

**Reading as participating: a study of embodied experiences of reading and
writing**

by

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Dedication

To my husband without whose support this journey would have not been possible, and to the eight persons whose lives touched mine as we travelled together.

Acknowledgements

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Abstract

The focus of this collaborative research is on seeking what enables or constrains participation in reading and writing as a social practice. Eight individuals with a label of dyslexia discuss and reflect, over a period of a year, on past and present experiences around reading and writing, and develop a personal narrative. The study uses a phenomenological approach, and ethnographic and narrative methods within a New Literacy Studies framework, situating experiences, and perceptions of them, within social and cultural contexts. The participants discuss, and reflect on, past and present experiences to design and develop their narrative. In the process, the relationship between experiences and perceptions and its effect on identity and agency, is explored. As participants each construct a narrative, with themselves as the protagonist, they 'sediment' their literate identities into the text, to be further reflected on. Initially, this collaborative study sets out to find what support, intervention, and community concessions persons labelled with dyslexia require, but this changes when the participants, through discussion and reflection on emotions, discourses and artifacts within the narrative, uncover covert sociocultural factors which hinder their reading and writing. The study moves away from a tacit acceptance of personal deficit or difference, leading to a label of dyslexia. It finds that the shift in the perception of literacy, from a definable and measurable goal to be reached, to one of participation in a social practice, enabled or hindered by embodied experiences, redefines the label of dyslexia, as reflecting restricted participation, and therefore social exclusion.

Keywords: Literacy Experience Embodiment Participation Perception Emotion Discourses Mediating artifacts Identity Agency

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Reading as participating: a study of embodied experiences of reading and writing

Chapter 1 Introductions

“Lived experience is where we start from, and where all must link back to, like a guiding thread” (Varela, 1996:234)

Introduction

This study explored the experiences of reading and writing of eight individuals of different ages and occupations. Through reflection on past and ongoing embodied experiences, the participants and I constructed personal narratives of participation, histories shaped within, and at the same time shaping, the wider world of literacy in practice.

In this chapter I introduce the focus of the research and describe what each chapter discusses. I introduce the participants, myself and my positionality as a researcher, and give a brief overview of the context in which the study takes place.

Focus of the study

This research focused on the perceptions and participations of eight individuals in reading and writing as part of their everyday lives as shaped by experiences of interaction which, in turn, shaped future interactions.

Questions

The study asked the following questions:

1. What experiences of participation in reading and writing do the participants describe?
2. How do their experiences, and reflecting on them, shape their stories and current experiences?
3. What aspects of their experiences do they consider enable or hinder their participation in reading and writing?
4. In what way, if at all, does the participants' perception of their agency affect their participation in reading and writing?
5. What further issues do the personal narratives of the participants raise?

To answer these questions, the participants and I constructed narratives of experiences through discussion and retrospection over a period of a year, since, as stated by Pennebaker and Seagal (1999) "... the act of constructing stories is a natural human process that helps individuals to understand their experiences and themselves" (p. 1243).

Initially this research focussed on perceptions of individuals with a label of dyslexia, reflected in the original research proposal and title, found in the Ethical Approval letter (Appendix VII). The original questions looked at how persons with a label of dyslexia perceived reading and writing, what kinds of social support they expected, and what kinds of intervention in schools would help. These were written collaboratively with persons with a label of dyslexia.¹ Once the study was underway, the focus changed to one of participation, irrespective of labels, and the research questions changed as well to reflect this new focus, as explained below and in Chapter 4.

At first, the participants spoke through a discourse of deficit and personal difference, especially while recounting school experiences. As Pollack (2001) indicated, for any individual, accepting a label of dyslexia acknowledged that the difficulties being experienced were caused by a deficit or difference within themselves. Once that 'safe place of communication'² was established, each of the participants shared their experiences in a different way, speaking of participations,³ emotionally engaged and embodied experiences, and factors that helped or hindered these participations. In recounting these experiences they 'storied' themselves, self-authoring as protagonists in a story of day-to-day lives, in which literacy played a vital embedded role.

Each participant was interviewed in depth, not just about literacy, but about day-to-day experiences of which literacy was part. The transcripts of these interviews formed basic elements of the stories. I met each participant a number of times, and through discussions and reflections of current and recounted experiences shaped their narratives of identity in literacy participation. A record of these interactions for each participant is found in Appendix III.

¹ Explained in Chapter 4.

² As used in Bellman (2011) p. 74.

³ Beyond shared activity, to mean an ownership of the act; Lankshear and Knobel (2011) use it for fan fiction writers as, "implicated in collaborations and participations" (p. 82).

My theoretical position was informed by post-structuralism, which presupposed, as stated by Richardson (2000; 2002), that there was no universal truth to seek, that the voices of the participants were of value and no claim to authoritative knowledge was made by me. I aimed to increase the body of knowledge about literacy as participation in everyday life in Malta through, as Lassiter (2005a; 2005b) suggested, collaboration with the participants.

Perception of literacy for this study

In this study literacy was seen as participation in embodied experiences of social practice, a view espoused by many⁴ whose research challenged the view of literacy as a set of cognitive skills to be gained through personal ability and instruction. Participation in literacy, as argued by Rogoff (2003) and others, was interwoven within experiences of daily living. This study made use of Vygotsky's⁵ sociocultural notions of scaffolding and mediation to discuss how the embodied experiences of the eight individuals shaped their perceptions, which in turn transformed the way they participated in reading and writing. The framework of New Literacy Studies provided a theoretical base from which this study theorised the participative, social nature of literacy practices,⁶ and the events⁷ which embodied them.⁸

New Literacy Studies shifted the view of literacy. Street (1984) illustrated how meaning was context bound. Various researchers⁹ argued for a plurality of literacies, and situated reading and writing within the wider context of participating in the practices of society through day-to-day relevance.

The approach taken in this research was phenomenological, arguing that perception, knowing and acting emerged through participating and living in the world, and were not universals present outside the experience of living.¹⁰ When participants started reflecting on their experiences, they raised issues of

⁴ (Lankshear and Knobel, 2011; Pahl and Rowsell, 2006; Barton, 2001; Gee, 1996; Street, 1984, among others)

⁵ Without subscribing to the somewhat reductionist views of cognitive development.

⁶ Literacy practices are the values which dictate the way people read and write in cultural contexts.

⁷ Literacy events are observable phenomena limited in time and space and participated in overtly.

⁸ Discussed further in Chapter 3

⁹ (Ahmed, 2011; Lankshear and Knobel, 2011; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, among others)

¹⁰ Supported by the work of Merleau-Ponty, (1945 /1992), Ingold, 2000, and Pink, 2011.

consciousness, emotion and feelings, and how these issues transformed agency and participation, which in turn reshaped perceptions. I found it difficult to make sense of my data through the literature on New Literacy Studies and phenomenology alone. The reflections of the participants seemed to me to indicate not just a recounting of memories but, as explained by Thompson (2004; 2007), meaning created anew out of every experience and, in a non-linear fashion, returning it back to the system to enact change, rather than processing information 'fed' to it from outside the system to extract meaning. This underpinned the view of literacy this study came to hold, as transformed participation, and supported the view that reading and writing were not an 'outside' skill to be gained but an experience, and meaningful within a social and cultural participative system. This led me to neurophenomenology,¹¹ developed by Maturana and Varela (1992) and Gordon (2013), building on Merleau-Ponty's work, expressing the circularity of embodied perception and learning, allowing me to understand the developing data better. This approach, along with a number of studies, reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3, on emotion and body image, awareness and consciousness were helpful in making sense of some aspects of data. Discussion of experiences of agency as enabling or hindering literacy was informed by, among others, Holland et al. (2001) whose work accounted for the active agency of individuals through the choices they made and the identities they constructed. A neurophenomenological approach, as noted by Krippner (2013), then served, "... to study experience from the perspective of the embodied condition of the human mind" (p.xii).

I explored my views of reality and the nature of knowledge, my ontology, and the epistemological framework through which I selected methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation. In order to do justice to the nature and complexity of experiences my participants brought, I realised I needed to design a study that fully embraced, as intertwined, the cultural, perceptual and embodied base of experience.

Outline of dissertation by chapter

In this first chapter, I set out the focus and perspective of this study. An outline summary of this dissertation is followed by a rationale of why I chose this

¹¹ A holistic approach to feeling and learning

particular field. Subsequently, I introduce the participants, myself and the local and global context. Chapter 2 reviews literature on literacy, while Chapter 3 discusses studies on perception. Chapter 4 reviews questions this study asks and describes the way methods to collect, analyse and interpret the data evolved. Chapter 5 summarises the narratives of the participants, while Chapters 6, 7 and 8 present and analyse excerpts from the narratives. The sociocultural, the embodied, and the perceptual come together in these chapters, and are discussed further in Chapter 9, bringing to a close this thesis with further issues for research. A bibliography for the literature which informed this study, and Appendices, follow.

Rationale for this study

Reading for a doctoral degree, I sought answers to questions formed within my limited experience, mainly why some persons learned to read 'effortlessly' within the school system while others did not. I had come in contact with many persons labelled as dyslexic, and I was puzzled that, outside school, supported by family and community, they often read. This was reflected in the questions initially asked in this research, to examine the perceptions of persons labelled as dyslexic, and how these perceptions affected the way they practiced literacy, as well as what kind of support they sought. When I started the interviews the focus changed, as in one interview after another my participants were concerned with daily experiences in which literacy was participation, and their exclusion from them. I discussed this with my supervisor and my participants and the focus changed to narrations of experiences of participation in literacy over the years and at present, and reflections on them.

Through my reading and research I developed a great admiration for persons like Brian Street (1984; 2011), who analysed and explicated the argument of the social practice of literacy, and Kate Pahl (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005; 2006; 2010), who made the meaning of artifactual literacies and everyday experiences real through her research, as well as many others who contributed to my growing knowledge and understanding. I felt that exploring the perceptions of literacy held by the participants through their experiences might allow me to understand better what transformed participation in reading and writing as part of everyday life.

Meeting the participants

The participants were volunteers from the Maltese Dyslexia Association.¹² The first three participants were interviewed during an initial session, in a pilot study,¹³ as a result of which the rest met with me informally first, with the interview held at the next meeting or after an informal conversation. Below the participants introduce themselves through excerpts taken verbatim from their narratives.

Andrew

Andrew was the first participant to be interviewed:

I am a pensioner, 61 years old, a retired bank manager; I had been at the bank for quite a number of years before I retired, since I was very young when I started, in my late teens. I joined the bank to escape remaining in a family business run by my grandfather, as at that time I was general dogsbody for him. He was quite angry when I went to the bank instead, but I wanted to be independent. My young days were difficult because of the death of my father. I think it was as if I developed slowly and it took a long time to get myself organized.

Jenny

Next to be interviewed was Jenny:

I am Jenny. I am a mother of three. I am 49 years of age and I work full time as a bus driver. I've done other jobs before, but totally different jobs from the one I'm doing now. I like drawing and I'm quite interested in things that involve working with your hands, craft, art and things like that. This story of me as a reader and writer starts in early childhood. My childhood, apart from school, was quite a happy childhood, mostly playing. In those days we used to play outside and meet friends. It was different to nowadays. At school, at first I was also very happy. Learning nursery rhymes, the alphabet, reading single words and short phrases and sentences, there was no problem. I enjoyed my lessons, especially since we first started in English. I think I was fine while we learnt in English only.

¹² Chapter 4

¹³ P. 72.

Martha

Martha introduced herself in the first interview as still studying. She changed the introduction during one of our discussions after she finished her course:

I am 50. This year I have qualified as a Gestalt psychotherapist, and now I am building a web site about counselling for infertility challenges, because this is what I do, and I am the only one in Malta. It has been a long hard trip, but at last I got there. I am very bad at writing and it affects me, and who I am.

I read a lot of books; I read my first book at the age of sixteen.

I did not have an easy childhood. When I was eight my father died.

Brooke

Brooke attended a vocational college in Art and Design. We met in a disused classroom during one of her free periods, as it was difficult for her to find the time outside school.

I started school when I was three, at the school in the village where I lived. I spent two happy years there. At the age of five, I was sent to another school, considered one of the best church schools for girls, on the island. I was told I was very lucky to have a place there since it is difficult to get in, only through a lottery.

I did not think I was so lucky. It was far away, and all the teachers spoke to me in English, whereas I knew mostly Maltese. At home, we used to speak Maltese as well. Some of the teachers spoke to us in Maltese but when the teacher used to tell us a story I did not always understand. I did not know the songs either. I wanted to go back to my old school. At home I used to feel good and I used to play games on the computer. The words never got in the way. Whenever I got really stuck I would ask my brother or someone to help me.

Karla

Karla had just received the results of her school leaving examinations.

I am fifteen. Just left school. Just that basically, that's who I am. I have successfully passed twelve Matsec exams, including Biology, Chemistry and Physics. These subjects were quite challenging, and none were my favourite,

as I prefer other subjects, but I did quite well. I enjoy art. I took art privately so it's not the same as lessons at school. It was one of the subjects I passed very well in.

Wayne

Wayne came next. I met Wayne in his rather new, rather opulent, office where he pointed out to me the complete lack of paper:

I am 41 years old. I have three companies, two of which I set up, and a third in which we have bought a share into. Before I became self-employed I was a draughtsman, and I worked ten years for the same company. I suppose that was my way of conforming to what society and my family expected. If I keep on going back, I did not do sixth form, I did not really have the qualifications to make it into sixth form...The names of my companies reflect my philosophy. One is called Right Brain, which I think is a very suitable name for what we do and what people should expect of us. For me it's a trendy catch-name, and personally it's part of my philosophy and who I am.

Damien

I met Damien at the library of the college where we both worked, and Damien was very much at ease:

I am a lecturer in mathematics and an artist. I am 45 years old. I became an artist at an older age. ...I suppose between eight and nine. I was introduced to science, which I didn't have at the other school, and I went crazy over it. I wanted to become a scientist and it was one of the things that made me read. At that time I couldn't read. I took long to read, because my sister, who is five years younger than me, learnt to read before me. However, at the time, I didn't use to think about it. My mother was careful not to compare us. I didn't think of myself relative to others. I just used to think about myself and what I wanted to do.

Alan

Alan was the last participant I interviewed. He was rather nervous and tongue-tied at first, in fact, it took long to put him at his ease, and so the interview was postponed to a later date.

I am 48 years old. I am a hairdresser. I paint, I enjoy sewing, I go to the gym, go out with friends, I like clothes, and when I have the time I like to travel, I like travelling a lot. My greatest wish is to read. I have loved travelling since I was young. When I was about nine, I went on a school trip and I was determined to keep travelling. I work, save and travel. When I started travelling, I realized that I needed to read. The places where I was going, my ticket, the gates, I realized that I needed to read.

These are the voices of the participants, quoted verbatim from their narratives. Their voices defined this study. Each voice, whether it contributed extensively through many hours of discussion and conversation, or entered and left the research with a smaller contribution, was entitled to being heard (Bhatia, 2002), since no one could talk about their experiences better.

My Background

While talking with the participants in the study, I rediscovered how reading, to me, was a door to a magic world in which people travelled around, under the sea or to the moon, or lived in Kingdoms of Middle Earth. It smelt comforting and felt comfortable and exciting at the same time, and even now, the scent when I walk into a book-store or library evokes these memories of childhood, perceived golden by the passing of time. Discussions with participants also dredged up an experience of shame, which I had sought to forget. My handwriting was untidy, and one day my copybook was pinned to my back for me to go round the other classes. Once I recalled the experience, I felt very bad, in spite of knowing in hindsight that it was common practice at the time.

Stories

Books are often the vehicle for the narratives within individuals' text experiences and imaginings, and the emotions these evoke. Cline and Necochea (2003), both academics, discussed the lack of books, but the wealth of life narratives as they were growing up. My experience of oral narrative while growing up came through my great aunt, who would draw two chairs in front of each other and say "Now let me tell you a story". With those words, I would be transported to pre-war Malta and the life of five young ladies living in a well-off household, with visiting tutors and music masters. The sensation evoked, wonder mixed with security, is the space I felt the need to create for the participants as they delved into their experiential treasure chest to narrate

and transform one sensation after the other through reflecting on their experiences.

Research

Undergraduate research, for a B.Ed.(Hons.) degree, involved the social practice of communication and multimodal texts in a total communication programme based on print and Makaton sign used in family literacy. For research undertaken for a degree at Masters Level, in Language and Literacy, I devised a class-based literacy programme, which situated literacy in the children's day-to-day lives, using popular culture to generate multimodal, collaborative texts. The children transformed their participation in the literacy activities of reading and writing, finding a connection with their culture and community practice by creating collaborative texts based on their social experiences.

Work

During my teaching, I used multimodal 'visible-communication' texts with children having trouble in school, among whom were some with a label of autism, and for these reading was a way into speech. My full-time employment is that of Senior Lecturer at Malta's main vocational college where I teach English and Literacy within the Learning Support Unit. I am a visiting tutor at the University of Malta, lecturing in Supporting Inclusive Education, on the use of graphical organisation of information for collaborative texts, supporting language learning in the classroom and early numeracy practice within the home and community. I also work in partnership with students experiencing learning difficulties and disabilities through a Maltese non-profit organisation that provides support within the community, in a society that does not always value diversity. I have learnt much, especially what I still do not know, by working in partnership with learners and their families.

Home

I am a grandparent four times over, my eldest grandchild being eleven and the youngest two years old. I am fortunate in having an opportunity, not available to me as a busy parent when my children were young, to be able to experience the most fascinating and incredible learning journey of all, as I interact with these young persons and see transformations taking place.

Researcher bias

Malterud (2001) pointed out that researchers' background and position affected what they chose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for the purpose, the findings considered most appropriate and the framing and communication of conclusions (p.483 - 484).

Seeking to explore my positionality, I feel that I am open to any findings about literacy. I am against labels, and models of deficit. I find I am also unhappy about the removal of the acquisition of reading and writing from the realm of social practice in everyday use and its assignation to the sterile and irrelevant teaching methods often found at school.

In spite of the tangible and sometimes tragic effects on families with family members who cannot participate fully in the literacy practices of their community, and the 'figured world'¹⁴ to which they are exiled, I feel that measuring and defining literacy excludes and emphasises the differences between community members, rather than seeks similarities in social practices. Through my position as researcher, I do not claim a more authoritative voice than the participants, but on the contrary, consider myself a facilitator through whom they can make their voices heard¹⁵.

Having clarified my ideological stance to the reader, I feel I am now ready to move on to the actual research itself. My framing of this research reflected the process of personal development I passed through during the past five years, while reading for my EDD and conducting my research, and impacted on what I chose to problematize and how I conducted the research. According to Packwood and Sikes (1996): "The ideologies that shape and frame the research are reflected in the metaphors we use to conceptualize the process" (p.336).

During the course of my doctorate, and especially during this research, many assumptions were shed, and at one point, in the throes of analysing my data, I

¹⁴ 'Figured worlds' are social spaces created by , and at the same time creating, the interactions of persons within that space: "First, figured worlds are historical phenomena, to which we are recruited or into which we enter, which themselves develop through the works of their participants (Holland, 2001: 40-41).

¹⁵ This is explained further in Chapter 4, as well as in later chapters, when themes and issues to focus on, and excerpts used from participant narratives, were negotiated.

experienced what Rogoff, 2003, called 'the discomfort' of never having before considered the assumptions of my own cultural practice, not just the obvious ones, but the insidious ones that creep up on you once you are aware. These included looking around when parking a car to see whether someone was unsure of how long they could stay there if this information was just in print. It included questioning why something as ordinary as having an eye test assumed that everyone who wore spectacles could read letters and text. In this I subscribed to what Rogoff (2003) called her overarching concept for understanding human development, "Humans develop through their changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change" (p.11-12).

I believe I am aware of my feelings about literacy, as outlined above, as I hope the reader is after reading my background, and knowing about my feelings and opinions a priori. I have shared this information with my participants, and readers, seeking to clarify why I chose to investigate and question the areas I did, and my methodology and data analysis choices. I hope these choices will enable me to seek out and put before the readers all the data I could gather, and allow the readers to judge my efforts for themselves.

Polkinghorne (2007) voiced his concerns about the validity of qualitative research, especially narrative inquiry, and concluded that ultimately:

Readers should be able to retrace the steps in the argument to the text and to judge the plausibility of the offered interpretation. The claim need not assert that the interpretation proposed is the only one possible; however, researchers need to cogently argue that theirs is a viable interpretation grounded in the assembled texts (p.484).

In order to gain the data and insights necessary to conduct this research, I chose to use different methodologies from the narrative spectrum, which allowed me to view my participants' experiences as a story of transformed participation in literacy within their community, while keeping in mind the wider context outside their immediate environment which ultimately formed the system out of which and into which their experiences flowed. The way the methods used for data collection, analysis and interpretation evolved will be discussed in Chapter 4, Methodology.

Malta – the local and the global

The study was located in Malta, a small island in the Mediterranean Sea. It is a member of the European Union.

History

Maltese history goes back to the Phoenicians, and inscribed stone tablets from between 800 B.C. – 200 B.C., have pride of place in museums, evidence of the importance the Maltese give reading and writing. The island was successively taken over by various nations, all of which have left their mark, both physical, and cultural. The most recent was the British occupation of the country, which ended in 1974, when Malta became a republic.

Language and Education

Malta has two official languages, Maltese and English, both learnt at school from an early age. As Malta is a small island, with no natural resources, education is considered important for finding employment, as well as for class mobility. All children between the ages of 5 and 16 must attend school. Most students attend schools in the public sector, which are open to all children according to where they live. Instruction is predominantly in Maltese. The second sector is the 'Church Schools', enrolment depending on an annual lottery held for all children between the ages of 3-5, as the demand for places far outstrips the supply. Instruction used to be in English, though a balance is now being sought. The smallest sector is that of the fee-paying 'independent' schools where instruction is mainly in English. The whole system is examination oriented, and very competitive. At the end of their schooling, students sit for public examinations to obtain a matriculation certificate. Performance in these examinations very often determines a student's future life-course.

Socio-cultural aspects

While family background may go some way to determine life-course in Malta, social mobility is determined by a number of cultural and social aspects, including education. Geographically, with an area of 316 km², Malta is rather small. In spite of this the dense population and convoluted network of roads subject to heavy traffic make getting from one side of the island to another a journey that can often take a couple of hours. There are distinct differences

between different towns and villages, with characteristics in customs and dialect specific even in now-adjacent villages. An economic divide exists between the old historic south and the newly-rich north. The walled cities built by the knights, battered during World War II because of the Drydocks which provided employment for men from those areas, and which have since closed down, show a high rate of unemployment, low-rent housing and lowest rate of further study by young people. The villages in the north, traditionally considered the 'remote' and 'uneducated', are now highly sought-after residential areas, providing expensive housing for young professionals, and employment in the hospitality sector. As explained above, attending a church or private school increased exposure to English, and gave the individual an advantage in the job market and further education, since a good level of English is required to attend University.

Policy on literacy

The prevalent view of literacy in Malta is one which sees the acquisition of literacy as responsible for the future development of the individual and the country's economy. Malta has been a member state of the European Union for the past ten years, and this perspective on literacy is bolstered by European Union Policies. Street (2005) stated:

It is assumed that the acquisition of literacy will in itself lead to, for example, higher cognitive skills, improved economic performance, greater equality, and so on. It is in this sense that literacy is seen as having such effects "autonomously," irrespective of the social conditions and cultural interpretations of literacy associated with programmes and educational sites for its dissemination. In this model the socio-cultural environment of the individual is in part determined by his or her literacy skills (p.417).

Within the global arena, the economic and strategic dependence of Malta on foreign investment for its continued development means that it is no longer an island, cocooned by the sea from what is happening elsewhere, and considerations of the global now drive policies, especially in Education. Malta is especially subject to the education policies set out by the EU, and has a set of targets it must reach by 2020. This document, Education and Training 2020 (2012). states:

Monitoring of both performance and progress is an essential part of the European Union's education and training policies, assessing strengths and weaknesses and guiding future strategy ([Online]).

Conclusion

This study proposes an intentional intersection between phenomenology as philosophy of embodied experience, neurophenomenology, being the physical basis of 'knowing returned to the system', and anthropology, with its cultural contribution, within a framework of New Literacy Studies. The data in this research is not collected but developed from transformative interactions of participants with their own experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1933) and what Cooper, 2011 called, "rhetorical agency...acts that make them who they are, that affect others and that can contribute to the common good" (p.420). The experiences the participants described and reflected on were embodied through the intersection of the sociocultural and the physical. It was the cultural norms which caused an experience to be embarrassing and shameful, when a participant found difficulty writing, but the experience became embodied as the physically - sensed reaction to it, which action, according to Denzin (2007) was responsible for the resultant emotion, and, as Rimé et al. (1992) noted, reflection brought the physical feeling to consciousness, described by Martha as she once burst into tears while reflecting on an experience, explaining how she made sure to avoid being put in the same situation. Glassmann (2001) compared the pedagogies of Vygotsky and Dewey and noted how they stated that everyday experiences brought development and transformation, "Dewey and Vygotsky left a legacy of ideas that continue to influence educators. ... At the core of this legacy is the importance of everyday activities to all human beings" (p.12). It is in everyday experiences that entwined spirals of perception and action move up and down shaping each other.

Above I introduced the research, its focus and perspective of literacy, followed by a chapter-by-chapter outline of this dissertation and a rationale for this study. I introduced the participants, myself as a researcher and the context. In the next two chapters I review further literature relevant to this research.

Chapter 1 introduced the research, a study of experiences of literacy, outlined chapter content, introduced the participants and myself and gave an account of the cultural and historical background to this study. In this next chapter, I review literature on literacy relevant to the main argument of the study.

Chapter 2 Literacy and Participation

Introduction

Initially, this study intended to explore perceptions of persons with a label of dyslexia. The focus changed after the study started,¹⁶ arguing for reading and writing as participation in experiences of feeling and learning. These issues were reflected in the literature reviewed from the fields of education, psychology and anthropology relevant to the main argument of literacy as participation internal to experiences. I discussed two different approaches to literacy, one as a set of universal skills, the other a New Literacy Studies perspective of literacy as a social practice. Below I review literature pertinent to participation in this social practice.

The main argument

In this study, I argued for an alternative view of literacy as lived experience, conceiving reading and writing as participation, bodily and emotionally engaged in an act of knowing (Street, 2011), I argued for literacy as a holistic, participatory process, transforming and developing both itself and the social context in which it was enacted, enmeshed in daily living through embodied experience, crossing the boundaries of labels which knowing and meaning were given. As Rogoff (2003) and Ingold (2000; 2004) showed, multiple factors across established ways of talking about meaning-making and knowing determined the extent of participation in reading and writing. I read widely, and some of the literature reviewed might not fit comfortably with other studies; however, as the data developed so did my field of reading, to allow me to make sense of it.

Contrasting views of literacy

A view of literacy as a measurable, definable, universal skill to be gained through specific and explicit instruction led to the practice of teaching reading

¹⁶ Explained in detail in Chapter 4.

and writing at school. Studies within this conceptualization fragmented the practice and often focused on isolated components, as illustrated by Nag and Snowling (2013), who examined children's ability to extract meaning from three different types of scripts by discovering what specific skills were used, searching for cognitive universals in reading development. They found that although children learnt identifiable language-specific and language-universal skills, this did not answer questions about how the text became meaningful. The study concluded by asking, "How do children acquire knowledge of the symbols of the language and what places constraints on this process?" (p.23). This implied that identifying "the cognitive universals that underpin reading acquisition across writing systems" (p.3-4) was not enough to answer questions related to making meaning.

In Malta – literacy definable and measurable

Maltese political and economic policy documents¹⁷ deemed literacy a unitary state of being, to be aspired to and acquired from outside the individual, a set of cognitive skills to be developed, clearly defined and measurable, as described by Nation and Snowling (2000).

Political and economic implications of this view

Within the Maltese context, the word 'literacy' served as currency in the economic and political fields, as successive governments accused each other of neglecting 'literacy' or lauded themselves for attending to it, putting the onus on literacy to produce, 'a well-educated and trainable work force' in order to help Malta compete in a global economy.¹⁸ Malta's membership in the European Union ten years ago added the global dimension to the government perception of literacy, equating lack of literacy skills with joblessness.¹⁹ The Union measured literacy levels within its member states through its programme *Education and Training 2020*, and used the results as a yardstick for economic growth. Although on the surface this goal seemed a noble one, whose aims were social inclusion for all within the member states, yet various researchers showed that such discourse of deficit served to disempower and limit citizens

¹⁷ (Education and Training 2020, 2012; Educational system Overview - Secondary Education, Higher Education, 2011)

¹⁸ (Malta - Educational System—overview, 2011)

¹⁹ (Education and Training 2020, 2012)

in their literacy practices.²⁰ Castleton (2000) found that unfounded conclusions and a discourse of deficit associating literacy and homelessness drove policies on literacy, resulting in disempowerment of the individual and marginalisation. The underlying assumption that literacy was a neutral tool for the dissemination of information or an innocuous practice for communication became, as Crowther et al. (2006) indicated, “deeply and inescapably bound up with producing, reproducing and maintaining unequal arrangements of power” (p.1).

