropriate because it was too difficult.

The possible combinations lead to four different potential silent reader identity types, for which I have chosen the descriptive titles given in Figure 8.1. 'Reader' means that real reading occurred, whereas 'dissembler' means that there was an appearance of reading but that for part of the time at least, this was a pretence indulged in as part of impression management. The terms 'interested' and 'disinterested' refer to whether a high or low proportion of the time was spent apparently on task.

FIGURE 8.1

A TYPOLOGY OF SILENT READER IDENTITY

	Level of motivation to engage high	Level of motivation to engage low
Text at appropriate level	Interested reader	Disinterested reader
Text not at appropriate level	Interested dissembler	Disinterested dissembler

The actual behaviour of the participants will now be discussed in relation to Systematic Observations completed during the autumn term of Y6 at the time the Literacy Reading Challenge initiative described above, was in operation.

8.4.1 Interested reader (ERNIE)

Ernie was in a somewhat different position during silent reading to the other three participants, as although at the start of the project his reading level was similar to theirs, during its two year course he made substantial progress, which meant that, as mentioned above, he was the only one of the four for whom the books on offer were set at a suitable level. It could be argued that, as my concern is with what happens when dyslexic pupils find themselves having to read overly difficult texts, little is added by this description of him as an ‘interested reader’. However, it is important to include Ernie’s experience so it can serve as a benchmark to show the pattern of behaviour possible when text and reader are well matched both in terms of motivational interest and reading level. During the Systematic Observation given in Table 8.1 below, Ernie was reading a spoof fairytale in the ‘Seriously silly stories’ series entitled *Billy beast*.

TABLE 8.1

Ernie – Systematic Observation of Literacy silent reading, 1.12. 2004

Book: *Billy beast* by L. Anholt and A. Robbins

Error rate on passage read: 6%

Reading speed on passage read: 84 wpm

50 codings (about 8 minutes)

Behaviour coded at 10 second intervals along the rows left to right

Start

RS	RS	RS	DO	RS	RS	RS	RS	RS	DO
RS	RS	RS	RS	RS	RS	DP	RS	RS	RS
DO	RS	RS	RS	RS	RS	DO	DO	RS	RS
DP	DO	DO	RS						
RS									

Finish

CODES, BEHAVIOURS AND PERCENTAGES

Code	Pupil behaviour	% of codings
RS	Reading silently (apparent)	82
RT	Reading to teacher	0
RA	Reading to adult	0
FP	Flicking through pages of book	0
DO	Distracted on own	14
DP	Distracted – interacting with pupil/s	4
DA	Distracted – interacting with adult	0
IA	Interacting with adult (about reading)	0
MT	Management task	0
WH	Waiting for help	0
MR	Moving around room	0
	Out of room	0

The codings show that Ernie interacted with the book for 84% of the time, a percentage that was almost identical to his average total time on-task during individual Literacy tasks. It would seem that this engagement was real rather than apparent, as I could see him sub-vocalising by moving his lips as he read, a habit

that had been particularly marked throughout Y5, but which disappeared during Y6 as his standard improved. After I had completed the Systematic Observation, I wrote in my fieldnotes that Ernie had seemed “lost in his book” (Fieldnotes, 1.12.2004). My subjective judgement about the success of this literacy event was strengthened during his lunchtime interview when he was able to read a passage from *Billy beast* with good expression at a reasonable rate and only made errors on 6% of the words (See Appendix 9).

There had been a number of distractions in the room during the silent reading session, so it seems likely that Ernie’s high level of engagement was probably also helped by his motivational interest in the humorous text. In *Billy beast*, the author subverted the usual fairytale convention that heroines are beautiful, and its comic basis therefore relied on the reader being able to make use of intertextuality (Meek, 1988). Ernie’s awareness of the manipulation of the expected features of the genre became apparent as he retold the story during his lunchtime interview, and this suggested that his home and school experiences had combined to bring about the type of familiarity with traditional tales that is important for effective literacy development (Barrs, 2000). Ernie did lose concentration and gaze around the room briefly on five occasions, which amounted to 14% of the codings in total, but each time he swiftly returned to reading. He was also coded twice as interacting with another pupil, but this contact consisted of gesticulating to the boy sitting opposite rather than speaking. This may be evidence that Ernie was aware of the importance of not disrupting the peaceful atmosphere during independent reading sessions, because during individual seatwork tasks, as will be discussed in Chapter Nine, Systematic Observations showed that although his average overall percentage of time engaged was very similar, he habitually indulged in off-task conversations with other pupils.