Literacy as ‘ideological’²¹

Ideology def.: (Oxford dictionary)

- 1 (plural ideologies) a system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy: *the ideology of republicanism*
- the set of beliefs characteristic of a social group or individual: *a critique of bourgeois ideology*

Heath (1983) demonstrated how literacy practices differed from one community to another, and that value and recognition given to these practices generated power and inequalities. Although she did not use the word ‘ideological’, she found that, in the United States, children in 'Roadville', a white working-class industrial community, and 'Trackton', an African-American working-class community,²² showed strong differences in literacy practices. These differed yet again from those of the townspeople, ‘Maintown’, members of the new urban middle-class. Heath made explicit the underlying power structures of school literacy, especially the way children in the middle-class community participated in culturally-dominant practices at an early age, finding that practices dominant in the working class communities, practices which were equally valid but different, were devalued once the children started school. She suggested that researchers describe literacy events within the sociocultural context in which they took place to enable the understanding of the ideological implications of how practices developed (p.74), demonstrating how reading was in fact part of the social learning which took place differently

²⁰ ‘Literacy practices’ was used in this work to mean the values, beliefs, judgments and other abstract organising principles a society used to actualize literacy.

²¹ Street (1993)

²² previously a farming community

in diverse communities, and gave access to different levels of power. In fact,²³ studies, cited in Street, 1984, found instances where literacy practice became a tool to make persons more manageable or pious. Street (1984) described how literacy was conceptualised differently by different people. He talked about two perspectives of literacy, firstly as 'autonomous', a skills-based perspective prevalent at that time, and an alternate view, ideological, situating reading and writing within a context of beliefs and values of the community in which they were taking place. He illustrated the power structures behind the participatory nature of literacy, the learning that took place in context in a community, showing how reading and writing were an 'ideological' activity with implications ranging widely beyond the individual, evidencing this social practice theory through his work in Iran. He described various literacy events the villagers participated in, highlighting variations according to the literacy practices of the community, sometimes religious, what he called Maktab literacy practice, other times commercial. He thus made explicit the ideology of the literacy practices in the village. Street, 2011, presented the theory and practice of literacy as a nexus of power and a source of inequalities, "The autonomous model of literacy is in fact an ideological model, precisely using the power to disguise its own ideology, its own ethnocentrism" (p.581).

Literacy and power

Definitions of what it means to be literate were always shifting, and impossible to pin down, being, as stated by Crowther et al. (2006), "socially constructed and cannot be seen outside of the interests and powerful forces that seek to fix it in particular ways" (p.1). Roberts (1995) demonstrated how defining and measuring literacy was an exclusionary exercise, serving to deny access to jobs and higher education, a situation participants in this study perceived themselves as experiencing. Instead, he proposed a 'pluralist' perspective which, "reflects the fact that conceptions of 'literacy' change over time and differ in disparate contexts" (p.424), giving power to those whose conceptions dominated at the time.

²³ Clammer, J. R. (1976). *Literacy and Social Change: A Case Study of Fiji* (Vol. 11). Brill Archive.

Graff, G. (1979). *Literature against itself: Literary ideas in modern society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mackinnon and Manathunga (2003) addressed similar issues of power in their research at Queensland University, involving international staff and students. They explored the difference between a curriculum and assessment based on 'dominant culture literacy' and teaching and assessment that were based on 'responsive cultural literacies'. They concluded that far from university education and assessment having a unifying effect on literacy capabilities of students, unless culturally responsive assessment took place, even at this level, assessment was a 'site of institutional power'. They maintained the implication that academic institutions protected the power they wielded by controlling what counted as literacy, the way literacy was taught in schools, and the way it was assessed in order to decide whether a person was literate, and they stated, "It also institutionalizes discrimination against students from non-dominant backgrounds and privileges students from dominant groups" (p.132).

Although schools presented participation in literacy activities as neutral pedagogy, literacy was inescapably bound to culture and identity. Brandt (2001) described reading and writing as a resource both for society and the individual, one that permeated everyday lives, a taken-for-granted 'staple' "like wearing shoes". She illustrated how this changed because of changing economies and ways of living, both enriching and a vehicle for exploitation, affected by transformative economic, family and social conditions which in turn enabled or impeded development of literacy practices (Brandt, 1998; 2001; 2002).

Perceptions, attitudes and emotions

Literacy is many things for many people, depending on perceptions, and the attitudes and emotions these invoke. Pahl and Allan (2011) illustrated this by stating:

One final insight we made while writing this article was that the Treasure Island collage was an image of what the library meant to the children. It was warm, safe, cosy and contained a survival kit for life in the form of computers, friendships and hot chocolate – and a book (which was added to the collage last). It was there for the children's present, but it was also part of their future resources for literacy and life. We would also argue that our research led to an understanding of literacy as connective ... and linked to emotional and sensory experiences (p.212).

Attitudes, often resulting from perceptions of emotional experiences, have a strong effect on participation in reading and writing. Barton (2007) gave importance to the attitudes people had, not just for themselves, but also for those around them saying, “We have awareness, attitudes and values with respect to literacy and these values and attitudes guide us” (p.45), a statement made repeatedly in his book. Barton and Hamilton (1998) detailed participation in day-to-day practices of participants in Lancaster, north-west England, and found that participation in these practices depended on values, attitudes and beliefs of individuals and the resultant community, stating:

...practices are shaped by social rules ... they straddle the distinction between individual and the social world, dealing with social values and attitudes ...people’s awareness of literacy, construction of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense of literacy (p.6-7).

Attitudes both shaped, and were in turn shaped, by perceptions and emotions. Cooper (2011) considered emotions as necessary for both action and construction of meaning. She described emotions and the resultant attitudes as emerging from meanings of experiences, signals and triggers of intent to act, as well as affecting the way we acted (p.429).²⁴

For the participants in this study, introduced in Chapter 1, literacy experiences seemed to be recollected and related through the lens of emotional engagement. They repeatedly related their experiences by referring to the emotions, and physical manifestations of those emotions, which they felt at the time of the experience, and seemed to mediate the retelling through recalled emotion,²⁵ speaking in turn of fear, elation, worry, and satisfaction as reasons for participation or non-participation in literacy.

Communication

Wells (1981; 2009) defined language and literacy as two communicative tools mastered through interaction and participation in a community, using mode or modes agreed by all. Some communities ensure this ‘agreement’ by encouraging children’s participation in activities with adults, while others abstracted the learning into ‘teacher – child’ zones (Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff, et

²⁴ Further literature on the embodiment of emotion and perception is reviewed in the next chapter.

²⁵ This is discussed in more detailed in Chapter 3 through the work of Rimé et al. (1991) especially.

al., 2010). Language learning started from birth, supported both unconsciously and intentionally by others, through simplification, repetition, correction, and interaction (Wells, 1981; 2009; Halliday, 1975; 2009). The child grew in language not by being instructed in it in isolation but by discovering its uses and getting results (Halliday, 1975; 1990; 2009). Rogoff (2000) described how the community at large mediated and nurtured the language development of infants, which developed according to community practice such as with 'motherese' (Ferdnald, 1985; Fernald and Marchman, 2012). Hearing children born to couples who lived in deaf, signing communities often developed Sign as their first language (Griffith, 1985; Kanto et al., 2013), and once they started school became bilingual in Sign and speech. Unique phonological characteristics of languages, such as the 'the' sound in English and the hard 'q' sound in Maltese, as well as idiomatic expressions, were implicitly acquired when language was participated in within the community. Reading and writing, this study argued, was using language in a different mode, but it was still, like language, participation in a community of practice.

Within present day Malta, while literacy demands have grown, participations in reading and writing, at least for some of the participants in this study, were not supported within the general community as much as previous generations, when children did chores along with adults. As pointed out by Rogoff et al. (2010) children and adults in our society were often segregated for life roles. As a result, issues of meaning in reading texts may become problematic, as a reader needed a worldview that supported the meaning of the text being read, a concept Smaragorsky (2001) termed a transactional zone between the reader and the text, to construct meaning in the text as well as generate new meaning. This worldview was not an issue when reading was a participation in the reader's community of practice, as cultural and social meanings were built in and available to the reader through the language and concepts being used. As Smagorinsky (2001) stated:

The reader's construction of new texts is the source of meaning in reading. These constructions, while idiosyncratic, are culturally mediated, locating meaning not only in the reader and text but in the cultural history that has preceded and conditioned both, in the social practices that provide the immediate environment of reading, in the power relationships inherent to social participation, and in their relational experiences that make the readers' life narrative (p.134).

The language and concepts particular to a community may start developing even before birth, as reviewed by James (2010), as the unborn child accommodates the life patterns of the mother, and she to him or her. The cadences of voices, the music played, television programmes and even church services and particular texts might all be familiar by the time the child is born. A number of studies in Marsh and Millard (2013) described the engagement of very young, and not so young, children with literacy before or outside school, including use of technology at very young ages. Levy (2008; 2009b) found that the dominant literacy of school devalued all that had been learnt in the community and perceived the child as not literate, and so did the child perceive himself or herself.

Communities of practice

Wenger (1998; 2006) explored learning through participation within 'communities of practice'.²⁶ Pahl and Rowsell (2005), with reference to Wenger (1998) defined communities of practice as, "Groups of people with common beliefs, values, ways of speaking and being" (p.153). The development of these "beliefs, values, ways of speaking and being" paved the way to participation, first as a 'novice; and later as an 'expert' within a community. Gee (2000) researched the spontaneous participation in reading and writing of a group of youths labelled as 'resistant'. Their engagement with literacy through video gaming supported the argument that abstracting learning from its participative context led to the unfounded and unjust assumption that the onus for participation, rather than the mode of participation, lay with the learner. Gee described how individuals disenchanted with school, labelled 'struggling' readers, engaged in sophisticated and elaborate literacy practices in their online gaming communities, thus being 'empowered' readers.²⁷ Individuals needed to be supported to participate, especially if they lived in a community of practice that gave importance to information, and transmitted much of it through the printed word. The relationship between literacy and power was, and is, stronger than ever, and as pointed out by Crowther and

²⁶ As defined by three characteristics: domain, a shared interest or identity, a community where interactions took place, and a common practice, what the members performed as they learned from each other.

²⁷ A literacy event in one community, such as participation in an online game by following written instructions and writing appropriate text, will be successful when considered within the literacy practices of a leisure or gaming community (Gee, 2000b).

Tett (2006), "Literacy, access to information and effective communication skills must be considered as part of the way inequalities of power are systematically reproduced" (p.108), and so, in a true community of practice all members are supported to participate. As Wenger (2009) and Rogoff et al. (2007) showed, within each community lay the responsibility of initiating new members into social practice. Literacy should not be an exception.

Presuming that there was only one route to learning through participation in a specific area of activity was a pitfall to be wary of. Cline and Necochea (2003) showed how, contrary to commonly expounded views on what constitutes a participatory literary environment, they became early and avid readers by participating in alternative oral literacy practices within their community. Rogoff, et al. (2010), discussing learning through children's integration and segregation in communities, quoted various studies²⁸ to support their claims that children learn best through participation in everyday routines. Wenger (2009) invited his readers to view this participation in literacy practices from a different angle, and proposed:

So, what if we adopted a different perspective, one that placed learning in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world? What if we assumed that learning is as much a part of our human nature as eating or sleeping, that it is both life sustaining and inevitable, and that – given a chance – we are quite good at it? And what if, in addition, we assumed that learning is, in its essence, a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing? What kind of understanding would such a perspective yield on how learning takes place and on what is required to support it? (p.209 -210).

Restricted practices

Self-appointed gate-keepers of literacy practices, using what Levy (2009a) called "a narrow and constraining discourse" (p.90), often reduced literacy to academic reading and writing, and did not recognise the practices of communities beyond that of school,²⁹ creating a feeling of failure in the individual. Gee (2000a; 2000b; 2008a; 2006b) concluded that reading and

²⁸ Bolin, 2006; Demuth, 1986; Gaskins, 2000; 2006; Lancy & Grove, 2010; Martini, 1994; Maynard, 2002; Maynard & Tovote, 2010; Philips, 1983; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1986; Weisner, 1987; Wenger, 1989; Whiting & Edwards, 1988; Zarger, 2010; Zukow, 1989.

²⁹ An ability in domestic or gaming literacy will not be given credibility within an academic setting, where the literacy practices, referred to by Kress and Street (2006) as "hidden, underlying conceptions of what those events mean, held by both participants and by observers and researchers" shape what is considered good practice" (p.ix).

writing practices engaged in by young people were devalued by dominant literacy, starting what Buswell et al. (2004) and Ferri et al. (2005) identified as a vicious circle of loss of identity and helplessness. Another consequence, as found by Duquette and Fullarton (2009), was withdrawal from participation in reading and writing through fear of failure and ridicule, as emphasised by the participants in this study, who thought that very often only one way of knowing and learning was valued. What they accomplished in other communities of practice, such as interior design, photography or computer gaming might actually be ignored. As Wenger (2009) put it:

Our institutions, to the extent they address issues of learning explicitly, are largely based on the assumption that learning is an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end, that it is best separated from the rest of our activities, and that it is the result of teaching. Hence, we arrange classrooms where students – free from the distraction of their participation in the outside world – can pay attention to a teacher or focus on exercises. (p.209).

Assessment practices

Wenger (2009), challenged our taken-for-granted perception that school was the right choice for a child to learn by stating, “To assess learning, we use tests with which students struggle in one-to-one combat, where knowledge must be demonstrated out of context, and where collaborating is considered cheating” (p.209). Tett (2007) and Street (2011), among others, argued that a ‘taken-for-granted perception’ that literacy was a set of skills to be taught and assessed by experts was untrue. Often, parents were discouraged from ‘teaching’ children to read before starting school as they “might get it wrong”, thus making schools gate-keepers to participation in literacy practices. MacKinnon and Manathunga (2003), above, demonstrated issues of power and social justice in schools through their work on assessment practices, which value dominant literacies while devaluing other literacy practices, a subject also researched in depth by Heath (1983).

Hall (2007) found that some individuals resisted placing themselves in a vulnerable position, and resorted to resistance, or ‘silence’ to avoid being seen as failures by their peers, and consequently by themselves. She discussed strategies used by three teenagers to protect their identity as readers, since, having identified themselves as inferior, they were unwilling to participate in what the dominant culture portrayed as a set of universal basic skills.

Standardization of what was expected in literacy, widespread testing and imposed learning outcomes, according to Crowther et al. (2006), “define what counts as ‘real literacy’ and silence everything else” (p.2), creating what Kell (2006) called ‘a kind of virtual image’ of literacy (p.100), which was “accredited with the power to effect change in people’s lives” (p.101). The disconnection between the ‘virtual’ image’ of literacy and reading and writing in everyday lives often led to programme planning on a deficit model of assessment, consequently placing lack of participation in literacy practices as a deficit inherent in an individual, rather than in the broader social system, leading to internalization of discourses of deficit by the learners and disempowerment of individuals,³⁰ especially when students were removed from spaces of literacy practice, such as classrooms, and given individual tuition, out of context with their situated lives, as found by Reid and Valle (2004) and Rogers (2004a; 2004b), and described by participants in this study. Pollak (2001) showed how this exclusion denied individuals the opportunity to participate in the social practice of reading and writing with their peers and gain expertise through practice.

Inclusion and exclusion

Inclusion within a community through participation and learning was dynamic, ‘ever changing’ and dependent on past and present social structures and conditions, including discourses and behaviours. People participated in multiple literacies with varying degrees of expertise and developed this expertise through participation by transforming the way they interacted with literacy within their communities. Not participating led to exclusion in communities such as school or the labour force. This was often referred to as ‘resistance’, shifting the responsibility from the system to the individual. Williams (2006) demonstrated how ‘resistant’ students made teachers feel confused and threatened by the notion that the student was rejecting literacy. However, Williams claimed that the rejection was not so much of literacy, but of participation, and the perception of the exclusion this might enact:

What we may not see is that, by not risking engagement, the student also does not risk being found out as an outsider. It is an anxiety born not just of being judged on individual work but of feeling cultural exclusion (p.152).

³⁰ As discussed by MacKinnon and Manathunga (2003); Kell (2006) and Tett (2007)

Williams continued, "... these same students may believe that their classmates have found a way to fit in that they cannot yet figure out" (p.152). Jenny, Martha and Alan related resisting participation because they felt they did not fit in, whereas Wayne, Damien, and Karla found alternative ways of participation. Some children experiencing difficulty, rather than resist, learn to subvert the system, obtaining power through the system itself by taking on the identity of the 'smart student' at home, and connecting it to school. Third-space theories³¹ provide common ground between what Kell (2006) called 'hyper-pedagogised', 'sterile' literacy,³² and literacy as it was actually used in homes and communities, as shown by a number of works,³³ promoting cultural diversity and crossing the boundaries between the different domains of literacy, supporting participation. International literacy campaigns are often based, as in Malta's case vis-à-vis the European Union, on misplaced evangelical zeal to 'reach the illiterate'. Kell (2006) called for a shift instead towards "a view of literacies as connected into flows of information, people and knowledge within broader social relations and processes" (p.105).

Third-space for literacy practice

This flow of literacy as described by Kell (2006) would be across the domains where people participated in reading and writing. In Pahl and Kelly (2005), the researchers demonstrated how parents' and children's literacies connected across domains of home and school, documenting how the nature of shared reading and writing shifted across boundaries, arguing against a separation of home-school literacies as sometimes found in the literature. In this study the participants spoke of practices in spaces where they felt empowered, such as domestic literacy, paying bills and cooking, and literacy using digital media, which, as discussed by Levy (2008) was devalued within school environments. Gutiérrez (2008) and Baker and Gutiérrez (2008) discussed a concept of a supportive, collective third space, such as a public library, that served to enhance engagement and interaction with literacy without fragmenting participation according to domain, but, rather, brought about empowerment across the different literacies.

³¹ (Baker and Gutiérrez, 2008; Levy, 2008; Pahl and Kelly, 2005; Bhabha, 1994)

³² As an autonomous generic accomplishment with 'exchange-value outcomes', often found in schools.

³³ (Gutiérrez et al., 1999; Moje et al., 2004; Davies and Pahl, 2007),

Multimodality

In Pahl and Rowsell (2006) a number of authors explicated much common ground between New Literacy Studies and multimodality. Bezemer and Kress, (2008), Siegel (2006) and various contributors argued for the ideological nature of multimodality and the power of multi-modal texts that connected local and global literacy, negotiating knowledge and agency in multilingual settings, with individuals showing preferences in semiotic resources. Persons transformed multimodal resources to author identities to negotiate agency, very much as the participants in this study endeavoured to do through modal choices³⁴ to participate in their communities. The lack of multiple modes of representation and choice³⁵ in schools and the community at large hindered participation in everyday literacy for the participants, especially in public texts such as parking notices and government communications.³⁶ As Connelly et al. (2013) argued, a major part of the problem was the 'dominance of formal types of representation', during interaction between 'governance' and the people.

The participants in this study considered this as socially unjust, reflecting that they had no difficulty accessing multimodal texts such as road signs, posters and brochures, where the form gave indications of the meaning. They related experiencing difficulty with traditional texts which presented information in written words, suggesting that they should be able to use modes of their choice to communicate with officialdom, and not be tied down to written communication, which, they argued, disempowered them, and led, as Connelly et al. (2013) pointed out, to accusations of apathy and disengagement. In reality, they reflected, they were 'resisting' being put in the ignominious position of admitting that they found it difficult to interact with current representation practices, such as a notice with just words, in a parking place, or an official communication in writing, rather than modes which allowed them to make meaning.

³⁴ Modal choice is used to refer to any mode, or means, by which the participants choose to make and transmit meaning during literacy events, such as photographs during interviews and discussions. The modal choices made by participants for artifacts are unique to each participant and experience.

³⁵ Modal choice is ideological in that it depends on the identity and culture of an individual, and exposure to the affordances of the diverse modalities.

³⁶ Pointed out by the participants and discussed in more detail in Chapters 6,7 and 8.

Funds of knowledge

Moll et al. (1992) termed as 'funds of knowledge' those hidden resources of knowing that were gained through experiences in family and community. Gonzalez et al. (2013) argued for acknowledgement of this knowledge, constructed through everyday experiences of language and activities (p.25). Very often these 'funds of knowledge' were not given credit. Moll (2013) argued that this made education an issue of power (p.276), and as Wayne sustained in this study a source of social injustice. The participants in this study showed a wide range of such 'funds' as discussed at various points in the study.

Mediating experiences

Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) and Gutiérrez (1999; 2008; 2012) illustrated how literacy practised within a community was mediated social practice, as it connected to the different modes of representation available in that particular community, not restricted to reading and writing, but open to how different languages and different modes supported each other and meshed together, showing how literacy not only connected the different facets of day-to-day life within different communities, but was itself knowing and living. This was found repeatedly in studies by Pahl³⁷ on her own and with other researchers. In her work literacy was shown as embedded in, and defining, different spaces, relationships and communities, including classrooms, families, libraries, neighbourhoods and even apparently unlikely places, through different artifacts³⁸ and ecologies, as father and child interacted over an activity, families discussed heirlooms and young persons interviewed individuals and evaluated data. Following research in a community library, Pahl and Allan (2011) stated:

Our research led us to the realization that literacy was not only to be found in place and space, it was to be found in the lines and threads leading from a computer, to a book, to a magazine and then to a scrapbook (p. 212).

Rowell and Sheridan (2010) explored the use of sensorial information by designers of digital media to mediate texts, allowing viewers to construct

³⁷ (Pahl, 2002; 2005; Pahl and Kelly, 2005; Pahl and Rowell, 2010; Pahl and Allan, 2011)

³⁸ An object, either found or produced, historical or contemporary, resulting from, supporting or documenting literacy practices within the social world.

meaning specific to the experience, open to change when it is a mediator in another, moving back and forth between the social and the individual within society. Prinsloo and Rowsell (2012) explored the diverse ways technology mediated making meaning according to where and how, as well as by whom it was used, and discussed issues of social justice while stating that, "... it might be more productive for researchers to think of technologies as multiply situated and multiply placed" (p.276). Rogoff, 2003, viewed interaction between culture and individuals as a transformation of participation, saying, "from my perspective people develop as they participate in and contribute to cultural activities ..." (p.52), and "... individuals determine their approaches to particular situations with reference to cultural practices in which they have previously participated" (p.258). Cultures facilitated participation with objects and tools, which gained their meaning through the experience in which they were being used. Holland and Lachiotte (2007) called this a way of extending ability to participate by "assigning meaning to an object or a behaviour" (p.104) making social and cultural choices and, therefore, ideological in nature. One of the participants in this study, as discussed further on, assigned her computer the role of mentor by personalising it.

The cultural and social choices, which enact and embody an object with meaning, may be both conscious and non-conscious. Cooper (2011) illustrated the way participation within a system transformed a system and informed later participation. She argued that the world changed because of the way individuals acted, this change taking place even through actions and choices made 'non-consciously', choices dependent on the ever-changing system in which the individual lived, and on past experiences within the system (Cooper, 2011). Mediators for participation, including language and technology, could transform participation within the community, using cultural means, causing change within the system out of which they originated (Cooper, 2011).

Computers and the internet as mediating artifacts interfaced many individuals' participation in communities of practice, actual and virtual. Davies (2012; 2013) documented participation mediated by technology using social networks. Hasse (2013) emphasised mediated relationships, as well as emotional and social behaviour. She found transformed participation, and change in the original meaning of an artifact, as it was "...through our

embodied being-in-the-world that the effects of technologies attain a situated meaning, which might differ from the meaning attributed to the artifact in the cultural context in which it was created” (p.79).

Conclusion

Crowther et al. (2006) suggested that:

Rather than seeing literacy as a tool for organizing our knowledge that is consistent with the economic view of the global economy, we need other ways of conceptualizing literacy that can embody more democratic visions (p.3)

The study explored literacy not as an entity interacted with or constructed, but as lived experience, embodied, consciously or unconsciously and emotionally, participated in, with and without mediation, transformed participation as every social practice. New Literacy Studies framed language, whether spoken or written, as dialogic, as Street (2006) said, “a continual negotiated process of meaning-making as well as meaning taking” (p.19). Various works reviewed above located making meaning as a socially situated practice, affected by values, emotions and attitudes, subject to transformation through participation. Likewise, literacy needs to be participative, “interactive and dynamic” (ibid). The ability to read and write should not be viewed as a goal ‘out there’ to be reached, but as a game to be played in the ‘here-and-now’. Otherwise, as studies from the field of learning disability and critical literacy illustrate,³⁹ viewing literacy as a goal to be scored over the ‘goal posts’ of the gate-keepers of dominant literacy leads to individuals who, through fear of failure or ridicule, will not play the game. It is theorized that such behaviour leads to a perception of ‘fault’ within the individual, rather than the conditions that created it in the first place, leading to exclusion and social injustice.

In this chapter, I reviewed literature from different fields, arguing a view of literacy as participation relevant to the lives of the participants in this study. In the next chapter, I will review literature on perception and its relationship with participation.

³⁹ Crowther et al. (2001); Duquette and Fullarton (2009); Ferri et al. (2005); Gee (2008); Pollak (2001); Rogers, (2004a; 2004b); ;Terras et al. (2009) among others.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed literature on reading and writing participation. In this Chapter, I discuss the relevance of perception to my study, with reference to literature.

Chapter 3 Perception and participation

Day 1

He walked slowly, hesitantly. He came out of the darkened doorway, odd among the homogenous throng of hurrying and scurrying humanity. Impatient passers-by scurried past him, casting furtive glances backwards.

Embarrassment and apology flooded his face.

Day 2

He stepped out of the darkened doorway with his mobile in his hand. He moved to the side of the doorway, tapping on the touchscreen. The hurrying, passers-by did not give him a second glance.

He held the phone to his ear in phantom conversation, moving slowly on his way.

He smiled in satisfaction.

Introduction

Perceptions⁴⁰ are not fixed, but fluid states subject to change as individuals 'dialogue' with others and the environment, taking the Husserlian notion of movement in embodied experience to refer not only to the kinesthetic movement of the physical body but also to thought itself. Bakhtin (1998) argued, "After all, our thought itself – philosophical, scientific, and artistic – is born in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought" (p.92). Perceptions, Haskall et al. (2002) noted, are part of 'the shifting movement of experience'. Experiences of reading and writing too show embodied movement, as Pink (2012) found, "Other practices – such as those of debating or writing - are equally embodied and involve movements even though they might be seen as linguistic practices" (p.41-42).

⁴⁰ What we think about something, someone or even ourselves

The participants moved in and out of the space of the research, travelling back and forth in time carrying with them their experiences. Likewise, their perceptions, which made meaning of these experiences, also shifted, creating movement in the embodied texts of the personal narratives. The 'safe, communicative space'⁴¹ of the research was not a unitary or physical space, though physically it consisted of many locations (Appendix III) but was constructed by the interactions enacted in it. A hair salon was a space where people went to get their hair done. While I interviewed and reflected with Alan, it was a research-based space, and when he described how he furnished it, it was a space in which he affirmed his identity as an interior designer. Burnett et al. (2012) examined such spaces, real and virtual, through the lens of materiality and immateriality, concluding that this, "... prompts us to focus particularly on the subjective experience of the interconnectedness of space, mediation, stuff and embodiment (p.101). She explained how using materiality as a lens:

...draws attention to the multiplicity of ways in which the material and immaterial are caught up with one another as well as the interwoven stories, discourses, values and memories that pattern individuals' understanding and production of texts (p.101).

Phenomenology

In Husserl's phenomenology of embodiment and his epistemology, as described in Denzin (2007), the body was a hub of lived experience, capable of sensing the world and moving in it, acquiring knowledge about the world as it interacted with other bodies in day-to-day lives. His findings about knowledge acquisition were taken up by others, including Merleau-Ponty, who gave these findings the structure and consistency for an ontology of embodied experience. Merleau-Ponty, (1945; 1962), stressed the physical aspect of perception, the body's interaction with environment, thought, self and external world. He concluded that in knowing the world we became part of it, shaping it even as it shaped us and our actions, and thus the conventional subject-object distinction was illusory. He proposed a philosophy that saw knowledge as constituting itself, not as something 'out there' for the individual to interact with but as coming out of and being that interaction. From his work emerged many others, developing further the notion of embodied knowledge.

⁴¹ Bellman (2011) p. 74

Gendlin,(1981) who differed from Merleau-Ponty in what constituted knowledge primarily, whether it was perception or bodily sensation,⁴² elaborated on this, showing how an intricate "bodily sensed knowledge" emerged from our bodily interaction with the world, which was us (p.25-26). This kind of knowing was discussed by Ingold (2008), who stated that this 'knowing' was internal to our 'entanglements'⁴³ in the life forces of our world, which was us, and not external to us, including earth and sky and weather and skills which we brought to bear on experience.

Embodiment

Merleau-Ponty's writings put perception as the primary embodiment of knowledge not by impinging on consciousness from the outside but internal to the very experiencing itself, without which the experience could not be had. This led to further research on interactive, self-regulating and self-generating living systems, autopsies,⁴⁴ (Maturana and Varela, 1980). Such research embraced the concept that experience was not something that was had of "something out there", but internal to the social system of the individual within his world, and that knowledge is generated by consciousness within the world (Maturana and Varela, 1980; 1992). This is relevant to this study because experiences reflected on by the participants made perceptions, emotions, meaning and knowing inseparable from action, all parts of the experience, yet being the experience itself, and a change in one part meant a change in all. This inextricable link between "feeling, thinking and learning" was explored in depth by Billington (2013), who concluded, " ... that our feeling, thinking, and learning are inextricably linked in complex ways" (p.81).

Development of a philosophy of neurophenomenology⁴⁵

The notion of experience as both of the world and in the world together with Merleau-Ponty's work on perception and embodied experience led to Varela's development of neurophenomenology, which involved what Maturana and

⁴² The underlying, unacknowledged feeling of knowing

⁴³ Living systems are defined by Ingold in various works as groups of interwoven lines of growth and movement making up a fluid world,' a zone of entanglement'.

⁴⁴ The term describes systems including legal, political, academic, and corporate, that construct their components which in turn construct their unity as systems.

⁴⁵ The label was coined by Charles Laughlin and fellow-researchers in the 1990s and further defined by Francesco Varela and provides "a bridge between first, second-,and third-person perspectives in the study of experience" ((Krippner, 2013).

Varela (1992) termed, “an ongoing bringing forth of a world through the process of living itself” (p.11). Varela (1991;1996) and, later on, Ingold (2000) and Gallagher (2005) discussed perception as embodiment of cognition, the Buddhist idea of mindfulness, the inter-relatedness of knowing and being known, embedded in the holistic being of the person, environment and culture. As stated by Varela et al. (1991), “organism and environment enfold into each other and unfold from one another in the fundamental circularity that is life itself” (p.217). A philosophy of neurophenomenology gave importance to the study of consciousness, emotion and experience. Varela et al. (1991) and Thompson and Varela (2001) stated that experiences took place within the whole body as a result of sensory and somatic systems, a notion expounded by Ingold (2000) who claimed that variations in skill and action were a result of ongoing practices within specific environments and ecologies, as he discussed in fifteen essays placed at different stages of living and ‘dwelling’. This ‘knowing’ shaped the way an individual within a social system perceived, in doing so changing perceptions of the system itself. Burnett et al. (2012) explored this with virtual systems, considering, “... how we make meaning in the light of what’s gone before or in this case in the light of trajectories through and across online environments (p.98).

Emotion

Bolger and Mesquita (2012) argued a constructivist view of emotion, defining it as a social process, dynamic, interactive and ongoing. Dirkx (2001; 2006; 2008), discussing how emotion hindered or motivated adult learning, added ‘imaginative’ to the process, suggesting that the images that our consciousness constructed had a direct effect on the emotion in an experience. Rimé et al. (1991) argued for a view of emotion as a lens to understand and make meaning of experiences. Within research, Denzin (2007) described the phenomenon of emotion as “ a reflection both of its location in the world and of the meanings brought to it by the investigator” (p.8). Kitayama and Markus (1994) brought together a number of studies positing emotional experiences as shaped, and shaping, the social and cultural community. This was also found by Pennebaker and Seagal (1999), who suggested making sense of emotional experiences, “by creating a story to explain and understand past and current life concerns” (p.1249). Experiences charged with emotion were shared more often than others, and brought to consciousness over and over, according to

both works. Emotion, embodiment and learning were inseparable in a neurophenomenological approach, which, as Robbins (2013) stated, sought, “to preserve the meaning of the experience of emotion as it appears within the life world context of the person” (p.1).

Studies, especially in the field of adult education,⁴⁶ on the embodiment of consciousness and pre-verbal intuitive learning explored holistic learning through the body. Hasse (2013), using an ‘emotional robot’, a socially assistive device, within a nursing home, found its presence changed practices and interactions of staff and residents, and stated, “In this process, new embodied perceptions of objects, signs and tools changed collective processes of activity” (p.94). Rimé (2007) explored changes brought about through emotion in experiences, concluding that recollection of events where emotions were engaged was enhanced, subject to perception, and, like perception, could change, since emotional experiences were often ruminated on and shared. Rimé et al. (1992) explained how the intensity of emotional experience was a deciding factor in shaping a lasting memory, influencing experiences in the present day, suggesting that these experiences may be talked about more often (p.1120).

In this study the participants re-engaged with emotions enhanced or altered by new perceptions as a result of day to day living since the experience took place. Rimé (2007) found that social sharing of emotions with a group affected the emotional state of the group through affecting the individual. Spowart and Nairn (2013) discussed emotional states shared through diaries. This sharing was experienced in this study as participants reflected on experiences through narratives, sharing emotions and forging, as stated by Katz (2012), new experiences. During participants’ reflections, references to body sensations abounded. As Gallagher (2006), building on Merleau-Ponty’s idea of spatiality, noted, “Conceptual and emotional aspects of body image no doubt inform perception” (p.26), illustrating how development of body image affected self-knowledge. He discussed how the body, when tired of reading, affected perception, arguing that when a person who was engrossed in reading, unaware of fatigue, eyes ‘anonymously’ going about their work, tired, he became aware of his body sensations and these got the way of reading

⁴⁶ The work of Dirx (2001; 2006; 2008) and Lawrence (2012)

comprehension, and the perception of the reading changed. Consciousness of the experience became reflexive, as when participants, reflecting on their narratives, described how bodily sensations they experienced while reading or writing, re-experienced in the space of retrospection, affected their perception of reading and their participation.

The senses' role in perception – multisensorial and multi-modal

Arnheim (1969) argued for validity of sensorial knowing, stating, “Unless the stuff of the senses remains present the mind has nothing to think with” (p.1). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) cited this work as crucial to their theories of multimodality while Kress (2005a) referred to it as a source for, “insights into the psychological, affective and social characteristics of works of art” (p.170). Pink (2011) developed an ethnography of the senses, stating, “.... social semioticians interested in multimodality and social anthropologists have come to acknowledge that an understanding of (multi) sensoriality is essential to understanding aspects of society and culture (p.262) in order to, “...have an emphasis on mobility, affect, empathy, and knowing...through which the ethnographer might engage with other people and their experienced realities in these ways” (p 274). Ingold, (2000; 2008) brought together the various ways of knowing the world not only for researchers, but also for participants, demonstrating that knowing cannot be fragmented into various senses.

Systems of meaning

Hodge and Kress (1988) showed systems of meaning as shifting ideological constructs of, “concrete individuals, acting on each other and the material world” (p.2), put across by dominant groups to serve their own interests, and resisted by other groups with a different version of reality, “structuring the versions of reality on which social action is based” (p.3). Ingold (2005) discussed how systems of meaning influenced perception, which becomes, “a by-product of our own categories of thought” (p.97). Ingold explained how our systems of meaning operated, and explained, “these sensory modalities cooperate so closely that it is impossible to disentangle their respective contributions” (p.97). Crow (2003) demonstrated the exclusionary nature of shared systems of meaning, stating that examining what a system discarded as ‘dirt’ gave a clear picture of what it perceived, and influenced its members to perceive, as of value, contending that, “Our ideas about what constitutes dirt

are part of a symbolic system of signs which has clear categories, used to organise the signs into a hierarchy of importance or use” (p.147). A semiotic structure, enacted in discourse, that classified a ‘good’ student as one who wore a short hairstyle and neat clothes, and rejected a student with long hair and a tattoo as being bound to be poor academically, systematically influenced perception. Rogoff (2003) detailed this concept with reference to language, how children discarded what they perceived as meaningless in language sounds to focus on what they perceived as of value. With reference to identity she stated, “The chosen ... identity is determined by the individual’s perception of its meaning to different audiences, its salience in different social contexts and its utility in different settings” (p.82).

Selection of the ‘meaningful’

Street (1984) demonstrated that valuing one literacy while devaluing and subordinating others led to individuals being perceived, and perceiving themselves, as inferior, also found by Rogers, 2002, in a study of two women in adult learning contexts, living in urban poverty and coming from a non-mainstream environment, and Gee, (1996) with his widely-encompassing work on cultural issues. Pahl and Allen (2011) illustrated how perceptions of literacy by researchers and participants affected the outcome of the study. In the abstract the authors noted, “...the data revealed that the children’s perceptions of literacy included some practices that were less visible to adults” (p.190). The literacies revealed to the researchers were not apparent to persons with a different perception of literacy, as these labelled the children’s actions in reading and writing in unorthodox ways as disruptive, “the children are running riot” (p.196). On the other hand, others viewed the same practices as something ‘connective’ to be used, “as she could see why Facebook, MSN, the text on the hot drinks machine, the labels in the library the posters and comics were all relevant” (p.211). Barton and Hamilton (1998), and Barton (2007), found that perceptions of literacy and the resultant attitudes were crucial to an individual’s participation in reading and writing. This, with relevance to education, was illustrated by Pahl and Rowsell (2012) who showed how devaluing students’ participation in digital literacy affected their participation in school.

Conclusion

Perception and participation in an experience were interdependent, the one shaping the other. As day-to-day participations, shaped through perceptions of self, others and environment, occurred, the way the participants perceived them shaped further participations, which in turn, as discussed above, might have reshaped the perception of experiences already participated in. The 'knowing' of perception, embodied in emotions and meaning making, 'mindfulness' and being in the world were, for the participants, at the same time theirs and others' and their perceptions of the world were inextricable from the perceptions of others of their world and that of the participants. As a number of authors⁴⁷ showed, this was the formalism of complex⁴⁸ wholes, where the sensorial, emotional, social and cultural were irretrievably entangled and entwined, giving rise to completeness that was more than the sum of its parts.

As individuals decided what was relevant in their world through perception, others' and theirs, the socio-cultural, along with the physical as 'feeling-thinking-learning' were seen, as shown by Billington (2013) as, 'linked in complex ways'. While emotions, such as pride and shame were embodied in feelings which brought about 'learning' for future experiences, it was the social that gave rise to pride or shame, or embarrassment, the expectations of others and their perceptions, as in the anecdote at the start of this chapter, which is based on personal experience.

Participations were experiences-in-the-world shaped by perceptions, theirs and of others. This perceptual 'knowing' enabled, or hindered, experiences of the participants in what they and others perceived as relevant or meaningful. The participants in this study explored their perceptions as embodied and socially situated, shaping attitudes, and narratives, through emotions. Viewing the role of consciousness in perception, and definition, of participation within local and global systems had interactional implications during reflection on experiences. The participants in this study perceived, shaped, recollected, reflected on and reshaped their experiences through sociocultural systems of meaning,

⁴⁷ (Burnett et al. 2012; Law, 2004; Ingold, 2000; Arnheim, 1969).

⁴⁸ See footnote p.42.

including discourse, mediation, and the lens of emotional engagement, seeking what enabled or hindered participation in reading and writing.

Above I reviewed literature on perception, relevant to the main argument of this study. The next chapter discusses methods used in this study.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 introduced the study and reviewed relevant literature. Chapter 4 discusses how methods, deemed most suited to collect, analyse and interpret data, evolved, their limitations and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 Methodology

Excerpt from research log 2012

10/5

Today I cried. She cried first. As we got to the part in the transcript where she had told me how terrified she had been when telling her husband-to-be about not being able to read and write, she broke down and said this brought it all back and she could still feel the shame, after so many years.

Introduction

The methods discussed in this chapter evolved as the process of the study unfolded, explained by Creswell (2007a) as “within-case” (p.75). Queries, brought up by participants on issues that became important once the study started, developed into the research questions, and determined the methods needed. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) stated:

It is frequently well into the process of inquiry that one discovers what the research is really about; and not uncommonly it turns out to be about something rather different from the initial foreshadowed problems (pp.159-160).

This is not to say that there was no initial research design, but as Holloway and Todres (2003) showed, “Precise definitions of specific qualitative approaches are still not settled and boundaries are often blurred” (p.355).

New Literacy Studies framed this research on reading and writing experiences situated in everyday lives. A philosophy of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1964) helped me explore these experiences and the way the participants perceived them. When the participants reflected on their experiences, they seemed to be reliving them rather than remembering and recounting them, creating images in my mind of emotional, embodied encounters affecting experiences in the present day, described in further detail in Chapter 6. I was puzzled, and intrigued. I searched for methods that would help me understand the impact of emotions and the learning that had taken, and was still taking,

place. This led me to neurophenomenology, as described in Chapter 3, to help me make sense of the developing data.

I did not set out to generate theories from within the data, as in grounded theory⁴⁹ as explicated by Glaser and Strauss (1967), but from this approach I borrowed the practice of cumulative and interactive data-collection and analysis, so that, as Holloway and Todres (2003) stated, “it is a journey of discovery where each stage depends on the other” (p.352).

The specifically situated, embodied experiences of the participants, as recounted and discussed by them, were often coloured by emotion. These experiences took place within, as Barton et al. (2000) showed, a specific social and cultural context. They were articulated through the “naturally occurring language” of the participants, described to me, the ‘outsider’, from what a number of authors⁵⁰ recognised as an ‘insider’ view. They shared with me what Holloway and Todres (2003) called, “position in society and the various meanings they give to their location, relationships with others and their behaviour” (p.355), making them active agents constructing their social realities (Holland et al., 2001), and had an effect on the development of the methods I used. Holloway and Todres, 2003, shared this notion of agency:

...that human beings are not passive recipients of cues or influences of the social environment to which they merely respond: they must be seen instead as dynamic agents who take an active part, based on the way in which they interpret the situation (p.352).

In Malta, as elsewhere, participating in reading and writing was important not only on a local level, but also globally, especially once Malta became part of the European Union.⁵¹ Individuals’ participation was affected by, and affected in turn, perceptions of who they were, and who others were in relation to them. This resultant self-authoring of identities within day-to-day practices was not wrought in a neutral world, but within lived experiences, and through interaction with others, including the widespread exposure to popular culture, which affected their own attitudes and those of persons they interacted with, as examined by the work of Williams (2009; 2011) and Holland, et al. (2001).

⁴⁹ A methodology that allows the researcher to develop or generate a theory from analysis of data.

⁵⁰ (Markee, 2012; Ferri, et al., 2005; Rogoff, 2003; Pike et al., 1990)

⁵¹ (Education and Training 2020, 2012)

Rimé et al. (1991) found that emotional experiences were more likely to form past experiences, often, though not always, socially shared more frequently than other experiences. Rimé (1995) indicated that retelling experiences changed perception of them. The person living through experiences subjectively labelled them positive and negative, because of the emotions aroused or evoked, embodied by perceptions of the experience over space and time.⁵² Identities were not created and sedimented⁵³ instantaneously, but experiences percolated and filtered through new experiences to leave their mark, influencing further experiencing, and shaping the identity,⁵⁴ which in turn shaped future agency in interactions. Prior experiences perceived as negative sometimes, as shown by Ferri et al. (2005) and Buswell et al. (2004), caused disempowerment and helplessness. Some participants in this study said they withdrew from participation for fear of failure and ridicule, as described by Duquette and Fullarton (2009) among others.

It was not easy for the participants to reflect on what they perceived as painful experiences, and so the methods I used for developing data in this research needed to facilitate reflection by the participants on their experiences within a 'safe' communication space.⁵⁵ These experiences, as perceived by the eight participants in this study were explored through the questions presented in the introduction, expanded and organised under the headings of Descriptive, Narrative and Interpretive for working with during the study.

Questions asked through this research:

Descriptive

What experiences of participation in reading and writing do the participants describe?

In what way do past and present experiences, the emotions within them, and the way they are perceived, develop and transform the participation in social practices of these individuals?

⁵² discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3 with reference to works of Rogoff (2003) and Brandt (2001)

⁵³ Rowsell and Pahl, 2007

⁵⁴ (Holland et al., 2001; Moje, 2009)

⁵⁵ Bellman, 2011.

Narrative

What identities and positioning do the participants author, through the narrating and discussing of their experiences of participation, within the world of day-to-day reading and writing?

What is their story, and how do their experiences, as well as discussing these same experiences, shape their stories and current experiences?

Interpretive

What part does emotion play in the shaping of identity and perceptions of participation and social justice as participants transform and develop participations?

To answer the above questions, together with the participants, I described their past and present experiences, the emotions these brought forth, and the development and transformations of their interactions with the social practices, which included reading and writing, especially as they interpreted them. In this collaborative study, the participants, together with me, discussed and reflected on experiences and particular themes over a period of one year (Appendix, III). We took a critical look at issues of power, identity and social justice, within these interactions, as well as the place this led the participants to occupy in the world of literacy, and the experiences that placed them there.

Literature Review: 'Betwixt and between'

When the study started, the life stories of researcher and participants were, as stated by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), 'in the midst', and did not start at that moment. The intersection of one with the other was a negotiated life experience in itself, continually, as they pointed out, renegotiated throughout the process of the research.

Simon (2012) whose phenomenological study on family literacy crossed the boundaries of education, social science and philosophy, called on the researcher to look at research and its dissemination as a process of discovery, with an inherent predisposition to surprise, and, "more than just a forward feeding, linear process", proposing "abandoning measurable, discarding product-driven orientations, in favour of process-driven ones" (p.20). I was on a learning journey in which the beginning was reconstructed from the middle of

the narrative, the 'thick of things', the place where the research was at, a narrative in which all things were possible, and, as Simon (2012) continued:

To learn is to be in *media res* in the interminable flux of possibility, thus to wish to tell the story of learning means to tell a never-ending story of a particular cross-section of time and place. To tell this story is an exercise in humility. It means refusing to prefer or guarantee with our accounts a peace of mind, merely to deliver pieces of minds, subjective interpretations, representations, narratives re-remembered, whose openly acknowledged vulnerability may indeed be their greatest strength for they ensure that we keep looking (p.20).

My experience mingled with that of the participants through discussion and retrospection and the co-development of data during the collaborative construction of narratives and poetry⁵⁶. Denzin et al. (2011) suggested creating an interactive space with the reader through the revelation of autobiographical details when writing up the research. In this study I revealed much about myself not just to the reader but also to the participants in discussions during which I shared autobiographical details and personal stances, thus creating a more intimate communicative space, but avoiding a confessional one, since as Thody (2006) cautioned:

You may report your own views and actions directly in the document, making the researcher just one more of the researched, but even where you are not also a respondent your views will influence what is written and how it is written (p.27).

Paradigm

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) defined a paradigm as a basic set of beliefs that guided action and defined the worldview of the researcher (p.91), reflected in the methodology selected for a study, in the way a researcher went about the task of adding to what we knew about ourselves and the world we lived in.

Alexander (2006) wrote:

Inquiry at its best endows us with insights to better control ourselves, not generalizations to more efficiently dominate others; and the surest path to self-governance lies in reaffirming Socrates' realisation that genuine wisdom begins with the recognition of how little we really know (p.278).

To follow, then, as the researcher, I need to beware what Maturana and Varela (1992) called, "the temptation of certainty", described thus:

⁵⁶ As explained in detail in Chapter 4.

We tend to live in a world of certainty, of undoubted rock-ribbed perceptions, our convictions prove that things are the way we see them and there is no alternative to what we hold as true. (p.18)

The cultural environment in which the experiences in the study occurred carried a multitude of preconceptions, attitudes and ideas picked up unconsciously over time by both participants and me. For true discovery and learning to take place, on both sides, a process of 'unknowing' took place, as described by Vasudevan (2011) and Rogoff (2003). Partially into this study I experienced a sense of panic when I realised that, with every interview, all that I thought I knew about my research, even what I thought I wanted to find out, was stripped away, leaving me with nothing. My participants found themselves not interested anymore in talking about dyslexia, or discrete events of reading and writing. I could not ask them what they thought reading was. I could not even think of them in terms of struggling or proficient readers, and they stopped thinking of themselves in that way. There were no different ways of teaching to investigate, though the participants had mentioned difference. However, this void was amply filled by what my participants were saying, which evolved as they too looked at what they said and what 'baggage' they carried when making such statements, the discourses aimed at them over the years which had become internalized as 'normal' and 'the way things are' (Valle and Volpitta, 2005).

Positionality

Within a positivist or modernist school the researcher introduced him or herself and then stepped back to 'let the research speak for itself', giving the findings of the research a claim to neutrality and truth, generalizing and sometimes universal. This was a fallacy, as Denzin (1998) stated:

To some extent however, this overt exclusion of the author is fictional, "masks that are hidden behind, put on, and taken off as writers write their particular stories and self-versions' (p.17)

The claim to neutrality was unsound, because the researcher kept power by not making explicit why he chose to research what he did, why certain methods were selected over others and why certain findings were privileged, this 'mask' giving an impression that the result of the research, the truth claimed, was inviolable. As Thody (2006) contended:

The researcher is dominant whether or not this is shown by the language chosen. The researcher has already selected the direction of the research and the methodology, will have chosen which data to include and which to ignore, what to include in the final report and what to omit (p.27).

A post-structuralist position, I thought, would protect me from this 'temptation of certainty', and keep me from seeing my views as authoritative and finite, but instead, as open to interpretation by the equally valid views of my participants and readers. Richardson (2002) defined this position by stating:

The core of that position is the doubt that any discourse has a privileged place, any method or theory universal general claim to authoritative knowledge. Truth claims are suspected of making and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles. Wherever truth is claimed, so is power; the claim to truth is also a claim to power (p.415).

Philosophy

To answer questions about perception asked in this study, I explored a phenomenological approach to collecting and collating data. Phenomenology gives importance to experiences from the perspective of the individual who is experiencing. As a philosophy of embodiment it is concerned with the circularity of perception and embodied experience as generating each other and consequently themselves. This approach contended that only the individual could interpret his or her own experience because as an experience it was embodied in the individual. Such an approach was indicated for exploring the consciousness of the participants regarding their experiences, as they embodied them through emotion, memory and action, and, as Creswell (1998) put it, searched for, "meaning of the experience and where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning" (p.52). When Andrew and Jenny thought of reading, their perception, their embodied expectation was a book, with cover and pages, as their experiences had embodied such activity. As data developed, the circularity seemed to 'spiral' upwards and downwards, intimating changes in agency due to past experiences and reflecting on them, and changes in past perceptions due to present experiences. My reading to make sense of this development led me to neurophenomenology,⁵⁷ a way of viewing my data, as Krippner (2013) described, "... within the theoretical

⁵⁷ More detail on P. 47.

framework of phenomenology and, a bridge between first-, second-, and third-person perspectives in the study of experience” (p.v11).

In phenomenology the experience cannot be separated from the ‘experiencer’, so as a researcher I became part of the research experience myself, striving to make explicit to the reader, as advised by a number of academics in the field of social research,⁵⁸ the level of my involvement, without imposing an interpretation of participants’ experiences.

Emic and etic perspectives

The notion of ‘emic’ and ‘etic’, derived from linguistics, used by Pike (1954), referred to the phonetic and phonemic aspects of language. Etic, from phonetic, represented scientific organization attributes while emic, from phonemic, stood for the meaningfulness attributed to language by its users. Used with reference to cultural discourse, as well as from an ethnographic research perspective, these two terms referred to the different ways knowledge could be acquired and articulated through language, shown by Markee (2012). Within a study, themes and interpretations could be ‘imposed’ from the outside, alien to the experiences of the participants in an ‘etic’ approach, or deduced from experiences and prioritized by a person from within the experiences, through retelling, and reliving the experience, in an ‘emic’, or ‘insider’ fashion.⁵⁹ Studies taking these two views of acquiring knowledge show how both perspectives could be negotiated, and were not mutually exclusive.⁶⁰ In the methods selected for this research I sought the ‘insider’ view, since the data developed through perceptions and experiences of the participants. Through the process of data development, with each interview and discussion, preconceptions withered away, creating a state of ‘unknowing’ as noted above. The participants’ ‘emic’ contribution identified a fresh focus for the research, and what issues were deemed important, leading to the final research questions and themes.

Practical application

Development of data was a process over a time-span of about a year (Appendices I, III). The participants recounted their experiences to me during

⁵⁸ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Hammersley, 2000; Cresswell, 1998 among others)

⁵⁹ For example in (Rogoff, 2003; Headland, Pike and Harris, 1990)

⁶⁰ (Lytra, 2011; Morris, 1999)

an in-depth interview / discussion, followed by further reflection and discussion between each participant and me (Appendices I, III) to negotiate a narrative, uncovering themes to focus on and develop. Collaborative writing was part of the process of discovery, a method of inquiry as proposed by Richardson and St Pierre (2004), through which, “ we discovered new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it” (p.923).

Collaborative Ethnography

Discussing the role of collaborative ethnography, Lassiter (2005b) explained, “In sum the ‘new ethnography’ potentially moves collaboration from the taken-for-granted background of ethnography to its foreground” (p72). One of the ways to ensure true collaboration, Lassiter claimed, was to be open to change in one’s conceptions and position during the research, sharing power with the participants, seeking to, “explicitly include reactions from their consultants within the pages of their ethnographic texts” (p.68). This results, he said, in a study that focused on the process of the research, as this study aimed to do as it focussed on examining living and changing experiences. Lassiter (2005b) reminded us to keep in mind that: “Because these relationships and their larger contexts are social and always shifting, researchers should recognize that building a collaborative ethnography is an ongoing and negotiated process” (p.96).

Qualitative Interviewing

The interview as a way of collecting data is important in qualitative research.⁶¹ Interviews can be structured, asking the same questions in the same order to all participants, or semi-structured, having a loose set of questions around the topic being researched to be used as a guide. Otherwise, the interview could be unstructured, whereby researcher and participant collaborate in discussing issues of relevance to both, as suggested by Robson (2002), a conversation eliciting the perceptions of life experiences and self, and as noted by McNair et al. (2008), expressed in her or his own words. Rubin and Rubin (2012) referred to interviewing as “the art of hearing data”, stressing the importance of culture, personality and other influences on making meaning of what was being said, explicating conversational techniques linking theories of communication

⁶¹ (Creswell, 2007; Lassiter, 2005; Rogers, 2004a; Barton et al., 2000)

and meaning-making with verbal and non-verbal issues in interviews. Collecting data in a phenomenological approach study was often done, as Cresswell (1998) pointed out, through long interviews of an ethnographic nature, sometimes over time and different spaces, and might include discussions and conversations, which, as Spradley (1979) illustrated, helped participants interpret their experiences. This all proved highly relevant to my research.

Phenomenology as a study

Cresswell, 2007, explained a phenomenological study as collecting the experiences, and describing, rather than interpreting, what all participants had in common, as they experienced a phenomenon, and stated:

The philosophical assumptions rest on studying people's experiences as they are lived every day, viewing these experiences as conscious, and arriving at a description of the essence of these experiences, not explanations or analyses (p.252).

Cresswell continued, with reference to Moustakas (1994):

The inquirer then collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals—what they experienced and how they experienced it (p.252).

As an approach, phenomenology served this study well, but I was not producing a 'composite description of the essence of the experience'. I would describe each individual's experiences and so I employed narrative methods to develop the data together with the participants, as explained in more detail further on.

Narratives – lived and told

We all have an ongoing narrative inside our heads, the narrative that is spoken aloud if a friend asks a question. That narrative feels deeply natural to me. We also hang on to scraps of dialogue. Our memories don't usually serve us up whole scenes complete with dialogue. So I suppose I'm saying that I like to work from what a character is likely to remember, from a more interior place.

— Lydia Davis, well-known author of "Varieties of Disturbance" (May 2007),

Narrative Research

Narrative research, Cresswell (2007) stated, could be, "studying one or two individuals, gathering data through collecting their stories, reporting individual

experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences” (p.244). Narrative analysis offered, according to Penketh (2011) and Polginhorne (1995; 2007), a ‘natural’ and powerful means of understanding how individuals experienced life events, and, “by a capacity to resist the compartmentalization of experience” (p.162) maintain the meaning ascribed to them by the participants. Penketh used narrative analysis to story the learning of a group of boys with a label of dyspraxia and their learning within art education, exploring the spaces between centres of practice, of relevance to my research as together with the participants I discussed participation in reading and writing across diverse social sites. Connelly and Clandinin (2000; 1994; 1990) illustrated the research value of narratives of personal experience, while others⁶² demonstrated how narrative approaches facilitated the consciousness of embodied experience, as this filters through memory and later experiences, to become visible and serve as a mediator during discussion. Through discussing and interpreting the story of their experiences, participants authored their identities⁶³ and formed a plot, negotiated and co-constructed, as they participated in knowing and shaping their world, allowing me to become part of it. Rogoff (2003) wrote, “Using such means as language and literacy we can collectively remember events that we have not personally experienced” (p.1).

Choice of research topic

Lassiter (2001) suggested sharing power with the reader by explaining how the topic was chosen, the reason why a particular area was selected for study, and the bearing this might have on the population from which participants were chosen. My choice of Literacy as an area for research resulted from my interest in the way words both reflected and shaped experience and knowing. My work with persons who found it difficult to participate in this ‘knowing’ when the words were on paper, or who thought they had difficulty because of the discourse around them, due to the way this ‘knowing came’ to mean a rigid academic production or achievement, directed me to this area, and the population that perceived these participations as problematic

⁶² Janesick (2010), Ross (2008) and Lassiter (2005a) among others

⁶³ As found in Rogers, 2004a; Holland et al., 2001.

Choice of method

Creswell (2007) explicated many methods for qualitative research analysis, as did Denzin et al. (2005; 2011), some of which I have elaborated on above.

Creswell et al. (2007) suggested that researchers should examine their philosophical assumptions (ontology), what they knew about knowledge (epistemology), their beliefs and values in the research (axiology), the way their methodology emerged and the way they structured their writing of the research, before deciding how to explore the data. A study on perception lent itself to a phenomenological method, explored through the pilot study.

However, as I explained above, I felt that by seeking out 'essences' I gave priority to phenomena common to the participants, rather than bringing out the diversity of the individuals. It also limited the importance given to the social milieu which situated these experiences, since according to Creswell et al. (2007), "The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce the experiences of persons with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (p.252).

Grounded theory, as discussed by the editors in Denzin et al. (2011), may have served this study. Creswell et al. (2007) described it as, "... qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants" (p.249). However, I feared this might result in loss of nuances, of those 'hidden' voices that fade into the background when generalisations are made.