8.4.2 *Disinterested reader (JANIE)*

Moss (2000) discovered the presence of a group of “can but don’t” (p. 102) KS2 readers during her ‘Fact and fiction’ project, and this alerted me to the possibility that dyslexic pupils might take up the identity type of ‘disinterested reader’ during

silent reading sessions if their motivation to engage with their book was low even if it was set at an appropriate level. Although during almost all of the Literacy silent reading sessions Janie was reading a book which was too difficult for her, and her typical behaviour, as will be discussed in a later section, was that of the 'disinterested dissembler', there was one occasion when it would be more accurate to describe her as a 'disinterested reader'. During the Systematic Observation given in Table 8.2 below, Janie's book was a novel entitled *Magic dad*, which she began that day, and when she read a passage during her lunchtime interview, I computed her error rate as 10% (See Appendix 8). On the face of it, it would appear that this book was also too difficult for independent reading, but as two of her mistakes were on the same unusual proper noun, and several others were semantically feasible, and so in miscue analysis terms could be considered positive (Campbell, 1993), it could be considered just within the limit of suitability. Janie also self-corrected words twice, which suggested that she was able to take meaning from the text (Campbell, 1993), and this was confirmed when I discovered that, despite reading word by word at a slow pace (Rasinski, 2000), she could retell the main points of the story.

TABLE 8.2

Janie - Systematic Observation of Literacy silent reading, 26.11.2004

Book: *Magic dad* by A. Prince

Error rate on passage read: 10%

Reading speed on passage read: 56 wpm

50 codings (about 8 minutes)

Behaviour coded at 10 second intervals along the rows left to right.

Start

MT	DO								
MT	MT	DP	DP	RS	DO	DO	DO	DO	DO
RS	RS	RS	DP	DO	DP	DP	DP	DO	RS
RS	RS	RS	DO	RS	RS	RS	DP	RS	RS
RS	DO	RS	RS	DP	RS	RS	RS	RS	DP

Finish

CODES, BEHAVIOURS AND PERCENTAGES

Code	Pupil behaviour	% of codings
RS	Reading silently (apparent)	40
RT	Reading to teacher	0
RA	Reading to adult	0
FP	Flicking through pages of book	0
DO	Distracted on own	20
DP	Distracted – interacting with pupil/s	18
DA	Distracted – interacting with adult	0
IA	Interacting with adult (about reading)	0
MT	Management task	22
WH	Waiting for help	0
MR	Moving around room	0
OR	Out of room	0

The Systematic Observation shows that for almost two minutes at the start of the session Janie was engaged in the officially sanctioned management task of writing the title and author of *Magic dad* onto the Reading Challenge sheet. This activity therefore made up 22% of the codings, and the large percentage has led me to suspect that she may have completed it slowly in order to postpone textual engagement for as long as possible. After she had finished writing, she did settle to

read for six brief disjointed periods which lasted around half a minute each and these amounted to 40% of the codings in total. This was a much lower proportion of the time than Ernie had spent task-engaged during the session described in the previous section, and for the remaining 38% of the codings, Janie indulged in intermittent off-task behaviour when she looked around the room or whispered to Amy, who was sitting next to her, about the illustrations in the story. As during individual written tasks in Literacy, Systematic Observations showed that Janie's average total time on task was consistently high, averaging out at 81%, her pattern of behaviour during this silent reading session would suggest that, despite the fact that the book could be just about be considered appropriate in terms of level of difficulty, she was relatively disinterested in the text and so only engaged on a shallow level.

8.4.3 *Interested dissembler (AMY AND RUSSELL)*

Both Amy and Russell's pattern of behaviour fits into the quadrant of the matrix which describes pupils who are motivated to engage with the books on offer, but cannot read them independently, and so have no choice but to be 'interested dissemblers' if they wish to manage their presentation of self in such a way so as to appear to be part of the community of literate practice. However, there seemed to be subtly different reasons for their motivational interest in their texts, and so I will discuss them separately.

I captured Amy's typical behaviour in the Systematic Observation given in Table 8.3 below during a session when she was reading a humorous 'Young reader' novel entitled *The Rex files – The life snatcher* (See Appendix 7). When she read a passage during her lunchtime interview, I discovered that her reading was perhaps even slower and more hesitant than would be expected given her error rate of 15%, and although she was in the middle of the book, it was obvious when I talked to her about it that she had been unable to take in the meaning of the story. During her next interview she told me that the teacher had said that once a book was started it must be completed, and so it would seem likely that her dutiful nature prevented her from

changing this difficult text for something more suitable. She was, however, aware of her predicament, as the following extract from the same interview reveals:

RA: Do you think it's a good idea to have the books in the room to choose from, and do you like those books?

A: I wish there were more easier books, but I like them.

(Interview transcript, 17.11.2004).

TABLE 8.3

Amy - Systematic Observation of Literacy silent reading, 17.11.2004

Book : *The Rex files – Life snatcher* by S. Ranger

Error rate on passage read: 15%

Reading speed on passage read: 30wpm

50 codings (about 8 minutes)

Behaviour coded at 10 second intervals along the rows left to right.