Another method that I considered was Critical Discourse Analysis, through which, in fact, I examined the recollections of discourses surrounding the participants' experiences, as well as the discourses they used to articulate them. This, although acknowledging the individual experiences of the participants, as Rogers (2002), demonstrated, used as the only method would have meant discarding much important data in the embodied experiences the participants were recollecting, focusing more on discourse, a small though important part of what they were relating.

After giving the matter much thought, I selected a phenomenological and ethnographic approach, as found in Pink (2012) who used experiences and visual ethnographies to explore the creation of spaces, and Maso (2001) who discussed the locating of phenomena within culture. I combined this with a

narrative mode of inquiry, to enable the research to give voice to the participants as they re-storied their experiences, keeping in mind that the research was only a small 'slice' of their lived experiences, and as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated:

As researchers, we come to each new inquiry field living our stories. Our participants also enter the inquiry field in the midst of living their stories. Their lives do not begin the day we arrive nor do they end as we leave. Their lives continue. ([Online] Chapter 5:p.1).

Ultimately, the methods used crossed the boundaries of ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative to do justice to the perceptions, lived experiences embodied by the individual in the cultural world and storied through discussion and retrospection. This methodology could be termed ethnographic, in that it queried and explored the cultural practices, values and beliefs of both a group of participants and the society in which they lived, as well as phenomenological, as expounded by Merleau Ponty, since it sought to develop data from the embodied experiences of the individual participants as in-the-world. Others, including Katz and Csordas (2003) and Maggs (2001), have crossed these borders. As Maso (2001) wrote:

Phenomenological ethnographic research tries to get close to its subjects in order to capitalize upon their familiarity with the topic under study, but [does] not assume they will find in this manner an 'underlying shared cognitive order' (p.144).

Phenomenology implied movement, not necessarily physical, but also the flow of thoughts and ideas as experienced and perceived in and across cultural spaces,⁶⁴ as the participants in this study illustrated. I too, as the researcher, was part of this moving through the 'knowing', as was the developing data, and the methods I used had to be able to record and portray this movement to the reader. Pink, (2012), in an innovative approach to sensory and embodied 'activism' research of place and practice in everyday life wrote:

It requires us to understand how we as researchers move through, experience and participate in research contexts, and how as the producers and consumers of representations we are involved in both creating and exploring images and texts that simultaneously tell about and are part of the everyday and activism (p.47).

⁶⁴ (Bakhtin, 1986a)

Summary of the research

Participants were selected through an open call to members of the Malta Dyslexia Association (Appendix VI). In-depth ethnographic interviews, discussions, reflection and collaborative writing developed an open narrative of embodied experience, which through reflection and rewriting continued developing throughout the research. The collaborative writing, which also included poetry, served as a mode of inquiry. The personal narratives raised issues of embodied knowing, especially identity and social justice. A timeline of the process of data development is found in Appendix I, together with a chart of the data set, while samples of this process are found in Appendix III.

The study

I began my research with informal conversations with persons with a label of dyslexia and members of their families, about twelve persons in all, during November and December 2011. We discussed issues around literacy as possible foci for research (Appendix I). In an informal manner, I mentioned my upcoming study, seeking issues that needed to be looked into. Most mentioned learning to read outside school, and not having in-class support allocated. Parents spoke about the difficulties of access⁶⁵ arrangements during examinations, while older persons with a label themselves, including teens and young adults, were concerned about how a lack of formal examination qualifications affected their entrance into higher education and limited their employment choices. All felt that their voices were not being heard, and were lost in what politicians chose to focus on from research. We also discussed what participation in such research would entail. Lassiter, 2005a, suggested such discussion, to ensure relevance of the research to issues deemed important by the participant population. I felt this was important to my research as I wished it to be collaborative as in studies⁶⁶ I had reviewed.

⁶⁵ Following recommendations made in an educational psychologist's report, a student may be granted support during examinations, such as spelling concessions during a non-language subject.

⁶⁶ (Pahl and Allan, 2011; Elmsky, 2005; Ferri et al., 2005).

Drafting of proposal and ethics board approval

Reading for the EdD programme, and my work over the years located reading and writing as an integral part of daily living. I identified the area I wanted to focus on and, as stated above, discussed it with various persons, about twelve in all, from the population from which I sought to recruit participants. During the discussions they said that all the 'experts' seemed to know what was wrong with them and what they needed but they were never asked, just told, saying that their voices as persons with dyslexia were not found in research, which instead spoke with the voice of the researcher. This matched with the review of literature I had undertaken for assignments as well as for this dissertation, where I found that literature about dyslexia was mainly published in journals dedicated to the topic, such as 'Dyslexia', and 'Learning Disabilities'. Some studies, such as Ferri et al. (2005) put forward the voice of the person with a label of dyslexia but the majority were of a technical and psychological nature. Two notable exceptions reviewed in this study were Kerr (2006; 2009), and Buswell Griffith et al. (2001). Hynds, 2010, also found this. In this study I chose to let the voices of the participants be heard, not just through their stories, but also through their participation at every stage of the research from framing the questions, developing the data through discussion, and negotiating the findings, discussed further in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, as well as concluding in Chapter 9. A number of other points discussed at this early stage concerned access to public information, educational gatekeeping in the form of examinations mentioned above, which they felt reduced the opportunities for 'a good job' and a cultural lack of awareness which equated difficulty with reading and writing with 'stupid people'. Some individuals mentioned access to support and intervention. I included perception of the notion of being labelled dyslexic, which some were dubious about but which was accepted with an attitude of humouring me. I drew up an application for ethical approval, on the lines discussed with these individuals, however this had to be reviewed. Some points suggested by some individuals, especially where they felt that they had no voice in research, had to be removed or amended, "I think it is wrong to suggest that people with dyslexia do not have a voice" (Ethics Review Board). Once I removed all references to marginalisation, figured worlds and artifacts the research was approved. Reflections on this process helped me focus my research towards reading and writing in everyday life.

Selection of participants

The eight participants in the study were members of the Malta Dyslexia Association. I chose to have members from this association firstly because when I started this study the focus was persons with a label of dyslexia and their perceptions, and secondly because I wanted participants who were already engaged with the world of reading and writing in ways that did not take these actions for granted. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) discussed selecting the population from which a sample is taken as to, “seek out groups, settings, and individuals where (and for whom) the processes being studied are most likely to occur” (p.245). Information was sent to the members about my research, found in Appendix VI. I attended a meeting in January seeking participants. One participant signed up after the meeting while others made contact later. As members made contact, they were listed to be called once approval was gained. Appointments with participants for interviews were made sequentially, with interviews transcribed before moving on to the next participant. The sequence may be seen in more detail in the timeline in Appendix I.

Pilot study

I carried out a pilot study to explore the selected interviewing methods and ways of data analysis, by allowing space for reflection after the first three interviews and data analysis, with a view to making any changes required, if any, to find the best means of answering my research questions through the voices of my participants. As a result of this pilot study, I made some changes, outlined below. Once I was given clearance by the Ethics Review Board, I started the interviews with the first three participants that signed up. Before each interview, we read over the information sheet again to make sure it was understood, and obtained informed consent. A sample of these documents is found in Appendix VI. Interviews took place sequentially, with each interview transcribed and a preliminary analysis for major themes made before another interview took place. Some themes were: bilingualism, childhood, digital literacy, domains of literacy and identity. A thematic analysis of all the interviews was later conducted using NVIVO9 (Appendix VII). This allowed a cumulative interviewing style, where major themes brought up by prior interviewees were discussed with subsequent participants. I discussed all the themes with all three participants in a number of sessions which followed all three interviews (Appendix I).

In the pilot study I used semi-structured interviews. I asked a number of questions, centred around the use of reading and writing in everyday life, to each participant, apart from asking them to talk about themselves. A sample page of transcript is found in Appendix III. The aim of the interview was to uncover a number of literacy events interviewees participated in, and how they perceived such participations. In these three interviews, the participants spoke about a number of literacy events engaged in as part of everyday life in many domains over a long period of time. To locate these individual experiences within the social culture wherein they took place, and, seeking out the literacy practices underlying them, I looked at these events from a cultural and historical viewpoint to resolve the dichotomous situation of personal experiences located in a social and cultural world, demonstrated by works of Cole and Hatano (2010) and Stetsenko (2005).

Initially, for analysis of the data obtained through the pilot study, three interviews in all, a thematic approach within a cultural – historical analytical framework was used. This was because, as I had written in my journal, hopefully:

CHAT⁶⁷ will allow me to view both the individual and society and their effect on each other in the practice of literacy.

Literacy events were selected as the activities to explore, identified from the transcripts. However, I was unhappy with this, as it meant fragmenting the narratives which the participants were building up.

By the beginning of July interviews and transcriptions, as well as follow-up discussions and conversations were going well, but my unease at the methods I had selected was growing:

Am I on the right track with CHAT by taking various literacy events as activities and placing them in a historical and cultural context? (Research log 5th July)

Two authors helped me resolve a dilemma resulting from the growing friendships with my participants, while respecting the personal narratives they were building up. Reading Janesick (2000), I realised that by isolating a literacy event I was removing it from the sphere of lived experience. My

⁶⁷ A method of research that identifies an activity in the data to explore within its historical and cultural contexts.

participants were not talking about discrete occurrences where they practised reading and writing. They were talking about their lives, and embedded in this day-to-day living were reading and writing. Janesick explained how where, "... experience is separated from knowing...[the result]...is another way to move away from the actual experience of participants in the research project" (p.390). Tillmann-Healy, 2003, made me realise that rather than being detrimental to my research, my growing friendship with some of my participants could be part of my methodology. This allowed me to 'give' more of myself during our discussions as we co-authored the developing data. Together with the participants, I realised that I was no longer collecting data, but rather, facilitating its development through supporting their reflection on past and present experiences, exploring our perceptions, and shaping further experiences within the research. The participants were gaining in autonomy during reflection, and sometimes I was a mere sounding-board as they picked experiences apart looking for hidden cultural constraints, as discussed in Chapters 6-9.

Phenomenology as method

Initially, in the pilot study, I tried hermeneutic phenomenology as a way of looking at the data on perceptions. In effect this meant, Cresswell et al. (2007) exhorted, bracketing off my past perceptions and experiences of reading and writing in everyday life and looking for the essence of each phenomenon across the participants' perception or experience. I isolated literacy events as phenomena, and put aside my feelings and beliefs, which I found rather difficult, about each phenomenon, but I felt this was at the cost of fragmenting the narratives of the participants.

Result of pilot study

During the pilot study I used a semi-structured form of interviewing, constrained to focus on events of literacy, thus removing them from the sphere of lived experience. My participants and I found this difficult, as they did not talk about discrete occurrences where they practised reading and writing. They were talking about their lives, and embedded in this day-to-day living were reading and writing. As a result, I amended my approach for the main study as I considered the above did not do justice to the full and embedded experiences of the phenomena in day-to-day living, and the emotional lens

through which the participants viewed them. Within the main study, the phenomenological and ethnographic aspects remained present. I was looking at individual experiences and participations, as well as the cultural practices that shaped them. At this point I found work by Pink (2012; 2011) helpful. However, since what was resulting from the interviews and discussions was a reflective, personal life-story, as a practical tool I adopted a narrative mode of inquiry to develop the data, informed especially by Clandinin and Connelly (2000).

Amendments as a result of the pilot study

Below are amendments made to the mode of data collection because of the pilot study.

Changes in method of data collection

Table 1 Changes in methods after pilot study

From	To
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured interview focused on literacy and literacy events. • Appointment – consent form – interview • Email transcript for approval or changes • Observation sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnographic, conversational interview on life in general; literacy as part of life. • Appointment – conversation – consent form – interview / discussion of interview data during interview itself – <i>giving more of myself</i>. • Participation in social gathering or activity

Reviewing the entries in my research log about my experience in conducting the first three interviews, and the transcripts, I realised that the participants were hesitant in sharing certain experiences on a first meeting, alluding to incidents such as experiences of bullying, but avoiding exploratory questions. I found that using a semi-structured format was restrictive, in that when participants wandered away from the question being asked I felt constrained to draw them back, stopping the 'flow' of talk. These findings led to two main

changes in the interviews. I met the rest of the participants first in a casual setting, which allowed us to interact on a social level. The interview then took place on a second visit or after conversation (Appendix I; III), when each participant and I engaged in a dialogue about their occupation, childhood experiences and so on. This changed the primary focus of the interview, from one of perceptions of literacy events to one of perceptions of day-to-day experiences which also included literacy, and meant I did not have to keep drawing the interviewee away from what he was relating, back to the topic of reading and writing, but could give importance to the experience not the event. Through exploring the first three participants' data in the pilot study, it resulted that reading and writing formed an intrinsic part of these experiences and the recollections were embodied in these experiences through emotion, or rather, as Katz (2012) wrote, made 'corporeal' when forged in 'emotion's crucible' (p.15).

Resultant data

The resultant data, rather than event-focussed, became a more personal and dialogic one, a process of participation, in which perceptions of experiences continued developing with the retelling and discussing itself, allowing the participants to collaborate in all stages of the research. While giving due importance to the cultural and historical background to the experiences recounted, I adopted a narrative style of inquiry.

The journey of the research

I started my research journey with discussions to identify issues of importance to the participants, as Lassiter (2005b) suggested, to ensure relevance to their lives. This initial information formed part of the application for ethical approval for the study. Once I obtained ethical clearance, I started the pilot study, as described above.

Development of data

Through amendments after the pilot study, the interviews became ethnographic, whereby, rather than me questioning the participants about issues of literacy, we shared information about experiences, both of childhood and adulthood, both past and present. This sharing led to the development of

a richer holistic picture of each individual and served to redress power imbalance in our roles.

Relevance of research questions

Spradley (1979), in his research about Skid Row, made me think about the relevance of research questions to the experiences of those being researched, as he explored why the questions originally formulated by him were seen as irrelevant by his interviewees. McCurdy et al. (2005) found research questions kept developing in a study, and that often, ethnographers do not have a clear picture of what they need to find out before actually starting fieldwork. The initial questions in this research were decided collaboratively through discussion, yet they developed and became more focussed on what the participants discovered of more importance. Issues of agency and social justice, which they decided merited consideration, replaced topics originally thought important, such as a label of dyslexia. These issues became important during retrospective discussions of experiences with participants, as they negotiated personal narratives.

A process of 'unknowing'

These in-depth interactions were not merely discussions and conversations which took place haphazardly, though chance encounters sometimes yielded rich data, but, as Shopes (2011) described, "It is not a casual or serendipitous conversation but a planned and scheduled, serious and searching exchange" (p.452). Further discussion and conversations, both about the transcripts of interviews and current events occurring in their lives and mine, led to more elaboration of the perceptions held by us, including my preconceptions of the research, a shift from looking for 'solutions' to exploring a process. An entry in my research log read:

13th October ...Somehow all the things I used to think, that all I had to do was find that approach that would help everyone to read, and so on, just does not make sense anymore, and seems irrelevant!

Some of these included the whole idea of struggling readers, reluctant readers, and proficient readers – as I began to view classification the way the participants experienced it, as disempowering, and seeing instead just persons who participated in reading and writing. Another opinion I had doubts about was the popular judgment that bad teaching was primarily responsible for most

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reading failure, and that everyone could learn to read if the right method was used. When I started my research, I also believed that being given a label of struggling reader made you one. These statements seemed simplistic and reductionist⁶⁸ the more I came face-to-face with the diverse and complex realities of the participants' experiences and the way emotions and discourses enabled or hindered their participation in literacy. This led to further development of the research questions.

Table 2 Preconceptions that were discarded

- Bad teaching responsible for most reading failure
- Everyone can learn to read if the right method is used
- Being given a label of struggling reader makes you one
- The whole idea of struggling readers, reluctant readers, proficient readers – classifying is disempowering – just persons who participate in reading and writing activity.

The developing data

Initial interviews were all recorded, as were most of the closing retrospections, except where participants asked otherwise (Appendix III). Discussions and conversations were not recorded every time as location and situation where these were held did not always permit this. A record of these interactions with each participant is found in Appendix III. The participants and I discussed themes as they emerged, allowing for a cumulative mode of data development, rather than data collection, an active movement, as described by Pink (2012) from one place of being to another. Originally, my intention had been to discuss these themes in focus groups. After disclosures made by some of the participants, for ethical reasons, I decided to use an individual conversational method instead, allowing for more insight on the part of participants in their individual storying of experience, a process described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as growth and transformation.

To maintain the communicative space of the discussions I did not take notes at that time, though alterations to the narrative were written directly, but made notes as soon as possible after the meeting. The number of hours spent with each participant during the development of the data, as shown in Appendix III,

⁶⁸ The belief that things can be reduced to simple components, and that nothing is more than the sum of its parts, so literacy is no more than a set of skills.

varied, and depended on their availability, how much they wished to contribute through discussion and conversation and how engaged they became with the research. The data developed over a year (Appendix I, III) through the shedding of preconceptions, and led to new points of view, for both the participants and me. Through these transformative interactions the participants developed personal stories, with themselves as the protagonists.

Narrative as method

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) defined the methodologies of narrative as both an experience and a study about experience, adding, "To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study" (p.375). Ferri et al. (2005) drew on narrative inquiry together with aspects of critical discourse analysis to explore how perceptions and attitudes caused by emotion impinged on the professional lives of their participants. In this and other similar studies in different fields, such as Kelly and Howie (2008) and Rogers (2004a), experiences, once recounted, allowed an individual to story his or her life, and, as found in Holland et al. (2001) author the main character, him or herself. These experiences were reflected upon, as situated within specific social and cultural environments which gave rise to, as Williams (2007; 2011) showed, the attitudes which shaped perceptions of participation and the experiences themselves. To capture this storying within a cultural ambience I used oral history techniques as part of my methods (Janesick, 2010). Oral history, as a research technique served to collate, together with the participants, what Janesick (2010) called the 'hi-story' of their lived experiences:

I would have to say that oral history is a revisiting of experience ...Both the researcher and the researched are active in oral history. Oral history is about the excitement and engagement of some lived experience. Oral history validates subjectivity and embraces it (p.16).

As the personal narratives of each participant developed, each recounted experience was located within a framework of personal storying and development of identity through participation. As found in Polkinghome (2010; 2006) the data in this study was these stories and the process that created them. Experiences cannot be isolated and fragmented as 'pieces of data', as their meaning lies within the person who experienced them and the part they played in the whole story. Clandinin and Murphy (2009) concluded, "As

narrative researchers work with their field texts it is the experience of the participants with the researcher that remains the primary concern” (p.599). As we sat together, with the material text, which had seen its birth as an interview transcript, in front of us, pens at the ready, or a digital text on a tablet or computer, to reflect on and make new meanings, the participants interpreted their experiences as part of the ‘whole’, adding to and transforming the story with each discussion, allowing their voice to articulate the narrative (St Pierre, 2008; Holland et al., 2001).

In my last meeting with each participant, we re-read the narrative, with any final alterations made at that time, recorded for most of the participants, and concluded with remarks and reflections of the participants about their participation in the study or about themselves. Some participants did not want to change the narrative itself but preferred an epilogue at the end of the narrative, while others changed the narrative itself. This was discussed in more detail further on in this study.

Friendship as method

During the development of data and the discussions, other than the initial interview, my position as researcher was somewhat blurred, as meetings took place within social venues, reducing ‘researcher power’. On occasion, meetings took place while the participant was offering services in a professional capacity, transposing power to the participant. With some of the participants, discussion and conversation led to the development of friendship, as common ground between us led to a sharing of ideas in many different areas, and friendship as method became part of my methodology. Tillman-Healy (2003) described friendship methodology as “multivoiced and emotionally rich” (p.734). While explaining through her own research how it could be used, she showed how one did not have to be a long-time friend to use the method, stating, “But qualitative researchers need not adopt the whole vision to benefit from friendship as method” (p.746), and added:

In many ways, though, friendship and fieldwork are similar endeavours. Both involve being in the world with others. To friendship and fieldwork communities, we must gain entrée. We negotiate roles (e.g., student, confidant, and advocate), shifting from one to another as the relational context warrants (p.732).

The stories developed as each participant reflected on his or her own perceptions, attitudes and experiences, remembered and recounted through the lens of emotion. These were accessed because of the communicative space created by the friendship between the participant and myself as researcher.

Writing to discover

Richardson and St Pierre (2004) stated, "I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it" (p.924). This was highly relevant during this study. In describing experiences, in the discourses of reflection, in the choice of words during discussion and writing, the participants chose a way of looking at the experience we were writing about. By putting a perception into words they could better reflect on it, sometimes leading to transformed perceptions of the same experience. By writing what we were discussing, placing it in a narrative positioning themselves as the central character, the participants discovered new experiences, and new perspectives on previous ones.

Poetry as a tool

Poetry was used, as described below, to express emotional aspects of data, first by me as researcher, and later on by some of the participants (Appendix V), aspects which, as pointed out by Katz (2012) cannot always be represented so well in prose. Poetry was used to focus and narrow down these issues to the most meaningful (Furman, 2007). When discussing the use of poetry in qualitative research Janesick (2010) stated:

One form that may enrich oral history narrative or any qualitative project is the form of poetry constructed from the data. Some writers call these "found – data poems". These are poems constructed by the participants in a study and / or the researcher from the data at hand ... (p.129).

At one point, I felt so overwhelmed by the emotions being expressed and, by the feelings that arose during discussion, that I despaired of ever getting them all down on paper, of doing them justice when articulating them. Coming across some work which included found – data poetry was opportune (Janesick, 2010), and writing my first one helped me identify themes in what I was exploring. While discussing my first poem with the participants, a number of them wished to write one themselves, to help them express their feelings

and make sense of their experiences. The poems served to put in words important themes and highlight crucial elements in narratives, as described by Janesick (2010), "Found - data poems can be a useful and helpful technique for making sense of oral history data" (p.129). Poetry was a way of understanding and focusing data, of expressing ideas, which were not easily expressed in prose, and as Lassiter (2005b) stated, giving voice to the emotional tones of what the participant wanted to convey: "

Many ethnographers use poetic transcription to communicate the style of speech, which can be crucial to understand the force and emotion behind types of speech in which intent is as important as content (p.131).

Discourse

Discourses surrounding and permeating the research were important. The discourse of the study itself set the tone for the type of research, positivist or otherwise. A collaborative style of discourse served to include participants in the research process by being accessible. The discourses that surrounded the participants as well as those they used to themselves impacted the way they storied themselves. Looking at discourse critically as a way of exposing underlying themes and power structures was a methodology that fit well with the collaborative approach of this study, and, as suggested by Wodak (2007) and Rogers (2004b) was effectively used in this manner, flexibility being one of its strengths. Fairclough (2005) maintained that Critical Discourse Analysis was an effective approach across various ways of data collection and analysis:

Methodologically, this approach entails working in a 'trans disciplinary' way through dialogue with other disciplines and theories, which are addressing contemporary processes of social change (p.1).

Limitations of these methods

Influence

One limitation of a collaborative study may be a blurring of the extent to which a researcher contributes to the final research in terms of influence and opinion. Although I consulted with participants from the beginning, yet the framing and construction of the study were my own. Using a framework of New Literacy Studies shaped the research experiences as situated, while my phenomenological approach gave importance to the embodied perceptions of

these experiences. I selected the methods, at least in the pilot study,⁶⁹ although those for the main study were developed together with the participants. Data for analysis, and issues to be tackled, were negotiated, in order to minimise researcher influence. Thody (2006), citing Kelly (2001), discussed the risk of the writer / researcher dominating the research data, stating, “Autobiograph, emotions, reflexivity, your own opinions - include all these and you run the risk of researcher dominance”(p.29). Within the study my role and that of the participants were fluid, with participants becoming researchers of their own experiences while I took a secondary role of facilitating their exploration of experiences through discussion and collaborative writing.

Confidentiality

We have a proverb in Maltese: “*Malta zghira u n-nies maghrufa*” which translates loosely as “*Malta is small and its people well known*”. The implications for this study concerned confidentiality and anonymity, which I felt should be protected at all times. Certain disclosures made by the participants were located in specific, identifiable events, while other disclosures were of an intimate nature, and so I abandoned my initial idea of discussing emerging themes in focus groups and instead discussed them with participants individually.

Data generated

Another limitation was the sheer amount of data to be included in the narratives, and the time spent with participants to discuss and pick out what they wanted their stories to include. A chart of the data set is found in Appendix 1, while a sample of developed data is found in Appendices III and IV. Due to word limits and such constraints a number of themes (Appendix VII) could not be elaborated on.

Time constraints

The changing perceptions of experiences, and the new perspectives developing, kept this research in a state of flux, fluid and with no end in sight, till, with great difficulty, a time period of one year was negotiated as the last point where narratives could be developed further for the purpose of the study

⁶⁹ P. 70.

(Appendices I, III), though most of the participants still kept contact to discuss further life experiences and read parts of the writing.

Data ‘messiness’

A limitation was the ‘messiness’ of the data, which, like life experiences themselves, was more amoebic and amorphous in nature and not at all linear in any aspect whatsoever. The nature of the data and its development made it difficult to fit any one method to the study, though this was compensated for by the element of what Simon (2012), called a sense of discovery and an ability to be surprised.

Perspectives

An initial limitation was that of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ frame of mind. In spite of the amount of reading, and meetings with participants to gain an ‘insider’ view of what it meant to practise reading and writing in Malta, it was very challenging to ‘walk in their shoes’. I must profess gratitude at the discussions and patient explanations with which my participants illuminated me on certain points.

Collaboration

Working so closely with participants shaped what the research focused on. This may have been a limitation at the beginning of the study, when I had a ‘plan’ to follow, which had to be discarded. It could not remain a limitation when the research took an alternative but fascinating route instead.

The busy lifestyle of some of the participants made collaboration a challenge, making it difficult to arrange long stretches of time for discussion. This was overcome by meeting in social situations, where the participants had to be anyway, in domestic situations such as shopping, and through the use of social media, though it may be considered a lingering limitation that not all participants could give of their time as much as others.

Negotiation

I encountered an unexpected limitation at the writing stage of the study. As the writing developed, the participants read or listened to the reading of pieces of writing especially where I included excerpts from their stories. Some

participants found difficulty where, due to word constraints, I cut excerpts short. This was resolved through ongoing negotiation.

I found one other apparent limitation in the writing, though this did not remain a limitation, but, in a way, became a strength. This was the need to consider diverse audiences, including the participants. At first my style of writing up the research was of an 'academic' nature, full of what Lassiter (2005a) calls "jargon and other forms of complex language" (p.119). When reading parts with or to my participants, I often caught myself paraphrasing on the spot to make the text accessible to them. By the time I would write the second draft, this paraphrase often became the way I wrote, making my writing more accessible not only to the participants but also to my readers. For the same reason, multiple citations are often placed in footnotes.

Ethical considerations

Ethical issues were of considerable importance in this research. Janesick (2010) stated, "Without a doubt, all qualitative researchers ... deal with ethical issues by virtue of working with real people in real settings face to face" (p.146).

Power

A primary ethical issue faced was that of power. Lassiter (2005a) noted that the voice of the participant might be drowned 'through academic interpretation irrelevant to the participant. I endeavoured to avoid this by including the participants in the study at all stages, starting from selecting the focus of the research. Discussion as a tool empowered participants as researchers of their own practices, as they viewed themselves and their experiences together with me.

Privacy

Everyone, including researchers, protects privileged information as 'private' and share this only with trusted others. One risk this study ran was of being intrusive. In the search for 'rich and in-depth' data, the researcher may, as Holland et al. (2001) pointed out, inadvertently affect the lives of those being researched. As happened in this study, sometimes individuals disclosed information of experiences they had never quite reflected on. Some outcomes were positive, as when a participant was empowered to look at his or her experiences from another point of view and moved on, using them for growth,

as discussed by Clandinin and Murphy (2009). Other times this might shatter an individual's peace of mind, causing hardship unexpected by the participants and researcher. Holloway and Todres (2003) contended that the qualitative researcher needed, "a heightened awareness of the ethical issues involved" (p.345). I tried to avoid this intrusion by protecting the privacy of the participant even from myself, sometimes by not discussing issues sensitive for the participant, by not including certain issues in discussion, and, even when participants showed willingness to disclose certain information, I always reminded them that they were not obliged to. Should they still do so I would switch off recording equipment. During discussions, I too disclosed certain private and 'privileged' information, thus, to a certain extent redressing the balance. The methods used developed a large amount of data. Some does not form part of this study for ethical reasons, part at the request of the participants, part at my suggestion. My being part of some of the participants' lives meant that their stories became more meaningful, but it also led to privileged and confidential information which could not be included in this study. I therefore deleted an amount of data as well as some of the poems created by participants in time of crisis.

Continuity

A difficult part of data development was choosing when to stop, a decision negotiated with the participants. Consensus was reached that communications taking place more than a year after the initial interview would not form part of their story, unless interaction had been curtailed for some reason. I kept contact with participants who wished it, since otherwise it would have felt as if the relationship developed was a utilitarian one, which was not the case. I also called upon participants from time to time, to read or listen to writing.

Conclusion

The nature of the research questions together with the result of the pilot study led to the emergence of the methods outlined above, methods based on a philosophy of phenomenology, of knowing through embodied experience, sensory and emotional, and culturally shaped. To access this knowing as data I used a phenomenological ethnographic approach, together with narrative

inquiry. Development of data and its analysis were concurrent and one led the other in turn, as the methods were developed.