Start

RS	DP	RS	DP						
DP	RS								
RS	RS	RS	RS	RS	DO	MR	MR	RS	DO
WH	WH	WH	WH	MR	IA	RS	RS	DO	DO
RS	DP	DP	DP						

Finish

CODES, BEHAVIOURS AND PERCENTAGES

Code	Pupil behaviour	% of codings
RS	Reading silently (apparent)	64
RT	Reading to teacher	0
RA	Reading to adult	0
FP	Flicking through pages of book	0
DO	Distracted on own	8
DP	Distracted – interacting with pupil/s	12
DA	Distracted – interacting with adult	0
IA	Interacting with adult (about reading)	2
MT	Management task	0
WH	Waiting for help	8
MR	Moving around room	6
OR	Out of room	0

The Systemic Observation reveals that Amy appeared to read silently for 64% of the time, and she gave the impression that she was sustaining her concentration well as she was coded as engaged at one point for about two and a half minutes without interruption. In fact her proportion of time on-task could be said to be even higher if the time she spent moving across the room and waiting to speak to the teacher on a matter about the book that I was not able to ascertain is included. There were several very brief periods of distraction, both when she looked around or interacted with Janie who was sitting next to her, but at 20% of the time in total, this was roughly half the proportion recorded for Janie in the previous section. Overall Amy seemed to be well engaged with her text, and although the total proportion of time she was on-task was lower than the 86% that she achieved on average during individual Literacy tasks captured in Systematic Observations, she appeared to be functioning as a full member of the community of literate practice. However, given her difficulty with the text when she read a passage to me, it seems likely that for much of the time she was apparently reading, she was in fact dissembling, even though she never admitted to this. Amy's comments during interviews showed that she was interested in what books could offer, but although it is impossible to be sure, I would content that an element in her motivation for managing her presentation of self during silent reading in the way she did, was the dutiful need to complete books and fill in as many Challenge sheets as possible, thereby impressing her teacher and peers.

Russell was in a rather different position to the other three participants as he was withdrawn during Literacy silent reading sessions by a classroom assistant in order to focus on high frequency word spelling (Homsby, 1993; DfEE, 1998). This effectively meant that he received a different literacy curriculum from the rest of the group, a practice that was highly exclusionary (Benjamin et al., 2003), but presumably was justified by staff because of his perceived greater level of neediness (Benjamin, 2002). Sometimes, however, the classroom assistant was late and then Russell was present for part of silent reading. One of these occasions occurred during the period when the Reading Challenge initiative was operational, and this

gave me the chance to complete the Systematic Observation given in Table 8.4 below.

TABLE 8.4

Russell - Systematic Observation of Literacy silent reading, 24.11.2004

Book: *Jeremy Brown of the Secret Service* by S Cheshire

Error rate on passage read: 32%

Reading speed on passage read: 35wpm

37 codings (about 6 minutes)

Behaviour coded at 10 second intervals along the rows left to right

Start

RS	RS	RS	RS	DO	DO	RS	DO	RS	RS
RS	RS	RS	RS	DP	RS	RS	DO	RS	DP
DP	RS	IA	RS	DO	RS	RS	DO	RS	RS
DO	DP	RS	RS	RS	RS	RS			
						Finish			

CODES, BEHAVIOURS AND PERCENTAGES

Code	Pupil behaviour	% of codings
RS	Reading silently (apparent)	67
RT	Reading to teacher	0
RA	Reading to adult	0
FP	Flicking through pages of book	0
DO	Distracted on own	19
DP	Distracted – interacting with pupil/s	11
DA	Distracted – interacting with adult	0
IA	Interacting with adult (about reading)	3
MT	Management task	0
WH	Waiting for help	0
MR	Moving around room	0
OR	Out of room	0

Unfortunately Russell was called away before the 50 codings were recorded, but I decided to compute percentages from the 37 codings, and discovered that the proportion of time he was apparently reading silently was 67%. This percentage was similar to Amy's, and like her, his engagement consisted of several periods of concentration, admittedly somewhat less sustained than hers, interspersed with brief periods of distraction when he looked around the room or interacted with friends. Although, again like Amy, the proportion of codings when he was on-task was somewhat lower than the average of 81% he achieved during individual Literacy tasks captured in Systematic Observations, nevertheless by behaving as an 'interested dissembler' he was able to put across the impression that he was a member of the community of literate practice.

Russell read a passage during his lunchtime interview from the novel, *Jeremy Brown of the Secret Service*, that he had been reading during the session, and I then discovered that his error rate was 32% (See Appendix 10). This meant that his reading was so disjointed and non-fluent that I had to support him by pair-reading (Topping and Lindsay, 1992) in order to minimise potential damage to his self-worth. This extremely high error rate made it seem unlikely that Russell had been able to take any meaning from the text during the silent reading session, but like Amy, he had given the impression of reading for a substantial part of the time. I have suggested above that Amy's dutiful conformist nature may have been responsible for her high level of apparent engagement, but, as will be discussed in Chapter Nine, because he usually missed the session, Russell did not regard the Challenge initiative as of his concern, so his motivational interest must have been different in origin. Comments in his interviews often showed that he was very attracted to the junior thriller genre which was popular with boys in his year group, and so I would suggest that the reason for his high level of apparent engagement was the need to be part of the social group that read those kind of novels. In fact on the day I completed the Systematic Observation, he had an extra incentive to try to engage with that particular book because it had been recommended by a friend, as he explained in an interview shortly before:

RA: How did you choose your new book then?