The method I used was phenomenological in seeking the individual perceptions and experiences of participations, and ethnographic through exploring together with participants the effect of the culture in which these experiences took place. The participants and I further developed this data, once accessed, through narrative inquiry, with discussion and conversation leading to the creation of personal narratives, reflected upon and negotiated between participant and me, identifying themes of particular importance and explicating the embodied, lived experiences that surrounded them.

In the next chapter, I summarise the gist of the participants' narratives and add some reflections about each.

Chapter 1 introduced the focus of this research, the participants, me and the context. Chapters 2 and 3 reviewed literature on literacy and perception. Chapter 4 discussed research questions and methodology. Chapter 5, below summarises the narratives the participants created, adding my reflections on them.

Chapter 5 Meet the participants

Introduction

In Chapter 1 I introduced the participants through verbatim extracts from their narratives. Over a period of about a year, as their narratives developed, we got to know each other well. Some became my friends. All touched my life and changed my perceptions of what reading and writing meant, how participation in this social practice affected identity and raised issues of social justice. These eight participants who I had the privilege to get to know, and who shared their life experiences with me were very special to me and it was a privilege to get to know them. I hope you will enjoy getting to know them through my summaries and verbatim excerpts in the next four chapters, as lack of space does not allow for the inclusion of the full narratives.

The narratives summarised below were a process of storying of experiences and reflections that took place over time, and in various spaces, as described in the time-space charts found in Appendix III. Each narrative was summarised by me in the order in which the participants were interviewed. Most of the participants have either read or listened to the summary, though Brooke felt there was no need to do so and Karla did not wish to. They were included at this point in the research since the next three chapters explored issues of emotion, discourse and mediation with the participants through their narratives. Each summary is followed by my reflections on the participant.

I first made contact with the participants through the Malta Dyslexia Association, as described in the methodology chapter. Malta is a small country, and I previously knew some of the participants in a professional capacity. As I met with each participant, first during the interviews and then for clarification and amplification of what they had said, it was apparent that restricting the data used in the study to literacy events, as I intended originally, would not account for the richness of personal experiences which shaped these events. After the pilot study, the interviews became ethnographic in

nature, and a narrative mode of analysis within an Oral History tradition, as described in Chapter 4, was adopted. After each interview, I transcribed the recording and sent it to the participant for review. Some sent back comments but the majority preferred to wait until subsequent meetings, during which we clarified information and made changes as required. We discussed themes that were emerging from an initial analysis using NVIVO, and through the cumulative mode of interviewing.

Crafting the Narratives

Research log 10th January 2013

I have been busy with the stories of my participants, choreographing the conversations into the original interview, making sense of the discussions, and how they want to tell their story, changing my views of them as I go along. The person they want me to see them as, or rather, the person they see themselves as, emerges with each reading and adjusting of each story as we reflect on it together. I think I have spent most time with Jenny and Martha, though informal conversations with Damien and Alan, and Andrew, also need to be brought in! This is all taking so much longer than I thought, and at the same time, I have a lot more than I thought I had. Martha gives me more each time... (Excerpts from research log, Appendix IV).

Once the participants had discussed and accepted the transcript, I removed the questions and comments. Leaving the same words the participants themselves had used in the original interview and subsequent discussions, I prepared the foundation of their story. During following sessions, the participants and I reflected on experiences and discussed how these would become their story, often sitting side by side at my computer or at a table in a coffee shop, such activity referred to as 'development of narrative' in the data-development charts (Appendix III, 1-8). At one point (December 2012), just before our final meeting, Jenny asked me to reword her story to 'become a better written one' since she was seeing many grammatical errors in the way she spoke and wrote but was not happy with the way she had corrected them. I did, but we both felt it did not 'sound' like her any more, and we went back to the original and negotiated a final version. The verbatim extracts from the narratives of the participants reflect the way of speaking and writing each participant brought to the study, with its sentence structure typical of English

speaking Maltese persons, with the occasional lapse into Maltese when English did not provide certain words, within a story structure each participant preferred. Some, like Brooke and Karla, moved sentences about for a very structured story, and hardly added or included material to change this. Others, like Martha, added more experiences and decided where they should go, and as we discussed Martha would say, “You know, where I told you last time about what he did to me at the office? I forgot to tell you he also said... . and I also want to write that I was very upset”. Others, like Wayne and Damien, often came up with new experiences and included them with whatever had reminded them of it, as when a discussion of how Wayne coped without paperwork brought an amplification of an experience in Spain, already found elsewhere. As I incorporated the reflections and insights into the narratives, I sent the updated versions to the participants, in preparation for the next meeting, when we reflected on it as well as on recent experiences. When Damien received his daughter’s school report he was incensed by the way it was written. His reaction was incorporated in the narrative as he compared the way reports were written in his case and in his daughter’s. I never sent the story to Alan, but read out parts to discuss. At the last meeting for each participant, approximately a year after the initial interview, we met for a ‘final’ reading of the narrative. The participants and I had negotiated this cut-off date at the outset of the study, but left it flexible in case of unforeseen circumstances. During this final meeting, recorded for most of them, as the charts show, we read the story one last time, incorporated any changes, and ‘closed’ the narrative for the purpose of the study. Some changed details such as age and occupation. Others made final changes with brackets, while others did not want to touch the story any more, but, together, we wrote an epilogue. In some cases, when they could not find the right words, especially in Alan’s case, they expressed what they wanted to say in Maltese and we would come up with it in English.

The summaries

As found through the data development charts in Appendix III, each participant was interviewed in depth, the transcript discussed over a number of meetings, themes and experiences reflected on, and the stories and poems co-constructed. While Appendix I outlines the timeline of the research, in Appendix III, for each participant, a data development chart lists the meetings

with each participant, the location, and activity, and how data was developed; either recorded electronically, through notes, changes to narrative, or all three. The participants shaped their own, unique narratives together with me. I wrote the summaries of the narratives, which, as explained above, were read by six of the participants. My reflections on my interactions with each participant follow the summary.

The Participants

Table 3 The participants, their age and their occupation in the order they were interviewed

Name	Age	Occupation
Andrew	61	Retired Bank Manager, Massage therapist
Jenny	49	Bus Driver
Martha	50	Clerk, Gestalt psychotherapist
Brooke	17	Student in Art and Design
Karla	16	Student attending sixth form.
Wayne	41	Businessman and entrepreneur
Damien	45	Lecturer in mathematics, sculptor
Alan	48	Hairdresser, artist, tailor

Andrew

Summary of the narrative

Andrew introduced himself as a retired bank manager. He was also a qualified massage therapist, an area of interest he discovered first as a hobby and then as an occupation. His interests over the years included photography, carpentry, car mechanics and boating. Spending time on his computer was his most recent interest. Andrew described his childhood as rather difficult as his father died when he was only seven, creating a time of confusion and uncertainty associated with his feelings about books, as he explained. Books made him both angry and anxious. He found being in a library or bookstore unbearable and avoided it as much as possible. Andrew did all his reading on computer. He kept track of family members through social network sites, read the news online several times a day, browsed online shopping sites and sought out travel bargains, as he travelled frequently.

Reflections

While interviewing Andrew the first time I felt uncomfortable. As part of the pilot study, I was using a semi-structured style of interview. I kept trying to move the conversation to reading and writing every time it deviated from topic, unaware of the negative feelings this created, but which I realised at later meetings. After transcribing this interview, I wrote in my research log:

5th April

I seemed to panic at one point because I felt that, instead of opening up, the interviewee was shutting me out.

Later meetings and discussions made up for that first interview and once Andrew found I was ready to listen to his experiences, whichever way he decided to tell me about them, we reflected on the first interview together.

Jenny

Summary of the narrative

Jenny drove a bus. Her former occupations included instructing adults with disabilities in pottery, being a housekeeper to the Egyptian Ambassador, sales girl, chambermaid, and even pizza delivery person, as well as a carer for the

elderly. She described how she left this last job because her total involvement made it a 24-hour occupation and her family was suffering. Jenny enjoyed a challenge, and described other jobs she would have loved to do had she not been afraid they would require reading and writing, areas in which she felt inadequate. She spoke of a happy childhood, with numerous brothers and sisters, that gave way to painful schooldays with incidents of bullying by a teacher sapping her confidence and her ambition to study science. Her interest in both science and arts drew her towards restoration, and she felt resentful that her life choices were made for her when she was sent to a trade-school at the age of thirteen, effectively shutting that door, though at the time, she said, she was glad to be rid of reading and writing. Jenny made certain that the academic experiences of her three children did not include the difficulties she encountered.

Reflections

Jenny too was part of the pilot study, and I was using the same interview format as I used with Andrew. Jenny, however was more persistent in relating life experiences, and we entered into a dialogue, sharing common areas such as concern for children and elderly parents. An incident during her interview got us closer on a personal basis. While we were in my study, the phone rang elsewhere in the house and my husband announced he was meeting his sister and going to hospital as his elderly mother had been taken to hospital. He later called to say that she had died. Jenny was still there and I think this vulnerability on my part created a bond, which later developed into friendship.

Martha

Summary of the narrative

Martha finished her studies during the research and became a Gestalt psychotherapist. She considered this a triumph against all odds, especially what she calls her negative opinion of herself when it came to writing. Episodes of bullying by teachers left a lasting impression, feelings of shame, and she went to great lengths to hide what she saw as her inability to write. In her narrative, she described some of the ploys she used to cover up. Martha persisted in her efforts to prove to herself that she could learn, and at the age of 50 felt she had proved to everyone including herself that she was not 'stupid', as she remembered being labelled at school.

Martha's father died when she was young. Her mother was an accomplished seamstress. She did not read or write, so, at a very young age, Martha took over the responsibility of household bills, as recounted by her mother later. She considered that hearing about her early capabilities gave her the knowledge that she could succeed and accomplish something in life, and fuelled her determination not to give up. Martha referred to her computer as 'he' crediting 'him' with providing the support she did not receive during what she described as a miserable childhood, remembered as a time of crying, fear and darkness. Her work, both on a voluntary basis as well as her new career, was with couples experiencing infertility. Martha loved reading. She remembered reading her first book at the age of sixteen. She was invaluable in reading over much of what I wrote and voicing her opinion.

Reflections

Martha was also part of the pilot study,⁷⁰ and so interviewed in a semi-structured manner. Rapport between us was established quite early on, points of contact being caring for aged relatives, love of reading and children. Martha loved discussing her nieces and nephews. We also discovered that we had attended the same church school. Through her reflections on school experiences, I recalled some of my experiences at the same school, adverse experiences which had become submerged in later positive ones. This too provided common ground for our friendship to grow, especially after I started helping Martha with her studies.

Brooke

Summary of the narrative

Brooke, a student at a vocational college, followed a certificate course in Art and Design. One of her earliest memory was of changing schools at the age of 5, leaving her friends behind, in the school in her village, to go to a church school an hour's bus ride away. She remembered how the daily trip made her feel sick, how she missed all her friends and how difficult she found it to make new ones. When talking about her childhood, Brooke described experiences of exclusion within the church school she attended, as she was regularly pulled out of class and given lessons on her own. Because of this, she said, she had

⁷⁰ P. 70

no friends at school. She described her difficulties as limited just to school, since at home she played games on the computer and looked up artists and celebrities to read about them. She felt it was unfair that to obtain support to participate in school she had to be labelled 'disabled'. She thought all children should use computers at school and examinations should be done on computer. She believed that, in that way, all children would participate.

Reflections

I interviewed Brooke on college premises, as she was unable to meet me outside. There was a formality between us, which was probably caused by her perception of me as a lecturer, even though I did not teach her. In spite of our discussions and conversations, this boundary remained, except when we chatted online through Facebook. This was probably due to the fact that this was more her element than mine. Brooke was very structured, and kept the same time-order organisation in her narrative, slotting in any experiences reflected on and expanded into their 'proper' place, replacing what she had thought previously, where necessary. An example of this was her reflection on a visit to an educational psychologist, which originally had been descriptive, but which she replaced with a critical reflection later on.

Karla

Summary of the narrative

Karla started her narrative by describing her success in her matriculation examinations, impressive as she passed with very high marks, which she described as making her feel good. At the age of six, Karla's teacher asked her mother to have her assessed as, she alleged, Karla was not responding to anyone or anything. Karla described how it was because she was always worried because her friends were learning to read and she found it difficult, and, since adults would talk over her, passing comments about her, thinking she did not understand, she thought that either something was very wrong with her or that they thought she was being bad. Karla found it difficult to reflect on her early days at school, and still felt resentful that she did not learn to read with her classmates at school but had to learn outside school. She found it too painful to express this in words, and wrote a poem instead (Appendix IV). Karla did not mind talking about what she used reading and

writing for, other than studying, and described her day-to-day practices, stating that for her reading and writing are just another way of communicating.

Reflections

Karla asked her mother to be present during the interview, and answered most queries in monosyllables. By agreement, after the interview, I sent the transcript to her and we met again for her to discuss and clarify in more detail. I had known Karla and her family well a number of years before. Her mother was an architect and her father was an engineer. Her two sisters, one older and one younger always excelled at school, and were very popular and outgoing, both girls discussed by Karla's mum in conversation after the interview.

Wayne

Summary of the narrative

Wayne owned two companies, working with digital media and design. He described his success as happening 'in spite of' his education, and in his opinion, schools hindered learning. Wayne considered himself a philosopher, and believed his outlook on life was due to what he called 'his unappreciated right-brain thinking' which he defined as a way of speaking and not in the literal sense. As a businessman he believed in employing the right man for the job, and that included writing. He explained how during meetings the procedures were videotaped for future reference and he believed that the way to the future was digital. Another issue which Wayne stated he felt strongly about was what he saw as the injustice of print dominance over other types of knowledge communication and accreditation, describing experiences in the cinema world to illustrate his point. Wayne had another recurring theme, centred around his lack of confidence even now, which he blamed on the discourse of deficit that surrounded him at school, and which he likened to a worm deep inside him. He also described himself as seeing information 'holistically'. Wayne had strong opinions about the educational system, especially the way assessment of activity, such as computer studies, took place through reading and writing.

Reflections

Wayne's success was nation-wide and his companies featured in a number of campaigns as responsible for video design and promotion. He communicated

these successes to his friends through Facebook. Wayne did not mind being recognised through the name of his companies, should someone reading the research do so. During the interview and following discussion, Wayne continually referred to himself as 'right-brained'. This metaphor ran through his narrative, which was rather long, as, whenever he reflected on an experience, he added and expanded by continued development on the themes he had already mentioned or by adding new themes.

Damien

Summary of the narrative

Damien was an established artist, a sculptor, as well as a lecturer in Mathematics. He believed a love for science, fostered by the school, helped him develop his reading. He spoke much of sailing, which he started at a young age, and which activity he credited with having helped him develop his writing and his problem-solving skills. His perception of his schooldays was of a productive and enlightening time. He mentioned being a late reader but felt confident about his reading now, stating that he enjoyed 'difficult' books with challenging subjects. In his narrative, Damien spoke at length about what he considered a failing of the educational system in not teaching students how to use visual information, and focusing only on the verbal. He also talked about the importance of fostering self-esteem, comparing his schooldays with those of his children, saying that the way progress was reported nowadays was detrimental to proper learning. Damien discussed how digital media changed his practice of writing.

Reflections

During the interview and subsequent conversations and discussions, Damien expressed his views on many issues. He found it difficult to have an organised narrative, in fact expressing his preference for a meandering text. Damien spoke at length about the way sculpting needed thinking and problem solving. During discussions, I said that I never could learn to draw. Damien asked me to attend some of his classes, which I did, and this helped me understand his story better.

Alan

Summary of the narrative

Alan spoke of his love of travelling and his different occupations. After attending a trade school for tailoring, he started his working life in a garment factory, which he hated. Being a good tailor, he made a name for himself sewing clothes for bridal parties, and made enough money to leave the factory and embark on a course in hairdressing, even attending various courses abroad by paying for someone to accompany him to help with reading and writing. Meanwhile, he had discovered a 'gift' for renovating old houses, employing workmen to do the outside while taking care of the inside himself, and found he was an excellent interior designer. Eventually, he opened his own hairdressing salon and took up painting, becoming moderately successful, having exhibited and sold some paintings. Alan began dancing in musicals, and for a time made the costumes for stage productions. In spite of all this, Alan thought of himself as a failure because he did not read and write, his perception of reading being embodied in books. In his narrative, he described how his fear of failure kept him from reading in the first place. Alan described how, when young, he was a timid, fearful child. He spoke of a childhood marred by fear of being found out as unable to read or write. He described his father as a man who could read anything in a number of languages, and he felt he did not belong in his family as only he had this difficulty. Recently, Alan took up voluntary work at a residential institute with persons with disability. He described how now, at the age of 50, he was accepting himself for who he was, overcoming his fears and participating in reading. Alan had many suggestions to make on ways in which a community could support participation, issues of social justice from a fresh perspective, discussed in the next three chapters.

Reflections

During my initial interview with Alan, as well as some conversations and discussions later, he frequently discussed personal difficulties. Alan had emotional outbursts, since his self-confessed fear of reading often got mixed up with accounts of private difficulties he was having. He remained engaged with the research and many times would listen attentively as I paraphrased and simplified what I had written, or read out segments for his feedback, especially

dealing with social justice. I will never again enter a parking lot without glancing around to see whether information is displayed in symbols, or just words, thus excluding persons like Alan, who are not confident enough to trust their understanding of print.

Conclusion

The summaries above do not pretend to do full justice to the personal narratives that developed as the research progressed, co-authored during a number of meetings. This development, and the scripting of experiences and reflections, made material the stories, representing movement through spaces and places, that of day-to-day living, and gave them flesh, embodied them as recordings and writing. This is not to say that they were 'final' in any way, but a segment of time in which the participants voiced their perceptions and moved their perspectives, and mine, across the situations and contexts which originally bound experiences, and into the space of the research. As discussed through the literature⁷¹ reliving experiences through reflection and storying the self is a situated and context-bound new experience, which in the case of the participants above was the 'safe communicative space' of the research. In storying the self, the participants authored their identity by telling others, and themselves, who they were. The identity the participants created was their identity within the research, as they interacted with and transformed not only their past and present experiences but also that which was experienced as a participant. My identity as researcher was shaped and reshaped as the research developed. I was grateful for this opportunity to gain insights, not only into their lives, but also into mine, through the many discussions we had. In the next three chapters, together with the eight persons above, I looked at the emotions, discourses and mediators of participation through which experiences were lived, explored and recreated in the form of the narrative.

Chapter 5 provided a summary of each participant's narrative followed by my reflections. In Chapter 6 the role of emotion in perception of experiences is explored.

⁷¹ (Burnett et al., 2012; Pink, 2012; Haskell. 2002),

Chapter 6 explores experiences perceived through the lens of various emotions, embodied and, as Haskell et al. (2002) wrote, “coming into being through shared interaction”. All extracts are ‘verbatim’ from the narratives constructed by participants.

Chapter 6 Emotions

Introduction

...consciousness emerges from the complex nested intertwining of memory, imagination and sensation (Sumara et al.,2008:240).

The above elements often come together in artistic expression. Billington (2006) credited the novel with:“... a long tradition of attempting to understand and represent the reality of lived experience” (p.283). Sumara et al. (2008) described how situated real or fictitious experiences in literary texts created awareness within the reader, developing consciousness of other minds, empathy, and the creation of own ‘storied experience’ and personal storying. Personal stories are not a collection of memories or recounting of experiences but the very construction of those experiences, the perceptions that coloured them and the meaning they had for the individual whose story it was. Janesick (2010) showed how personal narratives were always powerful in whatever way they were told (p.137). The participants reflected critically on the conditions and cultural norms which shaped perceptions of their experiences and brought forth one emotional response rather than another, endorsing attitudes, values and practices, as found in a number of studies⁷² already reviewed. Many times the participants relived emotions generated during the original experiences, the consciousness of it. Sometimes this was not expected by the participant, as when Jenny left the room to be sick after describing, yet again, being bullied by a teacher. The participants described how these emotions affected their new experiences, and, as Billington (2013)⁷³ and Dirkx (2001) found, they discussed and made narratives out of these experiences for self-knowledge. They repeatedly described their physical sensations and manifestations, recounted and sometimes re-experienced,⁷⁴ and through the emotion generated forged new experiences, because, as Katz (2012)

⁷² (Cooper, 2011; Williams, 2011; Barton, 2007; Barton and Hamilton, 1998).

⁷³ Even in dreams (citing Linden, 2007)

⁷⁴ As explicated in Damasio and Carvalho, 2013; Gallagher, 2006; Dirkx, 2001

described, “It is the very work of structuring action into behavior that is the crucible of emotions” (p.17). As noted previously, the participants discussed and reflected on changes in the way they perceived an event, sometimes leading to learning and new behaviours, as when Alan described his change of behaviour at seminars.⁷⁵ These reflections became part of the embodied, or, as termed by Burnett et al. (2012), material, text of the narrative, both on paper and digital. This allowed the participants to interact with this artifact as they made changes, crossing out, deleting or adding as we discussed and reflected. These personal narratives were summarised in the previous chapter. Line numbers refer to the original narrative, and were kept to help locate the excerpt relative to other parts.

Martha talked about her perceptions of childhood experiences and the emotions these brought forth, which in turn shaped further perception and experiences, saying that it was her perception of experience rather than the experience itself which shaped her present experiences and emotions:

Martha: *If I had to describe my house, it's as if we used to live in a dungeon, always in the dark. In reality, we lived in a very old house, with a very big yard in the middle, and a very big garden at the back side, so my house would have been always full of sun, but I don't remember it.* (Lines 28-32)

During these discussions I sometimes found myself, as described by Spowart and Nairn (2013) in their study of snowboarding mothers, ‘catching’ the emotional state, both positive and negative, of the participant as we talked over these experiences, leading to a shared experiencing and even friendship with some of the participants.

The experiences related by the participants could not really be fragmented into what they felt, or learnt, or why they remembered things the way they did. Most of the experiences involved emotion in some way, and interaction with others. The way they described feeling about something, and how it affected them even now, how their perception of it changed the way they acted over time, the learning which took place, whether intended or not, testified to the complex way in which, with reference to Billington (2013), feeling, perceiving, remembering and learning were linked. Pride and shame vied for top place as

⁷⁵ P. 141

Jenny recollected school experiences that drew these forth, events which may not have brought forth the same emotion in someone else, or from Jenny herself in a different context, emotions which shaped perception of event and self, illustrating the circularity of the embodied perception. She cried tears of shame and frustration while recounting an episode she perceived as humiliation by a teacher, but then swelled with pride when discussing her activity in science class. However, the notion of circularity did not end there. Merleau Ponty (1945; 1962) conceived emotions as parts of an embodied mind, ways of engaging with the world, and sometimes the way a person felt about an experience changed or developed through interaction with others. Some of these changes are described further on.⁷⁶

Some experiences considered important by participants were of, and regenerated, positive feelings such as elation, pride and satisfaction, leading to agency even now, years after they occurred, while others were often of a negative nature, as the participants engaged with literacy in what Holland et al. (2001), through the concept of 'figured worlds',⁷⁷ called "the counter-world", a place where the joy and sense of accomplishment, and the satisfaction of contributing to a community were lacking:

These counter-worlds, though undoubtedly 'figured' as we have used the term, rarely posit what a lived world should be. Instead, they show us what should not be, what threatens us, and they position the persons destined to inhabit them as relationally inferior and perhaps beyond the pale of any imagined community we would ever want to join (p.250).

Karla found discussing experiences which were forged through, or brought forth, negative emotions, difficult and painful, and to be avoided. Other participants sought to discuss such incidents, restorying the experience. Katz (2012) put forward the notion that emotion was more than a lens to view experiences through, being also a crucible to forge them as part of the world we live in. On this subject Katz (2010) stated:

Our feelings are ways that our corporeality comes into our awareness in two directions, as an awareness of internal depths and recesses

⁷⁶ Brooke's acceptance of the necessity of psychological testing to be given support; Martha's discussion of her boss's attitude at work; Alan's frustration at and recognition of his father's narrative; Jenny and Andrew's embodiment of 'being literate'; Wayne's discussion of discourses of deficit; Alan's acceptance of himself and all he has accomplished were just some such experiences.

⁷⁷ P.17

and as a sensibility guiding and attending our reach into the world (p.166).

Perceiving and forging experiences through emotion

Some participants discussed emotional states through 'feelings' these elicited or created, and the effect this had on their participation in literacy events.

Jenny related an incident of teacher-bullying and said:

Jenny: *I have a vivid memory of this incident especially, and it makes me feel sick even now. After that, especially during exams, I used to write my name and give in a blank paper when it came to composition. I was always scared of being made fun of again. I can still feel it, the whole class was laughing at me.*(Lines 41-47)

Martha described feelings of pain associated with reading and writing, even physical pain which she said recurred whenever she was criticised:

Martha: *I still cannot touch my ear, it was pulled so often. (Line 104) ...! Just recently I had a very bad experience at work. I actually felt as if I was back at school. Even my ear started hurting. One of the managers at work sent for me and called me all sort of names, and said I am putting the company to shame because I spelt "Loose" in loose connections with a single O.*(Lines 490-493)

For many years Martha shunned reading and writing, describing how she preferred to leave a youth organisation and be labelled lazy:

Martha: *Even when I became part of the Focolare movement I never said anything; ...I didn't help by reading meetings, writing circulars and so on I preferred to leave.* (Lines 170-173)

Impeding participation

Dirkx (2001) stated, "Emotions are important in adult learning because they can either impede or motivate learning" (p.63). This statement is valid not just for adults, but for all learners. Experiencing negative emotions leads individuals to avoid situations where the experiences may recur, shown in Shuck et al. (2013) and Perry (2006). Brooke did not wish to read in front of

others, following her experience at the psychologist,⁷⁸ where she was told her reading had regressed:

Brooke: *That was horrible and I did not want to go. We were four of us and I did not want to read in front of them.* (Lines 35-36)

Andrew avoided all contact with books, experiencing panic and anxiety when in a library or bookstore.

Andrew: *I think that's how books still make me feel, like I am bad. I think I should be able to handle them but I still can't. I hate book stores and libraries.* (Lines 144-146)

Both Alan and Karla recalled experiencing fear of being perceived as unable to learn during their early days at school, Perry, 1999, described this as consistent with the observations of teachers about children whom they considered as bright but unable to learn, children often labelled as learning disabled.

Karla: *In class I remember always worrying that I was not reading, not understanding what the teacher was teaching us. I was always worrying at school but no one ever asked me why. Instead they told my mother to take me for tests since they thought I was very stupid and could not understand people talking and so on. But I could, and I thought something bad was wrong with me, or that I was being bad.* (Lines 31-38)

Alan: *What I do remember from my school years, not just in the beginning, but right through, is fear. I remember always being afraid because I did not know how to read and write (Lines 29-30)... I am always afraid of getting it wrong. I am afraid to use an ATM. Even to give petrol if the attendant is not there. I am afraid of doing something wrong.* (Lines 290-296)

Panksepp, (2000), referring to Shand 1920's laws of human emotion, reminded us that the ultimate aim of fear is to keep us safe from danger, no matter whether that danger is real or not.

⁷⁸ Her perception of this visit developed into anger at even having to be assessed as well as how she was compelled to change her image of herself, but this came about after she reflected on and discussed her narrative.