R: Er Bob – he was sat next to me.

RA: Right yes

R: He says “oh pick that old one what I were reading and its really really good” - **and it is!**

(Interview transcript, 15.11.2004)

Despite the fact that the book was much too difficult for him to read independently Russell was at pains in the interview to give the impression that he was a full member of the classroom community of literate practice who could evaluate texts, and this was presumably why he chose to present himself as an ‘interested dissembler’ on that occasion.

8.4.4 *Disinterested dissembler (JANIE)*

With the exception of the silent reading session discussed above when she behaved as a ‘disinterested reader’, Janie was also always in the position of having to interact with books that were too difficult for her to tackle independently. However, her pattern of behaviour shown in the Systematic Observation given in Table 8.5 below was entirely different from that of Amy and Russell’s, as described in the previous section. The story Janie was reading was *The fried piper of Hamstring*, which was another spoof fairytale in the same series as the book Ernie was reading when he behaved as an ‘interested reader’, as described above. She was in a different position from him though with regard to sense making as I discovered during her lunchtime interview that she could not benefit from the intertextuality (Meek, 1988) because she had never heard of the ‘Pied piper of Hamlyn’. Her lack of familiarity with the traditional story may have made the subverted version seem rather baffling, and certainly this turned out to be a difficult text for her, as when she read a passage to me, her error rate was 15% (See Appendix 7).

TABLE 8.5

Janie - Systematic Observation of Literacy silent reading, 8.11.2004

Book: *The fried piper of Hamstring* by L. Anholt and A, Robins

Error rate on passage read: 15%

Reading speed on passage read: 49 wpm

50 codings (about 8 minutes)

Behaviour coded at 10 second intervals along the rows left to right.

Start

DP	RS								
IA	IA	RS	DP						
DO	DO	RS	RS	DO	MR	OR	OR	OR	OR
OR	MR	MR	MR						
DO	DO	RS	RS	DP	DP	DP	RS	DP	DP

Finish

CODES, BEHAVIOURS AND PERCENTAGES

Code	Pupil behaviour	% of codings
RS	Reading silently (apparent)	14
RT	Reading to teacher	0
RA	Reading to adult	0
FP	Flicking through pages of book	0
DO	Distracted on own	10
DP	Distracted – interacting with pupil/s	42
DA	Distracted – interacting with adult	0
IA	Interacting with adult (about reading)	4
MT	Management task	0
WH	Waiting for help	0
MR	Moving around room	8
OR	Out of room	22

Like the other three participants, Janie usually remained on task for a high proportion of the time during individual Literacy activities, but as described in Chapter Seven, she often openly spoke of her dislike of reading, and perhaps this was why she only even apparently read *The fried piper of Hamstring* for 14% of the codings. Amy's conformist personality meant that she at least gave the appearance

of reading her book, but it seemed that Janie's more rebellious nature resulted in her feeling comfortable engaging in reading-resistant behaviours for a greater proportion of the time. The codings revealed that she indulged in several prolonged periods of disengagement that amounted in total to over half the time, as she was recorded as chatting to other pupils for 42%, and gazing around the room for 10%. She also spent 22% of the time out of the room, presumably in the toilet, and this literal 'time-out' was a regular feature of her behaviour during silent reading sessions.

As discussed above, Janie's disinterest was apparent when she was reading a book set at an appropriate level, but it would appear that it was much more pronounced when she was reading a more difficult text. The conclusion would therefore seem to be that her less conformist nature meant that she did not feel the same urge to appear to be part of the community of literate practice as did Amy and Russell. However, this was not so, as her prolonged episodes of distracted behaviour were interspersed with five brief periods when she appeared to be engaging with her book, but in fact, as will be discussed later in the chapter, was indulging in a highly strategic version of dissembling.

8.4.5 Contextual variation in chosen silent reader identity

Although the discussion above focuses on typical behaviour patterns for the participants during the Literacy silent reading sessions, analysis of the data revealed that if textual difficulty was markedly different from usual, the pupil's presentation of self could alter significantly, and this explains why Janie's behaviour has been assigned to two reader identity types. It is important then to be aware that the pupils could move between categories, and perhaps the most extreme example of this occurred at the start of Y6 when Ernie read a *Horrible histories* book on which his error rate on the passage he read to me was 16% (see Appendix 9). On that occasion the Systematic Observation revealed that he was on-task for only about half the proportion of time he had been in the description above when he had behaved as an 'interested reader', with the result that his silent reader identity could be more accurately described as 'disinterested dissembler'.