Participants reflected on how being bullied had a paralysing effect on their participation in reading and writing. Such experiences, they said, left them fearful and ashamed. Katz (2001) described shame as exclusionary, stating, "Shame carries a sense of isolation from community" (p.150). Some participants described still feeling ashamed even though they knew that they shouldn't. After Jenny related how a teacher read out her work in class one time and made fun of her, she described her 'resistance' to being put in a similar position:

Jenny: *After that, especially during exams, I used to write my name and give in a blank paper when it came to composition. (Lines 44-46) And: There were other interesting jobs I would have liked to do over the years, but if they required writing I was always scared to apply. (Lines 123-125)*

Martha said a feeling of shame persisted in adulthood and affected her experiences until the present day, since at the slightest criticism she 'was back in that classroom being called':

Martha: *...all sorts of names: careless, living in the moon, distracted, not trying at all, doing it on purpose, because we just want to be fussed over, spoilt,,,(Lines 108-111)*

Martha got visibly upset on the word 'spoil' and had to pause; she had just related details of a very traumatic childhood which included the illness and death of her father. She also cried tears of humiliation, and had me crying along with her, when she described telling her husband that she could not read and write:

Martha: *No one knew I couldn't read, and no one knew that I couldn't write a word, no one knew. To tell my husband I felt it was the worst thing I could ever tell him. I can feel the panic I had that day. I started, stopped, started again. I can still see his shock. What made it especially bad was that I couldn't write. I never could, and that is what made it so bad. (Lines 188-181)*

Power structures in assessments were perceived by participants as inflicting shame and humiliation. Wayne explained at length how the system of assessments worked to shame students who did not fit the established norms:

Wayne: *...and so I was branded as an underperformer, lazy, distracted, and all those words. Your classmates start looking at you differently too. (Lines 71-72)*

This sentiment was echoed by Karla, whose anger and frustration led her to seek academic achievement, to “prove” she was not ‘stupid’:

Karla: *People look at you differently when you can't read. I guess I wanted to think of myself, and have others think of me as a good reader. (Lines 33-34)*

Further on she angrily exclaimed: *Had I been taught at school the way I was taught outside school, I would have grasped it, and just carried on with my classmates. (Lines 51-52, 94)*

Alan was frustrated at his inability to be part of what he considered a reading community to which his whole family belonged. During discussions Alan dwelled on the words below every time we discussed the story:

Alan: *My father was always reading. He never went to school and he can read in three languages, Maltese, English and even Italian. He always tells us, he wanted to learn but he could only go to school for one year because they used to collect the rubbish in Valletta, and he says that while on their way to Valletta he would be on the 'horse' underneath, find some newspaper, and read. My father was always reading. In the morning, he buys the paper, and he always has a book. When he worked he used to buy the newspapers for his employer, and he used to wake up extra early to have time to read them all before giving them to him. If he sees a book, he reads it. Even my mum and my brother and sister read sometimes. (Lines 65-74)*

And added in his story:

Alan: *I wish I could cut off my little finger to be able to read. It is something beautiful to be able to read, to pick up a book and read! (Lines 297-298) ... Although today there are so many other ways of learning I think nothing can replace learning from a book. (Lines 311-312)I dream of walking into a bookstore, buying a book, walking out with it and being able to read it. (Lines 322-323). He went on to say: Right now, I am passing through a phase where I don't feel like doing anything. Just staring, I could be lost in a book instead, pass the time, and learn. (Lines 216-217)*

When Alan discussed renovating old houses his tone of voice became confident, his head went up and his eyes shone with pride:

Alan: *While still quite young, I found I was good at interpreting visual information. I could get a message in a picture much faster than other people could. Even seeing broken down houses and imagining what they would look like renovated. The first house was an unused chicken farm. No one wanted to work in it for me. But as soon as I saw it I told myself I want this place. And it came beautiful. When I was finished with it, it was beautiful. I renovated seven farmhouses in all. Well, then I had another one in Zebbug. That is more of a palazzo than a house. It has a beautiful garden, which I designed myself, with different levels of plants, fountains, and even a secluded pool that looks like it is part of it, surrounded by plants. The furniture is grand, and the table in the dining room alone cost a fortune. It is an antique from the time of the knights. I did all the furnishings myself. The house was featured in the House and Garden magazine. I have a shoebox full of photos I took before and after.* (Lines 132-151)

Then the mood changed and shame took over again. Even without the words, the body posture and sad voice continued the story, recurring every time we discussed his perception of his inability to read:

Alan: *I rent it out to pay the loan I took out to arrange and furnish it, but because I do not read and write I do not get as much business as I should. When people want to book they ask questions and want to know about dates and so on. I am not capable. I can't keep asking people to help me. I am tired, tired of always having to ask someone to help me write. I am tired, tired, tired. So I put it in the hands of an agency. I am tired, tired, tired of not being able to write. Some people sometimes can help you, other times they can't.* (Lines 151-158)

Motivating participation

At the beginning of his story Alan talked about travelling in animated enthusiasm:

Alan: *I have loved travelling since I was young. When I was about nine I went on a school trip and I was determined to keep travelling, I work, save and travel. When I started travelling I realized that I needed to read. The places where I was going, my ticket, the gates, I realized that I needed to read.* (Lines 15-18)

The participants recalled, discussed and reflected on many experiences, and re-experienced⁷⁹ both negative emotions, such as fear and shame, as well as positive ones, such as enthusiasm and pride, together with the way these affected experiences in the present or were expected to affect them in the future.

In spite of having struggled with reading till he was about eight or nine, Damien stated he never perceived himself as 'lacking', and, reflecting on his experiences, could not recall any negative experiences related to this:

Damien: *When I was young, when I couldn't read, I remember it was a bit annoying, but I have forgotten that period. Nothing felt bad enough to remember. I see myself as a reader. (Lines 446-448)*

It seemed as if Damien had escaped being exposed to discourses of deficit, or they had not been significant enough in his experiences for him to remember, or else, maybe, there was a fear of remembering them, as with Karla, because they might bring about change in his perception of himself, and the social identities he was enacting, though, unlike Karla, Damien did engage extensively in reflecting on the experiences he related. He discussed his introduction to science and his fascination with the subject on a number of occasions, storying and restorying the experience, sometimes with little anecdotes as asides. This passion for science, he reflected, enabled literacy learning, embodying his experience of reading through curiosity, satisfaction and pride.

Damien: *I wanted to become a scientist and it was one of the things that made me read. (Lines 8-9)*

In a voice excited even now, and enthusiasm undiminished by repeated discussions of this very point, he went on:

Damien: *There was a particular book which I remember, a book with a battery. It was about electricity, so I was introduced to words like battery, bulb and cell. Along with the picture, it only had a couple of sentences per page. They were things I liked reading about. (Lines 15-18)*

⁷⁹ As explained by participants e.g. Martha (each time she discussed her experience at graduation) would grin and practically bounce on the chair as she retold a story of meeting someone who used to doubt her, right after the ceremony.

And

Damien: ...another book which I remember, in fact a book I got fixated on, was a book in which a boy, somehow, managed to make a grandfather clock. He made all the cogwheels; he made this machine, and that has been a dream, has become a dream. (Lines 25-28)

Student passion for a topic enhances literacy learning.⁸⁰ While a love for science motivated Damien to read, his writing was mediated through his passion for sailing:

Damien: At year 5, in grade 5, I started sailing, and all the compositions, and I repeat all, the compositions, right up to, even after I finished, until I got my O-Levels ... in all of them sailing had to crop up. I might go out of point completely, but a sentence to do with sailing had to come in. It was my challenge and my trademark. (Lines 84-89)

In a particular session Alan talked about how he felt fear made him hold back, but then, when asked, he recalled events he perceived as enabling. He reflected on his time in Trade School studying tailoring, saying that although he had forgotten until our discussion, there were times when he felt proud of himself:

Alan: I used to do well. I was very happy there. I used to feel good that I had done a piece of work and the teacher tells me good work, well done. Those things I remember. ... I had to do some reading and writing while I was there, but very little. For some reason I was not so afraid there, I think because the reading and writing was about things I knew about and that interested me ... (Lines 92-102)

A short while after this discussion, in which we had discussed his fearfulness, Alan joined a prayer group. At our last meeting he said:

Alan: I think I am not so afraid. At prayer group I follow all the words of the songs on the screen, and I can sing with them, and now I can understand the readings too. I am reading a book, which is not for children, one my friends have read and lent to me. I read slowly, but I can understand it, ... (Lines 337-341)

⁸⁰ (Betts, 2004; Pierson, 1999; among others)

For Alan, remembering one event helped him recall others, sometimes with the help of artifacts such as photographs, other times through discussion. Alan confessed that this was like living through his life again, only this time it was written so he would not forget. I used to read excerpts or we would pair read, and when we read it through on the last day, it was, for him, a treasured document, which he kept to share with his friend as the story of his life.

Wayne intentionally used his past experiences of success to set goals and 'talk' himself out of his doubts, motivating further action. Wayne was an entrepreneur, owning two companies and shares in a third. He put it this way:

Wayne: *I have to keep telling myself, reminding myself, on a daily basis, that I work very hard. I work very hard and I achieve a lot...*(Lines 27-28)

Perception of teacher praise for achievement in science class sustained Jenny for a long time, she said, even leading to her choosing a science option at secondary school. Below she graphically described one of these empowering incidents, which she referred to many times:

Jenny: *I remember how one time we had an experiment with peas and large beans and volume. I remember the beans, and the peas, which are smaller. Before she started the experiment she wanted, she asked what we thought would happen with the volume it would take, and I remember, I don't know how, but I said, the peas, because being small, it would fill up the spaces more; she was quite surprised that I worked it out like that. (Lines 77-82)*

Back to perception

The emotionally charged experiences described above were ways in which the participants felt that they engaged with the world, ways of being and knowing,⁸¹ not in some vacuum, interacting with an abstract self but in lived environments dependent on the values, beliefs and attitudes of others.⁸² While describing experiences subjectively labelled positive and negative by the participants may uncover common ground for the way they were perceived, this did not in itself explain the differences in the emotional reactions of individuals. It is philosophy to which one must turn. The participants were conscious of, and perceived, events in different ways; events were perceived

⁸¹ Sumara et al., 2008; Haskell et al. 2002; Merleau-Ponty, 1964)

⁸² (Boiger and Mesquita, 2012; Cooper, 2011; Barton, 2007; Barton and Hamilton, 1998).

differently by the same individuals in different environments or interactions. While Martha felt threatened by writing in many circumstances, relating incidents of panic and anxiety, yet she went on to say that if she felt 'safe' she would experiment with words and not feel upset at all. In spite of the participants not being able to read as well as their peers, they perceived the experience in diverse manners and reacted in diverse ways. Alan talked about fear, Damien mentioned slight annoyance, Martha defiance, Karla worry, Jenny and Brooke felt isolated and withdrew and Wayne professed to feel humiliated. As a number of researchers found, these diverse emotions were both dependent on individual perception of experience and constructive of the experience itself.⁸³ The ways we engage with the world, which we constitute by our engagement with it, is dependent on our interaction with ourselves and others. In the next chapter I discuss the discourses surrounding and produced by the participants as they continue to reflect on their experiences, authoring their main-character role in their personal story.

The role of emotion in enabling or hindering participation in reading and writing was explored. In the next chapter, together with the participants, I examine the discourses through which these emotions were embodied.

⁸³ (Billington, 2013; Damasio and Carvalho, 2013; Boiger and Mesquita, 2012; Katz, 2010; Talarico et al., 2004)

In this study, three main themes were negotiated with the participants as important: the role of emotion, the discourses, which triggered these emotions and expressed them, and the artifacts that mediated their life experiences that included reading and writing.

Chapter 7 Living the discourse

Discourse is lived through participation in day-to-day experiences, as stated by Fairclough(2005):

Discourse figures in broadly three ways in social practices. First, it figures as a part of the social activity within a practice. Second, discourse figures in representations.... Representation is a process of social construction of practices, including reflexive self-construction – representations enter and shape social processes and practices. Third, discourse figures in ways of being, in the constitution of identities (p.3).

Introduction

The discourses discussed in this chapter reflect both individual participations as well as the social landscape in Malta, both a construction of, and constructing the discursive participation. The creating of the discourse itself and its reconfiguration through reflection (Bansel, 2013) was the result of individual propensity and identity as well as cultural definition of narrative. Ultimately, however, and most significantly, these discourses were participations in lived experiences, evidence of the situated awareness of each participant at a particular space in a particular time through the use of language to create and reflect what Bakhtin (1981) termed, “a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for social significance” (p.333). It follows, then, that in this study, discourses were ideological participations in lived experience, shaping perceptions, which promoted or hindered participation in reading and writing. Such perceptions were embodied in the sensory materiality discourses evoked, as demonstrated in Rowsell (2011).

Theoretical framework

This study looked to neurophenomenology for its philosophical stance, seeing discourses as embodied participations in lived experiences mediated mostly, but not exclusively, by language-in-use (Gee, 1996; 2013). Discourses were

constructed by, and in turn constructed, the social reality of the participants, both affected by and causing changes in perception and attitudes.

The emotions that discourse both creates and emanates from embody how social behaviour and actions interact with individual action and reaction to become shared experiences in a corporeal way (Katz, 2012). This connection between the social and cultural basis of discourse and the embodied element, the way it is constructed through, the planning, the mental representation and the speaking of the words, was also made by Gee (2013). He pointed out that discourse was bound by the social discourses to which the individual was affiliated and in which the language was being used, yet determined by individual experiences, simultaneously personal, social and cultural (p.68). Gee (1996) used discourse with a capital 'D' to refer to the situated meaning of a discourse, its cultural and social underpinnings, and discourse with a lower-case 'd' to refer to language-in-use. Gee (2013) called discourse 'a tool' which we used, along with other tools such as technology, to "continually build and rebuild our world" (p.11). It transformed, and was in turn transformed, by its use in the significance of what was being said, the activity it supported, the identities and relationships it was enacting, and the perspectives through which it connected the facets of the particular situation with the social world of the individual (p.11-13). In this study, the participants reflected on discourses in which they participated through experiences, and discussed them through discourse reflecting the moment, the language-in-use as defined by Gee, to reflect the re-experiencing of discourses recalled through the emotions that gave them importance in the first place, embodied experiences of elation, anger, frustration, and humiliation.

I did not start out with the intention of including the neurological among the borders, of different disciplines, that I crossed. However, when the participants, both during interviews as well as in reflections, placed much emphasis on making meaning through the lens of emotion and its physical manifestation, my phenomenological framework did not suffice and I looked to neuro-phenomenology, as an approach to holistic 'knowing', together with perception based on social and cultural norms.⁸⁴ This helped me make sense of discourses the participants discussed and re-experienced, as when Jenny

⁸⁴ as discussed in Chapter 4 and literature reviewed in Chapters 3 and 6.

reflected on an episode of frustration after a visit to her children's school, talking of a heaviness she experienced, explaining that this was a physical sensation and that she felt much better because of talking. Martha reacted to a discourse, already included in her narrative by saying that even re-reading it left her feeling 'blocked' as she called it, unable to react, using language as the tool described by Gee (1996; 2013) to portray the embodiment of the participation. Karla, after discussing her transcript and narrative once, declined to reflect on her past experiences, saying that it made her feel upset and physically unwell. Andrew described reacting with a panic attack every time he walked into a library or bookstore, and through discussion concluded that there could be a connection with traumatic events in childhood. It was the sheer physicality of this data that led me to search outside my original frameworks for illumination to allow me to explain experiences both as lived within the social setting, and re-experienced within the research setting through what Rowsell (2011) termed as, "speaking to the senses" (p.331).

Gee (2013) credited language with 'magical properties' in that its nature changed according to the situation in which it was used, while at the same time constructing the same situation, stating, "It seems, then, that we fit our language to a situation that our language, in turn, helps to create in the first place" (p.10). Language, Gee pointed out, served not only as a means for communication but also, "to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions" (p.1). Very often, the very nature of language excluded persons from participation, in a field in which they were not affiliated, unless they were supported or mentored. Gee (2013) used the metaphor of a game, where language used to explain play could only be understood from inside the game, highlighting how discourse could be responsible for both including and excluding individuals from a social practice. Discourse was powerful because it had the ability to propel itself away from its originators and gave the impression of being neutral. That was not true, since the meaning in texts, both written and spoken, and including facial expression, posture, attitude and all that helped make meaning and define our world, ourselves and those around us, was dependent on by whom, where, how and when the discourses occurred (Gee, 2013, 2004, 1988; Van Dijk, 2011; Rogers 2004b).

The text

The participants and I selected and explored excerpts from their personal narratives. These reflected social realities and social interactions as perceived and constructed by them. They reflected on their identities as readers and writers as well as participants in this study. In this way the participants were engaged in making meaning of their experiences, simultaneously creating new ones which included me as a researcher, in what Fairclough (2008) described as “texturing (the process of making texts as a facet of social action and interaction)” (p.229).

These narratives were not a static story, a history of lived experiences but a fluid text, an unfinished discourse cut off at a specific point due to the exigencies of research,⁸⁵ developed over a number of meetings, with inherent possibility of further development through reflection on, and reframing of, life experiences.

Form

The relationship between the form of a text and the function it served could be analysed critically to reveal actions dependent on that discourse, acts of power, emotional engagement, identity, judgement and interaction. This chapter was limited to exploring discourses that constructed or reflected the emotional engagement of the participants, as discussed in the previous chapter, with those experiences which enabled or constrained literacy participations as social practice. Each word in each narrative reflected a choice resultant from the interaction between linguistic structure and social structure (Gee, 2013; Fairclough, 2008; Halliday, 1975; 2009). Each text was a situated narrative of experiences as perceived by the participant, and the language used was as individual as the text, reflecting gender, perceived class distinctions in use of language, garrulity and engagement with the research, reflected through the use of emotive words and phrases, length of sentences, variety of topics and reflexive statements included in the narrative (Gee, 2008). The language forming the text was mainly that of the participant, with contributions by me, as the researcher, when participants struggled to express a thought or follow through an idea, often saying it first in Maltese. For some

⁸⁵ (as negotiated with participants, Chapter 4, Methodology)

participants poetry⁸⁶ (Appendix V) provided a way to express thoughts they could not encapsulate in prose.

All the initial interviews, most of the final sessions and many of the discussions were recorded. Some conversations and discussions were not recorded electronically but notes were made as soon as possible after. These notes were later discussed with participants, and choices made on what was to form part of the narrative and how it was to be included, sometimes altering the narrative to date. Each narrative was unique and this was reflected in the disparity of styles and length, with the shortest narrative being only 70 lines long and the longest 573. The data in this study was not just the narrative itself, but included the process through which it was created, by what Gee (2013) refers to as, “taking, negotiating and contesting perspectives created in and through language” (p.5).

Process

Speakers and writers use the resources of grammar to design their sentences and texts in ways that communicate perspectives on reality, carry out various social activities ... and enact different social identities. (Gee, 2013:5)

When transcripts of the interviews were discussed with each participant, Wayne, Damien and Brooke accepted the transcripts as they were. Karla clarified a number of points, Andrew, Alan and Martha asked for parts of the transcript to be left out of the research while Jenny wished to alter the wording of some of her responses as she considered she had not explained herself well. Gee (2013) pointed out that the luxury of reflection on what people said is not often indulged in, however once we reflected on what people said we would, “often discover better, deeper and more humane interpretations” (p.IX). This became apparent as the participants and I reflected on what we were writing. There were no ‘right’ questions or ‘right’ answers. For each interview, every word, every phrase, every recount of a recollection, the way it was articulated was a choice - of tone, voice, and vocabulary - and these choices were open to change. Sometimes the participants described an experience, but then retold it in a different way, sometimes reflecting about seeing events

⁸⁶ As explained in more detail in Chapter 4, I had created a found-data poem to help me focus, and when I showed this to the participants some of them asked for help to write their own.

and even themselves differently. Some of the participants, mainly Wayne and Damien, would only add to the narrative in a lateral, meandering way, others changed the narrative regularly to reflect the re-experience of the participation, while two preferred to update their narrative by using epilogue, brackets and italics. Brooke reiterated the same narrative in much the same form, making minor adjustments and additions.

Karla did not wish to discuss what she had said previously after reflecting on it once, saying it was too distressing to think about a time when she could not read, and that she now thought of herself as a good reader, so she only added briefly to it, just enough to update. During the last session, Andrew changed his introduction of himself to reflect his status at that moment in time, including age and occupation, while Alan left the introduction as it was, and discussed the age change, a year older, as part of a narrative that was recounted in linear, temporal order. Wayne and Damien moved back and forth in time relating various incidents linked by relevance to the topic under discussion. Most of the participants made some of their reflective discourse part of their story, using words like “After thinking about it...” and “through our discussions...” while others preferred to include only their concluding thoughts and leave out the process. Two wished to include the question, which asked them to reflect on a certain point, together with the answer, as a box inserted in the main text. Through these interviews and discussions my perceptions of what my study was about changed, and my focus shifted from the participants’ experiences of literacy difficulties towards daily life experiences which included reading and writing. This change was apparent in my linguistic form as well, as I did not continue to use words such as ‘struggling’ or ‘expert and proficient’ reader, reflecting my change in social interaction with the participants and the research itself. The narratives are line-numbered to enable the reader to place the excerpts below within the wider story of other excerpts used.

Methodological matters

Although a full Critical Discourse analysis was out of the scope of this study, looking at discourse critically to expose underlying themes and power structures was a flexible and effective methodology that fit in well with a collaborative approach (Wodak, 2007; Rogers, 2004b). Its relevance to this study on participations in literacy was, as Rogers (2004) stated, to show, “...

how people are enabled and constrained by particular sets of discursive arrangements” (p.252) in their day-to-day life experiences.

Fairclough (2005) showed, as quoted above, how critical discourse analysis could be an effective approach across various ways of data collection and analysis when addressing current issues (p.1).

Selection of excerpts

The excerpts selected for discussion in this chapter are discourses located in experiences that included reading and writing, albeit sometimes indirectly. The selection was by no means exhaustive, but, rather, specific embodied experiences of unique individuals as they interacted, or dialogued, with social reality in a particular context, space, and time (Holquist et al., 2011; Bakhtin, 1986). They were shaped by the social context in which they were reflected upon, as well as the interaction of the discourse with perceptions, emotions and identity in that particular space and time of the retelling of experiences, together with me as part of the research. The spaces in which the reflections took place determined the nature of the dialogue, and a time-place chart is included in Appendix III, while the effect this had on the narrative was discussed in more detail in the chapter on methodology.

Analysis

Analysis in this study was ongoing, exploring what Fairclough (2008) called the dialogic relationship between the texts and social practice, by discussing and reflecting upon issues, tensions and inconsistencies raised in the crafting of the narratives. This ongoing analysis negotiated the discourses perceived as having enabled or constrained literacy participation, often through emotions generated or reflected. The participants and I met a number of times over a period of one year, and reflected on issues raised by the narratives. A record of these meetings is found in Appendices I and III. Sometimes these discussions brought to mind experiences not yet disclosed. Other times they involved a retelling of an experience but maybe from a different perspective. As described in Chapter 4, poetry⁸⁷ was used to narrow the focus of the data and interact with emotional issues when prose did not serve. Some

⁸⁷ I wrote the first poem to help focus my data, showed it to the participants, some of whom asked for help to write their own.

participants, especially Wayne, added more discursive experiences they remembered or retold to the narrative, which developed⁸⁸ as explained in the chapter on methods, and was organised as each participant wished, with each discussion, mainly according to the theme of the experience in the narrative at the particular point. In fact, his narrative was one of the longest, at over 500 lines and spanning a multitude of topics. Others such as Brooke reflected and identified discourses already part of the narrative. Each participant and I read and re-read the narratives a number of times. The lens used most frequently by the participants to discuss experiences was that of emotion, reflecting the data found in Chapter 6. Most of the emotions described in Chapter 6 arose through or were described by discourses about self, those about relations and interactions with social practices, and discourses that shed light on the world in which the interactions and social practices took place were reflected on. Guided by what Fairclough (2005) called the three ways in which discourse figured in social practice (p.3), as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, three categories were identified, namely cultural, social, and personal. The discourses could have been grouped in other ways, and other discourses identified, however these three categories were selected to examine how the excerpts of discourse reflected the social activity of the participants in day-to-day social practice, the ways they represented their participations in social activity and how they discoursed their identity and self, what Fairclough (2005) identified as “being-in-the-world” (p.3).

⁸⁸ An in-depth interview and discussion which formed the basis of the narrative, the experiences then discussed and reflected on and developed into a narrative collaboratively.

Table 4 Cultural, social and personal perspectives of participations

Cultural	Discourses reflecting the cultural norms which affected the experiences the participants lived through, and the emotions brought forth by the social realities they felt they were living. These included the wider issues of gender, social expectations, political issues and social justice.
Social	Discourses participated in through Interaction with the social world, to interpret and construct reality.
Personal	Discourses concerned with the participants' ways of being-in-the-world, the language they used to construct self-knowledge and how their idea of 'self' influenced their discourses.

As explained above, with reference to Fairclough (2005), these three categories were selected as representative of the experiences the participants were reflecting on, but did not mean other categories were not present. The discourses as identified collaboratively with the participants were reviewed to identify what Gee (2013) called the significant element or value, often reflected through feelings or emotions which engaged participation in the discourse in the first place, and how this enabled or constrained participations. A sample of discourses of individual participants as negotiated within the three categories, as well as under the emotional category discussed in Chapter 6, are found in Appendix IX.

Issues of gender, assessment, identity and social justice were identified as important during discussion with the participants still engaged with the research, mainly Jenny, Martha, Alan and Andrew, and to a lesser extent Wayne and Damien. Some excerpts were discarded, while others were negotiated for their inclusion, as enabling or constraining literacy practices.

Below are presented discourses of childhood, school-based discourses and adulthood. Discourses constructed by the participants as they reflected on their experiences were also explored for insights into the protagonist in each personal narrative.

Perceptions of social reality and identity

... the social event cannot be properly understood, interpreted appropriately, or described in a relevant fashion, unless one looks beyond the event itself to other phenomena (for example cultural setting, speech situation, shared background assumptions) within which the event is embedded. (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992:21)

The individuals living a social event construct social reality, and in turn, it constructs the experience being lived. The participants discussed the social realities through a lens of participation in discourses that enabled or constrained literacy practices through the emotions they reflected or generated. As they reflected on the text they created they uncovered the identities they had sedimented in the text of the narrative over a year, in the different spaces where it was constructed and the diverse positions occupied by the participants as it was generated. Rowsell and Pahl (2007) discussed how exploring the discourse of identities 'sedimented' into texts leads to a better understanding of how the text came into being (Rowsell and Pahl, 2007).

Childhood participation in reading and writing

One topic, which emerged from the interviews and was discussed with the participants was their early interaction with reading and writing, not isolated, but embedded in their social realities..

Martha and Andrew discussed being surrounded by a discourse of traumatic experiences:

Andrew: *My young days were difficult because of the death of my father. I think it was as if I developed slowly and it took a long time to get myself organized. My father died when I was seven, but he was unwell for a long time before that, so he needed a lot of attention. There was never much time for us.* (Lines 7 – 11)

In addition:

Andrew: *After my father died I was always afraid my mother would go away somewhere too. One day, during break, I ran all the way home from school to make sure she had not gone away.* (Lines 30 -33)

Martha: *There was always so much pain and crying around! My father's first heart attack was when I was six months old. And then he died when I was eight. So in those eight years he was always struggling in and out of hospital* (Lines 27 – 29)

And:

Martha: *I remember that we used to be terrified at night, and even sometimes wet the bed. How terrified we used to be! I hated Easter because Easter was death, and death was so present in my house.* (Lines 41 -43)

As both participants reflected on these remembered discourses, each in their own way, they refer to confusion, and fear, using very different styles of language: Andrew uses the first person and a reserved vocabulary while Martha uses emotive language and a sense of solidarity within family, and as stated in Gee (2013), "Discourses are out in the world and history as co-ordinations ('a dance') of people, places, times, actions ..." (p.32). They both commented that such events made it difficult for them to involve themselves sufficiently in their learning, perceiving the discourses as constraining discourses when it came to reading and writing. Ayyash-Abdo, (2001), points out that children's needs after the death of a parent are often not met since the other parent is usually too distraught to offer support.

Jenny recalled elements of family literacy in pre-computer days, a childhood that: *was quite a happy childhood, mostly playing. In those days, we used to play outside and meet friends* (Lines 6-7), and although she preferred to play or do crafts rather than reading, she remembered:

Jenny: *My brothers, and my sister, always had books. Some had pictures, and that was something that fascinated me. The brother who is a bit older than me read a lot, he used to read a lot ... I remember books with pictures and maybe one sentence. I remember my mother had bought a collection of books. In those days families used to buy an encyclopaedia. I think it was something that everyone would buy, and we had a treasure chest of books that came with it.* (Lines 22-32)

In colonial Malta children's books would have been in English. The language of instruction in schools was English, with Maltese being introduced later:

Jenny: *At school, at first I was also very happy. Learning nursery rhymes, the alphabet, reading single words and short phrases and sentences, there was no problem. I enjoyed my lessons, especially since we first started in English. I think I was fine while we learnt in English only. ... I remember that in the first years I was quite a good student, (Lines 8-13).*

After Malta became independent, in 1964, Maltese became the first language of instruction in state schools.

Brooke: *I started school when I was three, at the school in the village where I lived... I loved the stories and I knew all the songs. I knew mostly Maltese. ... (Lines 1-11)*

Both Jenny and Brooke found participation difficult once their mother tongue was not used much. On the other hand, Wayne, from an affluent, middle-class family found communicating and participating in school literacy easy, being an extension of his home literacy participations (Heath, 1986).

Wayne: *During my primary school years I think I was somewhat 'teacher's pet'. I had very good vocabulary and my English was very good. I had a vast amount of general knowledge, and in my early school years that used to bridge the gap. The teachers saw me as clever and knowledgeable. I could communicate very well verbally, and after all writing and reading was only a communication tool. (Lines 52-59)*

Karla, Alan and Damien recalled being unable to read, but there the similarity ends:

Karla: *In class, I remember always worrying that I was not reading ... but no one ever asked me why. Instead, they told my mother to take me for tests since they thought I was very stupid and could not understand people talking and so on. But I could, and I thought something bad was wrong with me, or that I was being bad. (Lines 22-26)*

Alan: *What I do remember from my school years, not just in the beginning, but right through, is fear. I remember always being afraid because I did not know how to read and write. ...I never drew attention. I was a very quiet, very timid boy. It's very difficult to talk about school. What I remember is that when I would not read and write I was always put in the back. (Lines 28-34)*

Damien: *I don't remember how old I was, I suppose between eight and nine. ... I wanted to become a scientist and it was one of the things that made me read. At that time I couldn't read. I took long to read, because my sister, who is five years younger than me, learnt to read before me. However, at the time, I didn't use to think about it. My mother was careful not to compare us, just support me. I didn't think of myself relative to others...* (Lines 5-14)

One question this discourse raised was whether the constraints on literacy practice the participants encountered stemmed from their perceived inability to read or the lack of support to participate in reading and writing.

School and participation in reading and writing

Schooling shaped a considerable portion of the participants' perceptions of self and the world around them. The power structures disclosed by examining discourse are not manifest only in speech, but also through the actions of those who are in a dominant position. In his recollection of school experiences Alan described how an inability to read was equated with an unwillingness to learn or "stupidity" by teachers, and led to exclusion at the back of the class (Lines 32-33; 44-45). Brooke recalled being excluded from class and receiving instruction alone (Lines 18-19). Two other participants retold incidents of what they perceived as deliberate bullying by a teacher, Martha and Jenny, while Karla described the terrible feelings of inferiority she felt when discussions about having her assessed went on over her head (Lines 25-26).

Martha: *I'd be thrown out of class. I still cannot touch my ear, it was pulled so often. When I remember getting into trouble at school, I see a short nun, her face always red, and always angry, always angry. My twin and I made mistakes all the time, because if you copy wrongly, if you mix up the letters, you are in trouble. I was called all sorts of names: careless, living in the moon, distracted, NOT trying at all, doing it on purpose, because we just want to be fussed over* (Lines 88-93).

Jenny: *One day we had dictation and a composition, and this teacher said, "LET me tell you what she wrote", and she gave the name and read what I had written to the rest of the class and made fun of me and that was it. After that, especially during exams, I used to write my name and give in a blank paper when it came to composition. I was always scared of being made fun of again. I can still feel it, the whole class was laughing at me.* (Lines 42-47) ... *The girl*

that was sitting next to me said that she was missing a rubber and so this teacher came along, in those days we used to have satchels not a bag, a leather satchel, and she turned my satchel upside down, everything fell onto the desk, and she went all through my things roughly and then she told me to pick it up, and she called me careless, and obviously, the rubber wasn't there because I hadn't taken it. (Lines 56-61)

Wayne too struggled with discourse from his school days, and considered it very powerful:

Wayne: *I achieve a lot, but down there is a worm, that always keeps reminding you, that your teachers, in those vulnerable years thought that and told you those words which now have a very solid basis and are very hard to dislodge, During your school years you are very vulnerable. (Lines 28-32)*

Wayne reflects on the equally strong influence of positive discourse at school:

Wayne: *Only two people looked at me positively at that time, and they stand out like a beacon, even now. One was the guidance teacher, who once told me: "What you do is not bad, just different. You will still get there, but in your own way". She did not use the word dyslexia, but she had identified the fact that I had an alternate way of looking at things. I must have been form Four. Another person was our English Literature teacher, who said, and even wrote on my reports, "What Wayne does in class is not being reflected in this report and what he did in his exams and this should require further investigation". He knew something was not right, and that I could be capable. (Lines 80-90)*

Jenny perceived interplay of gendered discourse with school discourse as influential in her life-course. She reflected on the discourse of gender dominant in Malta while she was growing up, a discourse in which men participated by being the sole breadwinners and women as homemakers. Girls were taught cooking, sewing and child-rearing skills. Jenny believed she was allowed to go to a Trade School for Art and Design because as a girl her future employment was not given importance:

Jenny: *Not many boys were allowed to go there I think, but being a girl my mother was more interested in my knowing how to cook and clean the house and so on (Lines 100-102).*

Once at the Trade School she did not do much reading and writing, as the students, mostly girls:

Jenny: ... *didn't like the subject, and I was one of them! So we used to do everything not to have the lesson done, especially with the Maltese and English* (Lines 110-112).

Adult participation in reading and writing

The lack of participation in reading and writing because of the discourse of gender affected Jenny in her adult life:

Jenny: *I went on to do many other things in my life. I have worked as a salesgirl, as a housekeeper for the Egyptian ambassador and part time as chambermaid, waitress and even Pizza delivery person. There were other interesting jobs I would have liked to do over the years, but if they required writing I was always scared to apply.* (Lines 120-125)

Gendered discourse had an influence on Wayne's life. Young men were prepared for a lifetime of work, preferably at the same occupation, earning enough to support a family. When Wayne did badly in secondary school his father intervened and:

Wayne: *He chose architecture for me and it took up eight years, ten years of my life... (Lines 232 -213). ...at a certain point in life you realize that life is passing you by and you question whether you are going to spend the rest of your life there* (Lines 231-232).

He did not feel engaged in reading and writing, but just did the barest minimum. While reflecting on his narrative, he questioned his own words and explained his actions at staying so long in a job he did not like as:

Wayne: *I suppose that was my way of conforming with what society and my family expected.* (Lines 232 -233).

Andrew explained how he was expected to conform when his family 'settled' him in a family firm as a place of employment, where, however, once he earned enough skills by participating in the family business, he made his own way:

Andrew: *I joined the bank to escape a family business run by my grandfather. ... He was quite angry when I went to the bank instead, but I wanted to be independent.*(Lines 3-6)

As an adult, Martha had to swim against the current of family discourse. When reflecting on this experience on the last day, she did not want to change the narrative, but decided to use brackets to add comments:

Martha: *I mean, when I told them I was going to start studying ... at home there was war ... Everyone, my husband, no one, could understand. They couldn't understand me... I remember ... No one would believe it. (This made me feel as if I was on a balance, which if I was receiving security during lessons went up, during input from family it went down, like a see-saw).* (Lines 231-235)

Power and participation

In every social practice tensions between different views of social realities demarcate the power held by different social parties to the practice. In reading and writing, it is no different, as was uncovered through reflection of the discourses surrounding the participants. Billington (1995) credited discourse analysis with the ability, "to give expression to the power relations which exist in the tension between the individual, the life of others and their different social positions" (p.37). The discourses discussed below try to make explicit some of the power structures in the life of the participants and how these served to hinder or enable their participation.

Social class

The language used by Wayne, Jenny and Alan highlighted class differences between those who attended free state schools and those who attended fee-paying church schools, where expectations were higher, and students rarely went on to Trade Schools. What was a natural progression for Jenny: "*I studied technical drawing, and chose to focus on pottery*" (line 116) and Alan: "*I did the Exams [and] I passed. I did the City and Guilds*" (line101), was a mark of failure for Wayne, who used words such as '*side-tracked into ... a Trade School*' (line 5). Through discussion, Wayne recalled further context to, as Van Dijk (1998) noted: "understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality" (p.352) as he reflected on his original comment (line 214-215).

Shame

Alan recalled how he spent his life feeling shame at not meeting what he perceived as standards of literacy set by others, and explained that he deprived himself from participation in the performing arts for many years out of fear of being found out. Wayne felt railroaded into work he did not wish to do, while Martha recalled her desperation when she had to tell her husband about her difficulties and talked about how she denied herself social opportunities to hide what she saw as the humiliating truth. One education discourse perpetrated the view that only 'bright' students study sciences. Jenny spoke with regret about having given up chemistry: *"I also loved chemistry and I was good at it, but because of the reading I was told it was not for me"* (Lines 99-100), making her unable to work in restoration, an area that as an adult she found she excelled in. Karla declared she found the past too painful to talk about, and felt she had to take sciences at school to prove she was not stupid, even though they were not her favourite subjects (Lines 2-4). Brooke felt that being taken out of class for intervention singled her out and made her lose her school friends (Lines 19-20).

Exclusion

Reading and writing conceived as social practice and participation imply an inclusive discourse. By this conception no individual should be termed 'an expert reader', or a 'struggling' one, "because identity labels can be used to stereotype, privilege, or marginalize readers and writers" (Moje, 2009). Unfortunately, this is not usually the case, including this present research which originally viewed the participants as 'struggling' readers with a label of dyslexia. This was one of the first preconceptions I 'unlearned' once the interviews were underway. In our discussions, participants frequently lamented that participation in experiences was often curtailed by dominant discourse about reading and writing. Martha and Damien made a number of controversial statements about the way self-appointed gatekeepers of literacy make individuals feel devalued:

Martha: *It's as if people are made of writing!!! If you don't write, you are not good in society! And I find that very unjust. A lot of people with dyslexia see it that way. People seem to think that they have a right to patronize you or*

humiliate you, by shouting at you when you make mistakes, and we are expected to tolerate it! (Lines 431 – 434)

Damien: *These students who cannot read, these people, are very hurt about it, they feel they are less of a human being than other people are! And I think they are correct to a certain extent, because society makes you less! If you are living in a developed country you are less. (Lines 450-451)*

Alan mentioned a number of actual situations and suggested solutions to this difficulty:

Alan: *At clubs and nightspots, things have improved, maybe because of tourists. ... But in other areas, especially our own government areas, things are not so good. We all pay taxes after all. Use more ways to give information. (Lines 262 – 264)*

Parking

Parking signs for example, you cannot always understand the writing telling you who can park there, when and for how long. When parking, if I find a notice, I do not park cause I wonder maybe it says I can only park for a limited time or something. (Lines 267 – 270)

At the petrol station

Pictures would help even at the petrol station. I panic, even to give the car petrol. Mine takes diesel and when I leave from there I keep asking myself, but did I give it diesel, am I sure? I remain doubting myself, and remain for ages in a panic. (Lines 286 – 289)

Official correspondence

Just last week, I received a paper [government notice] I read some of it, but I am not sure whether I understood it ... However, if at least they were to use simple words it would help, and with shorter sentences you would not get so confused. (Lines 270 – 276).

Designing the text to construct the self

Holland et al. (2001) found that, "Identity is one way of naming the dense interconnectedness between the intimate and public values of social practice" (p.270). Gee (2000b) iterated that through discourse individuals, "recognize

and negotiate different socially situated identities” (p.413). In the process of writing the narrative, the participants used discourses to reflect on their experiences, and ‘textured’ them, as used by Fairclough (2008). They constructed their identities, their ‘sense of self in practice’ (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005; Gee, 2000), within the research, ‘sedimenting’ them into the text (Rowsell and Pahl, 2007), as this developed through diverse modes of interview, discussion and reflection, and across diverse spaces ranging from work places to homes to social venues, real and virtual. Throughout, the participants enacted several roles, of student, service provider, friend and ultimately research participant as identities developed over a year.

Developing identities

During reflection, some participants, while retelling experiences, kept the content but repositioned themselves within that experience. Jenny disclosed an incident of bullying, given above, an incident, in which she was accused of stealing a rubber. During our discussion in the ‘safe’ interactive space of the research her innocence was taken for granted, positioning herself as the receiver of the physical action on the part of the teacher, in which her satchel was emptied on the table, she was ordered to pick up everything, and on top of that was called careless. When the excerpt for inclusion in this chapter was being negotiated, Jenny wished that the whole discourse around the incident be cited or at least mentioned, as otherwise her innocence might be doubted, and gave more importance to that part of the discourse than ever before, repositioning herself as the victim of false accusations first and foremost, and adding line 60-61:

Jenny: ... *and obviously, the rubber wasn't there because I hadn't taken it.*

Rather than inconsistencies, these differences reflect movement between the different identities of the participants, as they reconstruct their experiences at the particular moment in time, and, as Luke (1995) said, “...all discourse has a constitutive and constructive effect on the social world. ...reconstructing versions of the social world, identity, and social relationship” (pp.18-19).

Alan asked for a copy of his finalized narrative to share with his friend, as he had not realised before how much he had accomplished, and felt it helped him discover who he really was. Reflecting on all that he had accomplished in his life, as written in his narrative, he added:

Alan: *Maybe I used to paint, and sew and do all those things to make up for the fact that I could not read and write, but it didn't work; I still kept on feeling that I was an ignorant person. I think now things are better. I am now entering a time, I think, when I am making peace with myself. I do not find it so difficult to admit it. For example, on Monday, I went for an eye test and I knew he would give me a piece to read. In fact, I spent many years needing to go for an eye test and not going because of having to read. But this time I went in and when he gave me to read I told him, "I cannot read, is it ok if I spell the words?", and it turned out to be ok. It wasn't a problem. (Lines 175 – 184).*

Sometimes participants remembered experiences they had discounted previously, when they changed their perspective, or perception of an experience:

Martha: *I think that when you re-read what you wrote about something you passed through you get in touch with something new, which at the time you were writing it, it didn't come up, like when I told you they used to tell me I used to go to Valletta by bus as a little girl and never got lost, I had forgotten that. (Lines 461-464)*

Some of the participants actually changed the narrative. Brooke discussed how telling me about her second visit to a psychologist changed what she remembered, or brought back what she must have forgotten:

Brooke: *By the time I got to Form 1 I felt I was reading much better. But then we went to see the doctor again and he told my mother that I was much worse than I had been and I must have felt very bad. (Lines 31-34)*

Martha wanted to comment on something she had said but did not want to add it to the body, and asked me to put it in brackets to show she had thought of it later:

.Martha: I read my first book at the age of sixteen. I started reading Enid Blyton. And then I started reading novels and magazines. (I realise now that probably I was too frightened to read because of the lack of support and awareness, and pressure to read at school. Once I finished at the age of sixteen it was just me, no one to make me feel ridiculous.) She used to get us up one by one, and after I would have had a difficulty to read, she would ask

the next one to read, turn to me and say: "Now, was that difficult?" (Lines 12–17)

Andrew initially constructed a discourse of anger and frustration to talk about reading, positioning himself as a non-participant in literacy practices, a stance which he challenged and understood better during the various discussions (Lines 128 – 135; 138-141) and concluding by saying:

Andrew: *So now I know that, whatever the reason, books aren't for me. Print on paper is not for me, actually, and if I need to read anything I will do it on computer.* (Lines 156-158).

Whenever Wayne recounted or discussed experiences which created self-doubt, especially teacher-discourse from his secondary school years, he would usually follow with what Fairclough (2005) termed a discourse of "reflective self-construction":

Wayne: *You have to keep telling yourself "I can do this". You have to say it out loud 'I can do this'. When a challenge comes you have to reconfirm, you know.* (Lines 41-43)

In his narrative Wayne described how his teacher's perception of him had affected the way he thought of himself, and how the aftermath of this discourse affected his present life, as mentioned elsewhere:

Wayne: *I work very hard and I achieve a lot, but down there is a worm, that always keeps reminding you, that your teachers, in those vulnerable years thought that and told you those words which now have a very solid basis and are very hard to dislodge, During your school years you are very vulnerable* (Lines 32 – 39).

Creating a personal narrative allowed the participants to use language to construct an image of themselves and understand how others saw them, through the lens of their experiences, because, as stated by Moje et al. (2009), "People's identities mediate and are mediated by the texts they read, write and talk about" (p.416).

Karla, found it too distressing to discuss past experiences after the interview and creating the narrative and poem. She added briefly to her narrative with a discourse that reinforced her identity of 'the good student':

Karla: *I am working very hard to keep my place here and do well in my A-levels next year. Then I hope to go to University.* (Lines 163-168)

I left Damien till the end, as he was difficult to pin down to a discussion. Every time we met, rather than discussing what he had written before, he would add more text, and his narrative is long and very loosely organized. There were two areas, which Damien repeatedly added to: an image of himself as a person who could rise to a challenge, and connected to it, his enjoyment of philosophical texts.

Damien: *I am the type of person who is not put off from trying anything for whatever reason. I have found myself in challenging situations ... I make decisions, it's part of my make-up... I maintain control and I am in command. ...I have always had to struggle to get where I am now ... When I start a sculpture it is difficult. ... but that is what I enjoy, the spirit combat I have with it till it starts getting shape. When I am starting a sculpture, the pleasure is like when I am solving a difficult numerical problem.* (Lines 540-558)

Damien: *I enjoy reading philosophical books and so on, like Gramsci,... you have to go back and forth to make sure you understand what he is saying. ... comparing statements and so on. That's the kind of reading I enjoy.* (Lines 559-565)

Conclusion

Discourse gains meaning from the context in which it is experienced, and is shaped and reshaped by the embodied perceptions unique to each participation a person has of being in the world at that moment in time (Holquist et al., 2011). The words the participants used, the text they produced, both constructed and reflected the way they participated in day-to-day life experiences and their position as participants in the research. The experiences they reflected on may have originated outside the research experience, but, once they became part of the narrative, then they were in the research context, reflected on, and reconstructed as contextualized by the research discourse of what constrained or enabled reading and writing in everyday life. It was challenging to select parts of what each participant was saying while leaving out others, and this had to be negotiated with some of the participants, especially Jenny and Martha, since one discourse called to another in a narrative, and in real life all elements of discourse generally mesh

together. Each time the experiences were reflected on, like a turn of a kaleidoscope, the same pieces would form a slightly different pattern, and, although the narrative was not itself changed after the final cut-off date, this did not mean that the participants did not look at their own discourses differently.

The discourses explored in this chapter reflected the social realities of life experiences as participated in, the emotions that made them memorable and the emotions they generated when reflected on. The re-experiencing and discussion contributed to the identities constructed through the narrative in which the participant is the protagonist. Ultimately, one major ideological concern that emerged from the data presented in this chapter is that discourses themselves do not constrain or enable participation in reading and writing but rather how shifting perceptions of discourses serve to transform participations in life experiences, of which reading and writing form part.

After exploring the roles of emotion and discourse, in the next chapter I explore, together with the participants, the role of various artifacts they used to mediate experiences.

So far I introduced the research, participants and myself, reviewed relevant literature, outlined the methodology used and described the participants, and discussed how emotions and discourses enabled or hindered participations in reading and writing. In this chapter I explore how artifacts affected participation in reading and writing.

Chapter 8 Perceptions, artifacts and identity

... I argue that people employ cultural artifacts to “seem” literate, or to be seen as literate by others, and to “feel” literate, that is, to develop a sense of themselves as literate. (Bartlett, 2007:51)

Introduction

Participating in knowing and meaning through situated life experiences connected participants and context in this study. Words, activities and tangible objects which connected persons to such knowing and meaning were common to multiple experiences, as in the use of personal computers, but the context of each experience was reflected in the different ways experience and context came together, even for the same participant, since, as Prinsloo and Rowsell (2012) stated, the technologies used were, “multiply situated and multiply placed” (p.276). Mediation⁸⁹ served as a social interface, what Pahl and Allen (2011) called “lines and threads” (p.212) to connect the various artifacts for knowing and making meaning. The means by which the participants perceived their experiences connected and transformed, constructed by and through the social context of their experience, are referred to, in this study, as mediating artifacts’, ‘mediating devices’ and ‘mediators’. Rogoff (2003) gave importance to mediation as culture-based means, which transformed participation and knowing, as the way in which learning took place, stressing that people interacted within new experiences according to the way their participations had been mediated previously. For Holland and Lachiotte (2007), mediating devices⁹⁰ were cultural and social choices individuals made, according to the context and experience where the device was used. Hasse (2013) and Cooper (2011) contended that mediated participation changed the

⁸⁹ As discussed in more detail in the literature review.

⁹⁰ Used by Holland and Lachiotte (2007) to mean a socially constructed and culturally situated artifact to facilitate participation in literacy practices,

participation itself, since it was linked to context differently. Any future participation using the same mediation was likewise transformed.

Different communities of practice, as Wenger, 2009, pointed out, predisposed to particular mediating artifacts, and artifacts sometimes served as links between different communities, as Pahl and Kelly (2005) found with texts. Cole (2013) showed how use of mediators changed participants' perceptions of them, and brought about changes in emotional and social interactions, not always, as Hasse (2011) showed, as intended. Technology was rapidly becoming one such mediating artifact, its use in participation explored by many.⁹¹

The philosophy underpinning this study was one of phenomenology and neurophenomenology, whereby living systems were defined as interactive, self-regulating and self-generating, as discussed in previous chapters. Experiences, as pointed out in various works⁹² were internal to the participants' social system, and generated through their consciousness within that world, through experiential knowing and meaning with others.

It follows, then, that there could be no mediator without the experience and no experience without the mediation. While a personal computer emerged as a mediating artifact in diverse experiences of the participants, it was not in itself a mediator, but became one through its linking role, connecting the participant, the learning context and the feelings and discourses around, and of, the experience, within the experience, which could not have been had without it. The same applied to all the mediational means described below. The experience of talking about his travels was enacted by Alan through the photographs which owed their mediational status to the experience of the telling. The clay in Damien's workshop would have remained a lump of formless clay, without Damien's experience of sculpture to give it form, an experience of meaning making which would not have existed without the mediation of this tangible object.

Language, taped, written and physically experienced through locality and space, was a link between knowing and being, giving existence to, and existing

⁹¹ Davies (2012), Prinsloo, and Rowsell (2012) among others

⁹² (Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Maturana and Varela, 1980; Ingold, 2008; Pink, 2012) discussed already,

through the research experience. As each narrative unfolded, emotions and words together with all the environmental factors involved, engaging social, sensory and somatic systems connected together through experience and reflection on it. The narrative, as informed by Kress (2014) and Rowsell et al. (2010), was designed and redesigned with every interaction as identities were constructed, and led the participants to see themselves the way they thought others saw them. Interacting with knowledge changed as the participants sometimes selected different modes, as Damien with sculpture, and created a change in the identity of the person possibly by raising consciousness, and so, as stated by Moje et al. (2009), “casting the subject as an active agent, constructing one’s own reality and one’s own subjectivity and identity” (p.426). Mahri et al.(1998) illustrated this connective narrative of identity by documenting the deconstruction of identities and the authoring of new ones experienced by a student over the period of one year as a result of an injury that left her unable to write. As the participants in this study reflected on their own experiences, they authored themselves as protagonists in their life narrative.

Theoretical framework for this chapter

Theories of the social and cultural process of learning, and multimodal and embodied ways of knowing, from a perspective of New Literacy Studies, provided the framework situating the experiences, and a lens through which the use of mediators in making meaning was discussed and understood. A philosophy of phenomenology allowed for diverse perceptions of participants and researcher within embodied experiences in and out of the study. A neurophenomenological approach considered the circularity of perceptual and emotional embodied experience as a route for new knowledge in the first-person narratives with the context.

Importance of Spaces

The spaces where activities took place shaped them, and mediated the knowing and meaning of being in a location, embodied in a physical sense, as when Alan recounted how, at a seminar, he changed his seating to the front of the hall, engaging with the lecturer, and when Martha described differences in

making meaning at seminars in Malta and England. Some studies⁹³ discussed the concept that place of experiences is not just location but also the movement through states of being, as when Damien moved back and forth between the research space and common work space we shared, and as Alan alternately positioned himself between his role as participant and that of service-provider, movement reflected in the different kind of discussions which resulted. This was not some pre-existing space in which experiences took place, but constructed through experiences which were in turn constructed by it, as Ingold (2000) stated:

Positions in the land are no more laid out in advance for persons to occupy, than are persons specified prior to taking them up. Rather, to inhabit the land is to draw it to a particular focus, and in so doing to constitute a place (p.149).

This construction and movement was not always linear. In the case of Jenny and Martha, spaces of research gave way to spaces of friendship. I could write much more about the spaces traversed in this study, and the way the spaces acted on and were acted upon, even owed their existence to, the life-experiences of the participants. However this would be outside the scope of this study.

Artifacts in experiences

Pahl and Rowsell (2010) defined an artifact as a tangible, multimodal object which embodied meaning and experiences, belonging to a particular context. Holland et al.(2001) described their effect as, "... tools that people use to affect their own and others' thinking, feeling and behaviour" (p.50). Tangible objects often served to make sense of a participation even years after the experience, and provided a lasting link with that experience.

Alan, who owned his own hairdressing salon, renovated old houses, painted and sewed professionally, described himself as unable to make sense of words. He felt that photographs were important. Alan declared his difficulty in recalling past events without some object to remind him, reflecting and elaborating on this, even including it in his narrative. He described how it had always been difficult for him to remember without seeing something tangible,

⁹³ (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012; Pink, 2012; Pahl, 2005b)

He felt that photographs enabled him to make meaning especially as he created texts of his travels, embodied in memory through each picture:

Alan: *I need to sit down and look at a photo maybe, and then I start remembering and say, look, I have been there. (Lines 25-27)*

While reflecting on the houses he had renovated over the years, Alan used photographs to describe 'before' his work and 'after', especially his last project, a small palazzo, which he kept to rent out, and said with pride:

Alan: *The house was featured in the House and Garden magazine. I have a shoebox full of photos I took before and after. (Lines 150-151)*

Photographs were important for Alan to make meaning. When using social media he never wrote anything on his status bar, but often uploaded photographs instead, making meaning in sharing them with his friends and noting who put a like, as he did when he shared his pictures in the social space of the research. Alan's use of photographs was in the context of a social and cultural environment which normalised the use of photographs as a repository of knowing, and mediated his 'telling' of himself in his narrative in a way which contrasted with the way he normally thought of himself, as 'ignorant', and, as Holland et al. (2001) remarked above, mediated the way he felt about himself, allowing him to feel pride and satisfaction in his accomplishments:

Alan: *... I could get a message in a picture much faster than other people. ... seeing broken down houses and imagining what they would look like renovated. ... I renovated seven farmhouses in all. I have many photos. ... Even my family thought I was just throwing my money away.... I have renovated seven houses so far. all farmhouses; all falling down and in ruins. I used to do get workmen for the outside, but inside I did everything, everything myself. I love that, the colours and all. The last one, now, that I kept and I rent out, because that I needed to get a loan for it. ... It has a beautiful garden which I designed myself, ... I did all the furnishings myself. (Lines 134-150)*

Mode of artifact

Rowsell and Sheridian (2010) discussed how modes were deliberately chosen means by which a communication took place:

By understanding the modes a producer can select – and those a producer ultimately selects to represent ideas – we can better

understand the knowledge and practices needed to compose and communicate multimodally (p.86).

Communicating through artifacts was, as Pahl and Rowsell (2005) stated, "A way of making meaning that allows for different modes" (p.158). These modalities depended on the culture and environment of the meaning maker. Some modalities, especially activity, make knowledge available through body sensation. Eugene Gendlin, contemporary philosopher and psychologist, researched bodily-sensed knowledge for the past fifty years. In his works⁹⁴ he wrote about the feeling in the body as the first point of knowing, varying philosophically from Merleau-Ponty in that he considered perception a screen that limited experience.⁹⁵ However, for this study, both the perception of the experience and the experience itself were a route to knowing and making meaning, and, as Gendlin (1981) noted, making meaning emerged from experiencing through the interaction between 'experience and experiencer' (p.25).

The experience of sculpting as related by Damien was multimodal, using clay in a three-dimensional way, sociocultural, in that the subject figure was bounded by the perceptions of the context, and embodied in how he rendered his ideas in form as his sculpture emerged from his bodily interaction with the clay. Ingold (2008) considered skill as the catalyst for 'knowing', transformational in itself, in this case Damien's skill with clay. He was not acting on the clay as the subject of an action on an object, but by the fashioning of the clay he made meaning and shaped his knowing:

Damien: *...sculpture.... You have to use your hand to carve, but it is 90% mental work. ... In sculpture you are looking at form, and you are really making sense of the form. ... The meaning comes from the theme, if it's a figure, usually you use clay or plasticine, because that is flexible and you can change ideas as you go along, and that is where the meaning is coming out from. You want to express a certain idea, you are looking for certain movements, but it's harder than painting because you have to connect what is happening behind, at the back of the statue with what is happening at the front, and it's quite challenging. (Lines 39 – 53)*

⁹⁴ (1962;1981; 2012 among others)

⁹⁵ As discussed in Chapter 3.

Damien discovered his ability to make meaning through paint and clay in his thirties, and described his newfound consciousness of the world around him as:

Damien: *It's like seeing from scratch. ...You see in a completely different way (Lines 183-190). That had quite an impact on me. This was when I was thirty. It had an impact because I was blind and then I started to see (Lines 279-281).*

Some participants in this study found school to be a place of alienation where they felt disengaged from what their classmates were learning, and found that knowledge was more accessible outside school for various reasons, including the mode in which it was presented. Karla, having passed her SEC,⁹⁶ described her struggle to find a way to make meaning:

Karla: *Outside school I could use images with words, and see the words as images ... When I used to meet a new word I used to try to break it down in syllables and try to pronounce it but that did not work much. Putting words on flashcards and memorizing them worked better, and once I learnt them I did not forget. Something that helped me write at the time was mind-maps ... I remember one I did for a Junior News competition. It was about what makes you sad or happy. First I drew the faces and the branches, and then I could write the sentences. My entry had won a prize. (Lines 50 – 57)*

Karla claimed it was too distressing to think about a time when she could not read, because feelings of resentment came flooding back. Once she expressed them in her poem, found in Appendix V, she wished to focus on the fact that now she could read well:

Karla: *So although I might have had difficulties in learning how to read in the first place, we all read for some reason or another, and now I have no difficulty, in any of the types of reading I need to do. (Lines 112-113).*

Use of digital media

The participants explored their use of digital technology,⁹⁷ perceiving it as mediating, some more than others. The diverse mediations, discussed below, were embodied in day-to-day experiences. The artifacts described by the participants were not something external to be interacted with or participated in

⁹⁶ Examinations at the end of compulsory schooling,

⁹⁷ Discussed in the literature with reference to the work of Davies (2013) and Davies and Merchant (2009) among others

from some internal location of the participant, but an integral part of the experience, where, as explained by Maturana and Varela (1992), “knower and known are mutually specified” (p.253) and inextricably entwined.

Digital media as mediating artifacts

Digital media are increasingly central to everyday life experiences, activities and environments, although unevenly and in different ways among different individuals, groups and different regions in the world. (Pink, 2012, p.124)

The use of digital media was part of everyday experiences for the participants. All of them wrote that using personal computers made a difference to participations in literacy, though in different ways. Some mentioned the freedom to read about any subject of choice, others being able to follow news events, keep in touch with friends, organise and correct writing, enlarge font size and use other word-processing tools. These tools were not just mediators, but were themselves mediated by the interaction. Brandt et al.(2006) wrote, “ ... when you act with a technology, you act by mediating the actions of the technology as it does yours” (p.255).

For Martha the computer was all of the above and more. Martha often mentioned her computers during our discussions, sometimes her laptop and sometimes her desktop. She always referred to each as ‘he’.