Change in the curriculum context in which silent reading took place also seemed to affect the engagement levels of all the pupils significantly, as could be seen during the additional shorter silent reading session that regularly took place during the main fieldwork year in each Upper Junior class when the afternoon register was taken. During the Literacy sessions, much emphasis was explicitly placed on the importance of sustaining a peaceful atmosphere, and most pupils respected this and appeared to be reading quietly. However, during the shorter registration session, many of the pupils seemed to find it much harder to engage with their books, and this was perhaps because there were usually intermittent distractions, not least the teacher calling out names. I did not conduct any Systematic Observations due to the brevity of the sessions, but I did describe them in fieldnotes, and my subjective opinion was that although they tended to be on-task for a smaller total proportion of the time, Ernie, Amy and Janie's behaviour usually conformed to that described above in terms of interaction level. Russell's chosen silent reader identity however, seemed to be more variable, as is shown in the fieldnote extract below, which describes a short class session when he presented himself very differently from how he did in the Systematic Observation in the previous section:

Several adults came through the room, and Russell looked up each time. He then looked at a wall display of the Victorians and then turned round and glanced at me. He then sat with *The Guard dog* open in front of him and began to fiddle with something on the desk, and then whispered to the boy opposite. He then turned the two reward pencils round and round. By this time the teacher was picking pupils to do jobs to get ready for art. She said she was only asking people who she could see were reading. Russell quickly turned his attention to the book for a few moments but then began to look around the room again.

(Fieldnotes, 15.11.2004)

Russell's chosen reader identity in this extract would be more accurately described as 'disinterested dissembler' in terms of the typology, but even then despite his low motivation to read, if presentation of self as a reader began to matter, as it did when the teacher chose pupils to do jobs, he briefly indulged in impression management. Russell's Systematic Observation discussed in the previous section was completed

only nine days later, but on that occasion he was reading a text which had been recommended by a friend. It would seem then that the urge to appear to be part of the community of literate practice was so strong that it increased Russell's motivational interest level sufficiently to cause him to change his reader identity to that of 'interested dissembler', and during the summer term of Y6 there was an even clearer example of this which will be discussed in the next section.

8.5 Impression management during silent reading sessions

The participants used a range of specific impression management techniques in order to bolster their self-esteem and present themselves as full members of the classroom community of literate practice as they engaged with their books during silent reading sessions, and in this final section of the chapter, these will be discussed in the form of a cross-case analysis.

8.5.1 *Making a strategic choice of book in order to maximise real textual engagement.*

Strategic book choice in order to maximize the chance of engaging meaningfully with the text was a technique used by all the participants, and it took various forms. Despite registering distaste for reading in general, Janie was obviously most motivated to read if she was able to choose books based on popular media, presumably because familiarity with content improved accessibility (Marsh, 2003), and Worthy (1996) certainly found this was true for American middle school pupils who had negative attitudes to reading. However it is important to note that Ernie, who was the most positive about reading of the four participants, was also very strongly attracted to books based on films, television programmes or computer games. This was particularly likely if they were in cartoon format, and so their attraction may have been their strong visual modality (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). The way that the choice of a media text could scaffold successful meaning making was really brought home to me during a lunchtime conversation with Ernie during the Literacy Challenge initiative, when the topic of conversation was the book he had chosen that morning, which he was able to read just about fluently (see Appendix 9):

- RA: What do you think to that one then - the new one? (RA points to Dr Seuss' *How the Grinch stole Christmas*)
- E: It's really good – I like this one.
- RA: Is it?– how did you choose it?- cos I saw you come and choose and you hardly seemed to spend a minute. Did you know already what you wanted?
- E: Er – well I kind of looked at um this one and you know that film about the Grinch?
- RA: Yes – I've not seen it but I've heard of it.
- E: I really like it and it says (Ernie indicates book title) *How the Grinch stole Christmas* – so I thought that might be the same one.
- RA: And is it?
- E: Yep!
- (Interview transcript, 11.11.2004)

Another strategy that was employed at some point during Y6 by Ernie, Russell and Amy in order to try to maximize the chance of real textual engagement, was to bring a familiar book from home to re-read. This seemed to work well, as for example, when Amy brought *Why not?* from Bel Mooney's *Kitty and friends* series, she had the lowest error rate of any passages she read (See Appendix 7). She spoke on a number of occasions of her liking for these stories and how she hoped to collect the full set, and Worthy (1996) has drawn attention to the benefits of series books for pupils with literacy difficulties:

Mackay (1990) speculates that the popularity of series books may be due partly to the fact that they provide readers with a sense of mastery over the conventions of reading. With characters, language and content that grow more familiar with every book read “even a reader inexperienced in an absolute sense has the opportunity to behave like an experienced reader in this regard at least” (p.484). (Worthy, 1996, p.210)

Janie never mentioned having books at home, and certainly never brought any to school, but she did make use of a rather different strategy in order to maximize her chance of meaningful textual engagement. Although she consistently maintained that she disliked reading in general, on several occasions she expressed a preference for reading poetry as opposed to stories, and one of the few times when she seemed

genuinely engaged with her book during a silent reading session in Y6 was when she had chosen one of Alan Alhberg's humorous anthologies. The reason for her liking of the genre may have been that she preferred it aesthetically, but some of the attraction was perhaps because the sparser language form ensures fewer words are needed to express ideas (Crystal, 2004), the consequence being that the total reading load is lessened. In fact, ten years ago, Worthy (1996) suggested the use of poetry as a way to 'hook' reluctant readers because of its repetitive and predictable language forms, and it is interesting to note that Sainsbury and Schagen (2004) found in their survey of attitudes to reading at 9-11 years, that pupils with reading difficulties often stated a liking for poetry.

8.5.2 Making a strategic choice of book in order to appear to be a member of the classroom community of literate practice

As mentioned in a previous section, during the period of the Y6 Literacy Challenge, a 'book club' atmosphere developed as pupils recommended titles they had enjoyed to others, and all four participants were influenced at some point in this way and so made strategic choices in order to present themselves as full members of the community of literate practice. However, as described above, Russell was the participant who was most likely to adjust his behaviour in order to be in line with his peers, and shortly before the end of Y6 his use of book choice as an impression management tactic was very clear to see. He had persuaded his mother to buy him a copy of a junior thriller type novel entitled *Fire and Ice – Blood Feud* on the last day of the school Book Fayre because two of his friends had purchased it, and as the following extract shows, during his last interview with me, he was very keen to talk about the book:

RA: ... How did you choose this one?

R: All my friends had got it and they said "it's really really good".

RA: Yes – I noticed Jacob had got it – so you thought you'd get it?

R: And Matthew's got it as well and he said it's really really good...

RA: What is it about?

R: Well it's about these two teenagers what have got powers for fire and ice – there's this man called Blood Ford or something ... he's like a vampire or somat [something].

- RA: So have some people finished it then – some of your friends?
 R: Er no not yet.
 RA: You're all reading it together are you?
 R: Yes
 RA: That's good – and then you can discuss the story line can't you ?
 R: Yes – Jacob's near end of story – he's at about page 100.
 (Interview transcript, 6.6. 2005)

When Russell read a passage of the book, his error rate was 30% (see Appendix 10), and yet despite the direct evidence to the contrary, he seemed desperate to convince himself and me that it was a suitable choice of text, as later in the interview he insisted that it was neither hard nor easy, but was in the middle. His determination to continue to give the impression that he could read the book continued during the afternoon registration silent reading session, when my fieldnotes show that, as in the Systematic Observation above, he presented himself as an 'interested dissembler':

1.10 PM The pupils came into the classroom after break. Russell collected his reading book *Fire and ice* from his tray and sat down in his place with Jacob. He opened the book at the page where his homemade bookmark was, which said " Russell – Keep off" on it. He then appeared to start to read from where he had finished with me a few minutes before.

...During this short session Russell gave every impression that he was really reading. This is the clearest example I have ever seen of a pupil maintaining the pretence of reading because they are desperate to be part of the peer group community of readers – it is doubly sad in Russell's case as his perseverance is also motivated by really wanting to read the story which has been recommended to him.

The teacher said she would not start the register until she could see that they were all reading. Jacob and Matthew were also reading the same book as Russell – as the teacher took the register she remarked that they all had the same title and said "An epidemic" – Matthew said "*Fire and ice* – they're right good". Russell continued to appear to read his copy.

(Fieldnotes, 6.6.2005)

8.5.3 *Engaging with the book but not with print*

Fielding and Roller (1992) state that during independent reading sessions, even if pupils with dyslexic/LD "are engaged with books, they are seldom engaged with the *print* in the books" (p.678). When required to read aloud, there was no way that the

participants could avoid interaction with alphabetic text, but during silent sessions, it was possible to spend the whole time looking at print-free or print-light features of books. This was an option, provided pictures and diagrams were included, which allowed the impression of engagement to be conveyed to peers even though virtually no reading occurred. What was perhaps surprising was that, apart from Amy, all the participants admitted that they did this, but they never said that this was because they could not read the text, but rather gave the reason as interest in visual features. Russell, for example, knew that during class silent reading sessions he was meant to have a story book, but he often contrived to choose non-fiction texts which he said was so he could study the illustrations and diagrams and thereby improve his considerable scientific knowledge. Ernie too was aware that when reading the Salvation Army *Kids alive* comics, which appeared on a regular basis, that he gravitated to pages written in a cartoon format in which the illustrations rather than text dominated. When observing during silent reading sessions, both during Literacy and registration, it was obvious when the participants were using this strategy, as they would turn pages far too quickly for meaningful engagement with print to have taken place.

OFSTED (2004a) have recently noted that some pupils in their survey “flicked through their books with little apparent interest” (p.22) during silent reading and my fieldnotes reveal this happening when Janie had chosen a topic book on the Ancient Greeks to read during registration one afternoon at the start of the summer term of Y6:

Janie opened the book and flicked through the pages fairly quickly – at a speed that could only have given time for a cursory glance at the pictures. *Janie told me afterwards that she had just looked at the pictures rather than read the book. I asked her if there was a particular page she had looked at for me to photocopy and she suggested p.24 – but I don't think she had particularly looked at this page more than any others.*

A number of other pupils, including Bob, were also looking at topic books about the Greeks, but they spent more time looking at each page, and seemed to be studying the information and pictures in a more sustained way. (Fieldnotes, 27.4.2005)

By this stage of the year, Janie had consciously decided to opt out of reading as much as possible, as discussed in Chapter Seven, and it seemed she had chosen the topic book, not because of genuine interest, but because she no longer bothered to have a reading book in her tray. Nevertheless the use of this strategy was successful in that it enabled her to appear to be a member of the community of practice in which pupils improved their knowledge of the class topic.

8.5.4 Engaging in an alternative legitimate activity in order to avoid reading

Up until the start of the Literacy Challenge in the autumn term of Y6, the only alternative legitimate activity that could potentially be indulged in by the participants during silent reading sessions that avoided reading but maintained the impression of membership of the community of practice was to take a long time to choose a new book in the library. The new initiative, however, provided an opportunity that did not exist before, and that was to spend as long as possible writing book reviews and carrying out the associated management tasks of copying titles and authors and collecting stars. Amy and Janie seemed to be aware from the outset that these tasks could be elongated to minimise reading time, but at the start of the spring term they contrived to make it an even more successful strategy for avoiding reading. The Challenge was originally intended to be operational only during the autumn term when a student teacher was in charge of the lower ability Literacy group. However, although the class teacher terminated the rewards after Christmas, she decided to continue with the book choice and review system, but as individual sheets held together with clips were not proving to be sufficiently robust for the longer time span, the pupils were issued with conventional reading diaries. During Janie's first session of the spring term of Y6 I described her and Amy's behaviour during the time they should have been engaged in silent reading:

Janie and Amy collected their books and went to sit down in their places ... and I got ready to do a Systematic Observation. However I then realised that they were writing – for the whole 8 minute session Janie was either copying the reviews from last term into the new red notebook, reorganizing the sheets and clipping them back together or discussing the task with Amy.
(Fieldnotes, 20.1.2005)

During Amy's session the following week both girls spent the silent reading time copying reviews again, and after I had talked to her about it in her interview, I discovered that the teacher had told the pupils to make a list of all the books read since the start of the initiative at the back of the notebook, but that Janie and Amy had decided to also write out all the previous reviews at the front. That was a considerable task even though the reviews were very brief, but it meant they were able to spend quite a number of silent reading sessions busily occupied whilst resisting reading completely. The teacher usually prepared for the main part of the lesson by working on the laptop that was connected to the newly introduced interactive whiteboard, the impact of which will be discussed in Chapter Eleven, while the pupils read, and unless there was overt misbehaviour, she did not monitor what was going on closely. The girls therefore were able to get away with this behaviour, which was to some extent legitimate, and which meant they completely avoided reading whilst giving the impression of membership of the community of literate practice.

8.5.5 Dissembling when apparently engaged in reading

During the Literacy Challenge I overheard a number of pupils discussing ways to cheat the system in order to obtain the rewards, which showed that, human nature being what it is, individuals will always find ways to manipulate such a situation to their advantage. The participants were not immune to this ploy, as was shown during an interview near the start of the initiative when Janie was talking about the books available for silent reading :

J: And they are really thin so you can get through them very quick.

RA: Is that good? Do you prefer that then?

J: Um, and then I get more stars on the back and then I can get the prize! (Janie laughs)

(Interview transcript, 8.11.2004)

From that position it was only one short step to the realisation that the books could be 'got through' even more quickly if they were not read properly. As already discussed, given that the books on offer were too difficult for them to read

independently, three of the four participants had no choice but to engage in pretence, but the Challenge may have provided an extra incentive to do this. As the whole point of dissembling behaviour is impression management in order to manipulate presentation of self (Goffman, 1959), I thought it was unlikely that any of the participants would openly divulge that they sometimes pretended to read, and I felt it was unethical to ask them directly. As anticipated, apart from letting on that they sometimes missed out passages of difficult text during silent reading, Amy, Ernie and Russell never admitted that they might be indulging in this behaviour, and although Janie did not either, my suspicions were aroused during the second half of the autumn term when she told me she had read a whole book in one silent reading session which would have been impossible for any reader, however experienced. In fact around that time Amy's sense of duty and fair-play led her to tell me during an interview that she had become aware that Janie was not playing by the rules in relation to the new Challenge sheets:

- A: Janie, she read this one before me. (Amy looks at book)
RA: This *Barn owl* one - did she right yes ?
A: And she were on this page and she went like that - she turned it over and went - one- two- three (Amy turns 3 pages over rapidly)
RA: Right.
A: And turned it over so she don't really read it.
RA: Why do you think she does that? – cos I know you told me this last time.
A: Cos she wants a lollypop.
RA: Right – and do you think other people?
A: And cos she don't like um reading, and when I spot her I go “ Janie, you're not actually reading it”.
RA: Right
A: And she's put 8 stars on there (Amy indicates Reading Challenge leaflet back cover)
RA: Has she? Right.
A: She's put 9 on – extra 2 - when she hasn't even read them.
(Interview transcript, 17.11.2004)

Amy obviously thought that Janie's reason for dissembling was her quest to win the prize for reading the most books and this may well have been the reason in the autumn term, but Janie continued to engage in pretence after the reward system was

discontinued. As she became more and more openly disaffected with school during the spring term of Y6 she may have actively wanted to present herself to me as rebellious, but I was still surprised when, during an interview, she confessed openly that she sometimes pretended to read during the Literacy silent reading sessions:

RA: ... I just want to know about *Tod in Biker City* – have you just started that or are you quite a way through it?

J: I'm half way.

RA: Can you show me where you are then – right near the back ?

J: (Janie flicks through the book to near the end and indicates p. 63) there.

RA: Right ... can you just read a little bit of it for me?

J: I haven't really been reading it.

RA: Haven't you ? What have you been doing then – how do you mean?

J: I just flick through a page like that. (Janie turns pages of the book rapidly)

RA: Yes.

J: And keep going like that (Janie flicks pages again) while I'm writing.

RA: Right - oh because you're filling in those – yeah. Well, how can you say you've got to the end of the book then if you've ?

J: Miss just says – “Oh right” – when you say “Oh I've finished” – she goes “Go and change your book then” and if it were a boy's story and I don't really like them.

RA: Right then - so are you saying then that actually you've been pretending a bit with that one?

J: Yes.

(Interview transcript, 20.1.2005)

Later on in the interview Janie told me that five days was about the right length of time to keep the book before asking to change it, and she was careful to point out again that the reason she did this was because the only books left to choose from were ones she found boring because they were boys' stories , but that once a book was started the teacher's rule was that it must be completed. This was a good way to save face (Goffman, 1955) because it meant she deflected the reason for the pretence away from the possibility that the book was too difficult for her to read independently. As she declined to read to me that day I do not know if the level of the book was suitable, but as it is a text I know well because I use with my dyslexic pupils, I think it is likely she would have struggled with the demands. However,

even if the level had turned out to be suitable, by citing boredom and disinterest as the reason for pretence, Janie successfully diverted attention from the possibility that the book was too difficult and thereby, despite divulging an impression management strategy, was able to preserve her presentation of self as a competent reader.

8.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at the ways that the participants used impression management to manipulate their presentation of self as readers, and because of the rich findings that emerged during analysis, I have concentrated on the silent reading sessions that were a regular feature of Literacy. I have proposed a descriptive typology of silent reader identity, and it is interesting to note that the two participants who were most likely to behave as ‘disinterested dissemblers’, namely Janie and Russell, said when asked in interviews around the time the Systematic Observations were carried out, that they preferred silent reading to the guided reading sessions that also took place during Literacy. At first I felt this was a counter-intuitive finding as I could not believe they actually liked the sessions, but then I realised that I was transferring my pro-reading values on them and forgetting Woods’ (1990) rejoinder, quoted in Chapter Three, that pupils often “transform [school activities] into something more meaningful - play or sociation” (p. 190). Viewed in this light, their preference was less surprising as dissembling and/or disengaging were not behavioural options during guided reading because texts were usually read aloud. It then became obvious to me that the reasons ‘interested reader’ Ernie, and ‘interested dissembler’ Amy, said they preferred guided reading was because they were aware that the support available would be more likely to help them to improve their standard, something they were keen should happen.

The problem was that when the participants found themselves forced to engage with texts during silent reading that were beyond their independent level, they had no official conduit for making it known that these sessions were a waste of time, and therefore no agency to alter the unsatisfactory situation. In view of this, if they were to preserve their self-esteem with their peers, they had no choice but to use

impression management techniques, and all of these were essentially designed to ensure they presented themselves publicly as full members of the classroom community of literate practice, and thereby put across spurious reading competence. The tactics they employed can also be interpreted as ways of coping with the stressful situation of having to engage with overly difficult texts, as can the periods of distraction that were a significant feature of their behaviour at times. Seen in this light, the last part of this chapter can be regarded as a bridge to the following two in which I use the concept of 'coping strategies', introduced in Chapter Three, as a lens through which to discuss the specific ploys used by the participants as they negotiated their way (Woods, 1990) through the multitude of other reading demands encountered each day at school.