Martha: *When I first got the computer, in the beginning I didn't understand him at all, and I think not even after I did the course. It's by trial and error that I understood it. I still discover new things, although my laptop, miskin,⁹⁸ he is sick now, and I have to use the old one. (Lines 283-286)*

While at first I thought it was an error in the use of pronouns, as our meetings grew more frequent, I realized she did not really make that kind of error, and so I asked about it. I was very surprised when I found out that it reflected the way she thought of her computer, as a person:

Martha: *Yes, I think about my computer as someone who, though sometimes I want to bang him to the wall, as a trusted friend who is patient, and corrects me without judging. The computer opened a new world for me. The print is bigger and if you make mistakes they are corrected. Through him I learnt the*

⁹⁸ 'poor thing'

difference between the 'tha' and 'the', for example. Verbs and nouns never made sense to me before, through him I learnt. He is the head, the mind, of spelling that I'm not. That's it. So he's everything. That's how I feel, as if it's a person, and I argue with him, when I want to write something and he doesn't let me, or changes things, and I tell him "no, not like that! Then I go to the dictionary, to check. Sometimes he is right and sometimes I am. This is the battle I am always having with him. (Lines 288-297).

Martha claimed that the computer helped her access current events, government documents and the like, as well as further her studies in psychology and psychotherapy, and allowed her to develop her writing through the diverse affordances of this media.

Affordances of digital media

Lankshear and Knobel, 2006, found that digital media generated new ways of encoding meaning. Most of the participants considered that the computer made it easier for them to read and write, allowing them to change font size, use hypertext to read what they considered relevant, take advantage of word processing tools, access material in different modes, and even adjust the seating position in relation to text, as some of the advantages of using a computer. They discussed being more confident reading and writing, and some of them said that they thought they participated more. As Gee, 2001, pointed out "The affordances of a new tool (mediating device) often give a learner more new "intelligence" than any internal mental change" (p.31).

Access to computers allowed both Brooke and Karla multiple options for interacting with information. Using the internet enabled use of multimodal cultural tools other than language, such as images, diagrams and maps, as mediating means which enhanced the 'design of meaning' across modalities (Kress, 2010; Rowsell and Sheridan, 2010).

Brooke: *I found the computer a big help. When looking up something I used to watch videos sometimes and then look it up to read. That way I understood more. I spend time writing on Facebook too. (Lines 40-42)*

Karla: *I like travelling, and if I am going somewhere new I read about it first. I would go on the internet, and look up the place, and, if it's a new place, get to*

know all about it, get to Google it, get the map up, since I understand better with diagrams than words; Diagrams are much better. (Lines 100-103)

A major advantage of writing on a computer was using word-processing tools along with internet, which they considered transformed their way of participating in reading and writing. Brooke was sent to a reading intervention programme with younger children, which she described as horrible, and instead increased her reading participation on computer:

Brooke: *I started looking up artists on computer and reading about them, as I was studying art, and my reading got better. (Lines 38-40)*

On his social network site Damien often wrote about his artwork, giving historical background and detailed description:

Damien: *The computer helped a lot with my way of writing, as it developed. Today I would start writing without worrying about spelling or order, and then sort it out later. The computer made a difference. I couldn't do that when I was writing before because I couldn't shift around whole paragraphs, saying this would come better if written before. When I write, today, I don't need to make such big shifts any longer, I seem to be able to order better in my mind before. But if the need comes up I can do it. Today I only write on computer, ...Then there is the spell checker, and the grammar checker, which manages to find many of my mistakes. Usually they come up in red and often I can correct them without even using the dictionary. Once I see the line I say Ah, I forgot to put in an 'e' there or ...I've inverted a couple of letters here, and that is a great help. (Lines 106-110)*

A drawback of print material is the rigidity of font-size and presentation, while one of the affordances the computer offers is flexibility of font size. Both Alan and Martha believed this helped them to understand what they were reading:

Alan: *Then I went for a course and things got a bit better. The best thing about it was when I learnt how to make the writing bigger. I could always read the headlines on a newspaper because those are big. When I learn a word if when I see it is big I can read it. (Lines 224-227)*

Martha: *I read it on the paper and could not understand it. First thing, it was placed in different pages, and the first thing is you had to understand was*

where it was written. Then I went online, on theTimes, it was there, I made it as big as I wanted, the font, which to me makes a big difference, read it and understood it. The size of font makes a big difference to me. (Lines 309-314)

Participating in literacy by collaborating in social networks

As everywhere else, the use of social networks in Malta is widespread, allowing members to collaborate in creating texts by commenting on each other's status, comments and writings to end up with a text composed by multiple authors. All the participants were users of social networks, creating collaborative texts and forging an identity in a virtual space (Davies, 2012):

Damien: *Nowadays I use the computer extensively. Mainly I use it for publicity and social media. I use Facebook mostly. (Lines 119-120)*

The physical experience of using a computer

Perceptions and knowledge are created, challenged and transformed through embodied life experiences including participations in literacy and these in turn transform experiences. As discussed in the review of literature,⁹⁹ the environment in which one participated in reading and writing, the ease with which the body responded to the physical act of literacy also affected participation. Andrew compared the way he felt when reading from a book to reading on a computer:

Andrew: *On a computer, it's different, because you can just sit back, have a monitor in front of you and read. You don't have to keep a book in your hands. You can sit back and relax. I get tense all over when I'm holding a book. Even thinking about it makes my back hurt. (Lines 60-64)*

Computers mediating agency

The computer mediated Jenny's participation in reading and writing sufficiently to enable her to get a job as a bus driver. After leaving Trade-School Jenny shunned reading and writing, even turning down jobs she would have loved to do for fear of having to write. However, when she realised that the examination to become a bus driver was done on computer she applied, passed and got the job. By using a computer she felt able to act in many ways:

⁹⁹ in Chapters 2 and 3,
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Jenny: *Computers make a big difference. I needed to pass an examination to become a bus driver. I opted to do it in English, a multiple choice exam, and because it was on computer I had no difficulty.. I use the computer quite a lot. I do not have my own. It's a family computer, but my kids have their own laptop, so basically the old one is mine now. With the computer you read, because you're going through things, you're seeing things, when you're searching for something and then you see something else and you read that. I use the computer to book travel tickets and accommodation, leave feedback about these, and look up countries I am going to visit, look up recipes, and shop online. Sometimes I read the news. (Lines 160-170)*

Language as a mediator

Language mediated the participants' discussions, elaborations, reflections and narrations. Wayne used what Wells (2007) called 'semiotic mediation', the use of sign as a means of social discourse, in a self-reflective manner, to mediate what Holland et al. (1998) referred to as 'identity-in-practice', as he discussed his agency in literacy practices within the field of entrepreneurship.¹⁰⁰ He explained, as presented in some excerpts from his narrative, how he talked himself through feelings of inadequacy. He also used an expression metaphorically to construct his identity in the research, repeatedly referring to himself as 'right-brain'.

Metaphor mediating identity

A concept is usually defined as "an abstract idea, a notion, conception, abstraction, conceptualization, theory, hypothesis, postulation, belief, conviction, opinion, view, image, impression, picture" (Dictionary.com).

Concepts are usually expressed in culturally-determined language, with situated concepts expressed in different ways by different cultures, demonstrated through the work of Ingold (2000) and Rogoff (2003), often in what Cole (2013) and Gee (2013) identify as the figurative language of the metaphor. Concept and metaphor, can, as Gee (2013) discussed, mediate literacy (p.31). Cole (2006) demonstrated how students in an after-school programme learnt and used, "concepts as mediating means; as tools for

¹⁰⁰Wayne had identified a need in the market and started two successful companies, sourcing and organizing the required material and human resources, and was still engaged in searching further for new ventures.

observing, interpreting, analysing, and in many instances modifying phenomena that they encounter ..." (p.151). Hung (2002) explored mediation of the social construction of knowledge through metaphor. Holland et al. (1998; 2001) posited that a culture-bound belief may be a mediating device for self-knowledge and the meaning of identity. Lakoff and Johnson (2008) credit metaphor with being the basis of our conceptual system, "the way we think, what we experience and what we do every day" (p.3).

Wayne often referred to himself as a misunderstood right-brain person, assigning to this a range of aptitudes and abilities and contrasting to left-brain persons with a different set of abilities. Lakoff and Johnson (2008) contended that metaphors "are shaped and constrained by our bodily experiences in the world ..." (p.246), supporting what Holland et al.(1988) stated that while the use of a metaphor could shape the knowing it mediated, the metaphor itself was shaped by the experience.

The metaphor Wayne used was shaped by his life experiences, and helped him deal with many aspects of his life experiences in turn. Wayne said:

Wayne: *And when we talk about left-brain and right-brain it does not refer to the actual physical brain, the philosophy.* (Lines 336-338)

He frequently discussed what he considered the philosophy of being 'right-brain' as a propensity for looking at life and its events in a holistic way. He named one of his companies Right-brain.¹⁰¹

Wayne: *The names of my companies reflect my philosophy. One is called Right-Brain, which I think is a very suitable name for what we do and what people should expect of us. For me it's a trendy catch-name, and personally it's part of my philosophy and who I am.* (Lines 7-10)

Wayne had a very negative view of his schooldays, believing his abilities were misunderstood and unappreciated. He used this metaphor to make sense of his disengagement with schooling:

¹⁰¹ Although these could identify Wayne, he asked me to use the actual name of the companies, saying he stood by all he said and did not mind who knew it.

Wayne: *I think that throughout my school life and when I was young my 'right-brain', way of thinking and doing things was very much the dominant non-appreciated part of me. (Lines 11-13)*

He also used this concept to make sense of the way information was disseminated, and he discussed different ways of doing things:

Wayne: *... They will not replace words, but provide alternate means, or just parallel means, because alternate means again you privilege one over the other. I am not talking about post-literacy. I am not anti-left brain. I feel it's an injustice to make right brained people left-brained, just as it would be an injustice to do it the other way around. (Lines 325-331)*

Having stated at the outset that he considered himself 'right-brained', Wayne made a number of statements of identity:

Wayne: *interesting is that, right-brains, they are philosophical. They see the bigger picture, ... (Lines 401-402)*

His semiotic mediation helped him develop his identity-in-practice as he used language to tell others and himself who he was:

Wayne: *I have to keep telling myself, reminding myself, on a daily basis that I work very hard. (Lines 37-38.*

Activity mediating identity and enabling participation

Activity served as a cultural tool to connect development of identity and transformed participation.¹⁰² Social and cultural interactions, such as being successful when gaming on computers, or refusing to read in class, mediated the way a person shaped identity,¹⁰³ and this, in turn, influenced what they participated in and the way they acted. Some of the participants described their perceptions of how various occupations, leisure activities and daily-living tasks affected their participation in literacy, and, in some cases, their knowledge of who they were.

¹⁰² (Vygotsky, 1930 / 1981; 1978; Hall, 2007; Holland et al., 2007)

¹⁰³ As discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, s

Gaming

Gaming on computer, Wayne said, helped him see himself as 'capable' and fight off the disempowering labels of his schooldays, to become a successful entrepreneur in the field of digital media technology:

Wayne: *In fact, though no one picked it up at the time, least of all me, I was being quite capable, in the area of computers. ...The great thing about computers in those days was that you could teach yourself. Obviously that started to shine a light. It was a different evolution of learning. ..., we played You break it and cheat it. That was the fun part of it. It was a very important familiarization process... because I had good oral skills and a great fund of general knowledge I escaped the idea that being unable to write means you are intellectually deficient. I was just labelled underachiever. ...*(Lines 91-110)

Sailing

Damien considered sailing as a 'talisman' that mediated his writing, saying:

Damien: *English was a bit of a problem. At year 5... I started sailing, and all the compositions,... right up to, even after I finished, until I got my O-Levels practically, ... and I must have done at least a thousand in those 6 years, in all of them sailing had to crop up.... a sentence to do with sailing had to come in. It was my challenge and my trademark. (Lines 82-89)*

Massage therapy

A course in massage therapy encouraged Andrew's participation in reading and writing:

Andrew: *I started a course in Massage therapy, decided to follow a Diploma course in it which had loads and loads of reading. It's not something you enjoy but something you have to do to get to the part that is hands on. (Lines 116-119)*

Tailoring

Alan recalled how tailoring helped him engage with reading and writing:

Alan: *After secondary school I went to Trade school. Apart from reading and writing I have another problem... Because of the fear I rush...I was learning tailoring... I used to do well. I used to feel really good that I had done a*

piece of work and the teacher tells me, "Good work, well done". Those things I remember. My teacher was always telling me, "Well done Alan, How well you sew". ... I had to do some reading and writing while I was there, but very little. ..., and then when I did the exams I passed. ... (Lines 87-102)

Hairdressing

When reflecting on this experience through his narrative Alan remarked that just some help with the reading and writing was what he needed, and this brought up another experience of supported learning, when he left his job in a garments factory and trained for a hairdresser:

Alan: *During this course I needed to do some reading and writing... the teacher, the one for hairdressing, used to help me. He found me very good in the work, the practice, ... Then, even when I went to courses abroad, I started taking someone up with me. I pay for them, and they help me where I need to read. (Lines 114-120)*

Shopping at the supermarket

Alan described his engagement with reading at the supermarket:

Alan: *...frustrated because all the headings are in words. I recognise certain things just by looking at them, but then again, certain things you have to read what they are, especially now that I am doing the shopping myself; my friend writes for me and draws . I only started these last two months, but I am always improving. (Lines 280-283)*

Cooking

Through cooking Alan connected with literacy online and with the support of his sister and friends looked up recipes without the fear he normally associated with reading.

Alan: *When I cook now I follow recipes but I ask and ask, just to be sure. Sometimes I use YouTube for cooking. I call up my friend or my sister to spell the words I am looking up and I type them in. (Lines 207-209)*

Books and identity

The artifacts which the participants perceived as mediating their participation in literacy practices were an integral part of each experience reflected on,

enabling knowing and meaning-making through cultural means.¹⁰⁴ As they reflected on their experiences they authored their identities within these participations. One artifact which had an effect on these identities was the book.

The book is a cultural artifact, referred to in everyday discourse. We go ‘by the book’, and the law “throws the book” at you; we refer to honest persons as “an open book”. In popular culture ‘schooled’ persons are often portrayed reading a book.

Andrew got upset at the idea that his literacy activities online were reading, since he always associated reading, very negatively, with books, saying that those that read on computer or other digital media did not know what reading meant. Even Alan and Jenny identified being literate with book reading, and in spite of their activities in reading and writing through other media, reading a book epitomised participation in reading:

Alan: *Although today there are so many other ways of learning, I think nothing can replace learning from a book.* (Lines 311-312)

Jenny: *I realized during the first interview, that I actually do a lot of reading, and yet, because I am not a regular reader of books, I still feel that I am not a reader.* (Lines 197-200)

For Karla, being a reader was not just doing well in subjects that required much reading, but reading the same books as her friends:

Karla: *Even with reading now, if I find a difficulty I work it out. I read the same type of books as my friends.* (Lines 73-74)

Conclusion

The participants linked many artifacts to make meaning in their experiences, from computers, to activities, to language and objects, each connection mediated differently by linking in different ways into their experiences, situated in the experience itself. The choice of particular mediations was shaped within the social system of the experience rather than pre-set. Martha’s designation of her computer as the mentor she never had, the mediator of her learning to

¹⁰⁴ (Rowse, 2011; Holland and Lachiotte, 2007)

write, linked into a narrative of childhood bereft of support, while connecting within a system that made it possible for her to own a computer at all. Wayne's use of the metaphor of left-brain / right-brain, which puzzled me at first, was connected both to his perception of himself as different and linked to his experiences of discourse which encouraged him to succeed by being different, yet also to discourse of dyslexia which used such terms in their literal sense. Photographs and sailing and sculpture, while linking to each participant's particular experiences transformed the knowing. connecting interaction with others to construct a social identity. Maybe, in a different set of experiences within a different social system, each participant would have found other means to mediate other experiences, but in the narratives they lived and discussed, these particular experiences were enacted in the ways related above.

One over-reaching mediator, a deliberate choice within the culture of research, one that made possible the development of this study, was semiotic, that of reflection, discussion and conversation, interfacing the interactions between myself, the participants and their experiences, the development of their identity in the research world and the narratives as artifacts, designed and redesigned with each interaction not only of participants with the text but even of the readers themselves (Kress, 2014; Rowsell et al., 2010).

The chapter above explored the ways and means the participants perceived as enabling their knowing and meaning-making. The next, and final, chapter reviews the questions this research hoped to answer, looks at implications for practice and makes suggestions for further research.

Chapter 9 Agency lost and found

‘Finally I am the author of my life and I will live to write the successes of my life. This story will continue...’ (Gutiérrez, 2008:160)

It was a video forum called “We want to start a conversation” held at the University of Malta. The video was the idea of a group of teenagers labelled with dyslexia, who

scripted the video and worked with various professionals¹⁰⁵ to produce it. I sat there, fascinated, as young people looked at labels



they were wearing, labels saying: ‘careless’, ‘clumsy’, ‘moody’, ‘lazy’, ‘shy’, ‘sick,’ and so on,. Each poignantly told what wearing these labels meant in school and the general community, the pervasive sense of ‘otherness’ they lived with. The music was ponderous.

Suddenly an upbeat rhythm hit us like a wave. The circle of teens stood up and tore the labels off, revealing other labels underneath: ‘enthusiastic’, ‘imaginative’, ‘creative’, ‘determined’, ‘born-architect’, among others. They spoke about their dreams as snippets of every-day experiences took over the video, bringing into sharp focus the way they felt others perceived them in contrast to the way they wished to present themselves, their strengths and their dreams. The audience clapped, until the music changed again. As the teens stood still, we came back to reality.

It was an animated discussion. Someone finally asked – was it really reading and writing that held these teens back or was dyslexia another word for exclusion?

¹⁰⁵ Ms Clare Agius, Dr Ruth Falzon and Dr Isabelle Gatt among others

Introduction

Initially, this study focussed on perceptions of literacy among persons with a label of dyslexia, a focus selected collaboratively, as explained in Chapter 4, querying what support they thought they should receive, and how reading was taught. A preconception,¹⁰⁶ initially shared by participants, was that difficulties with literacy were often due to prescriptive methods of teaching. Karla, Brooke, and Martha learned to read outside school, and spoke at length about this in the early stages of the study. Once participants were selected and the interviews began, all of them agreed with the relevance of the topic, looking forward to contributing to research that would improve conditions for persons with a label of dyslexia in Malta.

Then something strange happened. The more we reflected, the further the label of dyslexia receded, becoming no more than a convenience or inconvenience, depending on the participant. It was difficult, more than my participants and I were expecting, to limit interviews and reflections to discrete literacy events as intended, since daily experiences in which reading and writing were embedded somehow 'got in the way' and demanded to be heard. Narratives developed,¹⁰⁷ the participants 'writing' themselves into the text, as described by Rowsell and Pahl (2007). The participants explored experiences in literacy by, as Richardson (2004) suggested, 'rewording the world as a mode of inquiry' (p.923), examining perceived failure in reading and writing. The perceptions of experiences of failure in a particular space at a particular time seemed memorable and vivid through emotion and embodiment. These experiences told of emotional engagement at that time, and of insidious discourse that affected agency.

As the participants reflected, they called into question their taken-for-granted assumptions about reading and writing.¹⁰⁸ Jenny commented that parents were always told that children developed at different rates, then, when they started school, they were expected to meet some pre-set standard, without considering their background. Wayne remarked that making reading an end in itself, rather than a way to participate, was to blame, a sentiment echoed by

¹⁰⁶ A list of preconceptions this study started with and which were discarded is found in Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁷ Collaboratively written, as explained in detail in Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁸ A list of these is found in Appendix IX.

other participants as perceptions shifted through reflection, positions becoming fluid, and negotiated.

The participants' position as persons with a label of dyslexia shifted out of focus. As they related experiences of everyday life in which reading and writing took place, the experiences of emotion and discourse, and discussion of consciousness and feelings took the study down a different route.

The literature

The literature consulted for the initial proposal gradually became irrelevant, or mostly irrelevant. The methodology selected for my pilot study, to identify discrete literacy events, as a reflection of practice was inadequate to do justice to the developing data. I read widely, crossing boundaries of philosophy, anthropology, psychology, and different types of learning as well as new developments within the framework of New Literacy Studies. I found studies of Ingold (2000; 2005; 2011) about sensorial knowing helpful, as was work by Rogoff (2003) on transformed participation. Research by Pahl about experiences of the 'every day and multimodality' (2005; 2007; 2009) was crucial for my understanding. Gutiérrez (2008), connecting the zone of proximal development with Third Space was relevant to the supported creation of the narrative. As I became more involved in the emerging narratives, works by Rowsell and Sheridan (2010) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000; 2006), helped me locate the narratives in the research, while the work of Holland et al. (2001), of Bartlett (2007), and of Moje et al. (2009), among others, made explicit emerging identities, their role in agency, and issues of social justice.

Initially, I considered issues of consciousness and emotion as outside the scope of this study, issues often avoided by researchers as 'messy'. They kept on resurfacing through the data-development taking place and, as explained by Denzin (2007), emotion "relives past memories and sensations and moves against a horizon of past emotional experiences" (p.66). The sheer physicality of the data began to cause unease, not just in the case of Martha with her physical reactions to criticism, and childhood perceptions,¹⁰⁹ but in most of the other participants as well. Andrew confided his physical reactions to entering a bookstore, Jenny left the room to be sick when reflecting on an

¹⁰⁹ As in her account of her childhood p. 102.

episode of bullying, Damien tried to explain how his brain ‘was in his hands’ during sculpture, making them ‘think’ and ‘reason’; these and other similar incidents continued to baffle me.

The unease I felt at sidestepping such data culminated in guilt when I heard a talk by Williams (2013), given at Sheffield University, where he discussed the way researchers often avoided the very issues I was trying to avoid! Shortly after, I read an article, Billington (2013), for my work with children with autism. In this work, the author discussed the importance of emotion and experience in practice, including the teaching of reading, stating:

Approaches to reading also were adopted which did not take account of the affective processes that underpin a child’s enjoyment and motivation for what is essentially a social and cultural experience—and are thus totally missing the point of what has been a most prodigious leap in the human story and the intertwining of thinking, feeling and learning (p.178).

This article was a deciding factor for me to tackle these issues, or at least try to make them visible. Although the physicality of the data had introduced me to neurophenomenology as a philosophical approach, I now read work by Antonio Damasio (2013; 2002; 1999), alone and with others, on feelings and emotion, mind and body, and I realized that, as pointed out by Billington (2013), not all neuroscientific research reduced agency to chemical reactions in the brain. I read studies on consciousness and emotion (Hasse, 2013; Cooper, 2011), and the role of the senses (Ingold, 2011; Pink, 2009). Literature on the use of multiple modes of expression and representation became quite important once participants stripped off the perception that some deficit within them was hindering reading and writing, and examined what mediated their experiences and whether it was freely available in the community at large.

The literature for literacy and for perception, embodiment, and emotion was reviewed separately, in Chapters 2 and 3, as often found in the literature. The topics came together in this chapter, indivisible in participation in reading and writing. I am sure I was the bane of my supervisor as I went from one field of research to another. This body of literature, across many fields, helped me address the data as it developed, and so the literature I cite is an eclectic mix, crossing the boundaries of anthropology, New Literacy Studies, philosophy, and psychology among others.

Questions asked of this study

The questions asked of this study were introduced in Chapter 1.¹¹⁰ For the sake of clarity, the questions are presented again here to situate findings.

1. What experiences of participation in reading and writing do the participants describe?

The participants described experiences from childhood and adulthood, ones they perceived important enough to include in their stories, not experiences of literacy events, but experiences of the everyday in which literacy was embedded. The stories were summarized in Chapter 5. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 explored experiences described by the participants through the emotions they generated, the discourses, which articulated them, and the artifacts which mediated them.

1. How do their experiences, and reflecting on them, shape their stories and current experiences?

Once experiences were brought to consciousness, described and turned into narrative to be reflected on, perceptions were re-configured, and new emotions and perceptions forged, as described by Katz (2012):

Active or passive, behaving on our own or collaboratively with others, we shape our conduct from moment to moment so that at any time and in any place we are in the progress of doing a version of something, something that routinely has a colloquially cognizant name. The most fundamental units of social life are formed through giving narrative meaning to corporeal movement (p.17).

Every time Jenny and I reflected on her narrative, she would focus on particular experiences, related in full elsewhere. One concerned her being accused of stealing another girl's rubber,¹¹¹ and another concerned a humiliating experience connected to writing.¹¹²

Jenny: *One day we had dictation and a composition, and this teacher said, "LET me tell you what she wrote". (Lines 41-47)*

Each time Jenny repeated what the teacher said, her voice rising on the LET, she would then remark, as in her narrative:

¹¹⁰ They were also explicated under different headings in Chapter 4.

¹¹¹ P. 127

¹¹² P. 126

Jenny: *I have a vivid memory of this incident especially, and it makes me feel sick even now. ... I can still feel it, the whole class was laughing at me.*

As Jenny reflected on this experience she seemed to relive it,¹¹³ rather than remember it, re-experiencing the emotional charge it carried, which had heightened consciousness in the first place and made it so vivid. The same happened with many experiences of other participants, discussed in Chapter Six. Experiences resulting in fear described by Karla, Andrew and Alan, the humiliation Martha and Brooke felt, and Jenny and Wayne's shame, on reflection, were perceived as having contributed to their struggle with literacy. This awareness brought about a shift in perception of self and agency within the research, shaping stories and identities sedimented into the text. The only participant to emerge seemingly unscathed from his own perception of experiences seemed to be Damien. In his narrative, he described a non-judgemental culture, which surrounded him both at home and at school as a reason for this. Damien discussed at length ideology underlying lack of modal choice in representation within the community, and through his reflections hoped to change his experience as a lecturer.

2. What aspects of their experiences do they consider enable or hinder their participation in reading and writing?

Connelly et al. (2013) stated:

The choice of how something is represented is central and meaningful. Individuals and groups have particular connections with modes of expression, and these may be visual, gestural, aural and other forms of artistic representation. These modes go beyond the written, go beyond the voice, and open up the vista to diverse forms of representation (p.10).

The participants explored many modes of representation and meaning-making, using cultural means, and individual choice.¹¹⁴ They found that in many areas of public communication no choice of modes was available, leading, sometimes, to alienation from the community. Alan was having difficulty keeping track of his utility bills:

Alan: *The problem with email is not what my friends send but when it is used for other things, which you have to be sure you understand, especially bills and*

¹¹³ P. 103

¹¹⁴ Discussed in Chapter 8

so on, now they are sending them through email, just emails. I don't like this because sometimes I get mixed up with emails and it's not so easy to show them to someone else. Besides, I do not know how to make payments through email. These things affect me. Everything through email. That's not fair on persons like me. (Lines 243-249)

They highlighted the injustice of a taken-for-granted attitude that all should be able to make sense of verbal, written communication, while representing meaning in other modes was devalued or ignored.

As the layers of the narrative lifted, and re-layered with new insights and experiences, the idea that some arbitrary level at which they could read and write was responsible for their difficulties was discarded. Each participant made new meanings and took up new positions, original for them in that they created them through transformed participation within the research, as they explored further, what had enabled or hindered them. They looked at their experiences with discourses past, which still affected them, and, through reflection, interacted with the experience the discourse had articulated. Their perception of particular experiences shifted as they reflected through the lens of new experiences, making explicit the contexts, which had created the discourse in the first place, making additions or changes in their narratives to reflect these new perceptions, sometimes, like Wayne, adding lengthy explanations on how they were using these new insights to increase agency.¹¹⁵

My writing first hindered, and then enabled, their participation in the research as I developed my writing through discussing it with the participants. I often paraphrased in simpler English, which affected the way I rewrote, enabling further participation. The participants considered the space of the research a 'safe' environment, a space where they would not be 'judged and found wanting' and so participated. Jenny mentioned a 'safe' place as enabling participation when she discussed reading to her children, while Martha mentioned it in relation to writing. Alan was afraid of reading for most of his life. At prayer group, his participation was enabled through the presence of the large screen and a 'safe' environment, causing him to reflect on his socially-situated identity, changing his perception of himself from a person with a label of dyslexia, unable to read, to a person who participated in reading at prayer

¹¹⁵ This was discussed at length in Chapter 7

group. Wayne found that negative discourse from his schooldays hindered participation; this question has been answered in detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

3. In what way, if at all, does the participants' perception of their agency affect their participation in reading and writing?

As reflections went deeper, the participants looked beyond themselves to the way others' values and attitudes shaped their perceptions. As the research progressed, the participants often asked to discuss particular themes. Martha, back from a seminar abroad, talked about the difference in attitude between her boss at work and the people she met during the seminar, and the effect on her participation. In her narrative, Martha explored others' perception of her and the effect this had. She said she always knew she was capable, because her mother and other relatives related how she took care of bills when her sister got married. This was in conflict with perceptions of her at school. She wondered if that was why criticism seemed so unfair. In another reflection she described herself as being on a see-saw depending on whether she was in the company of her husband and sister, who perceived her as unable to achieve, or with her teachers who praised and encouraged. This conflict was articulated in her poem in Appendix IV. Wayne discussed how he felt when tackling a project, highlighting attitudes of working partners in Malta and those of his American partners, which he described as 'very positive' and, to show the effect on his participation, added: *using the tools my friends have shown me , through the way I speak, [!] communicate enthusiasm* (lines 410-413). Alan reflected on his fear of reading, perceiving in his father's beliefs about reading a pressure to perform.

As they reflected, the participants uncovered various covert culturally constructed factors that affected their perceptions of these experiences and, in turn, their agency. An experience such as Jenny described happened within a cultural frame where a teacher was always right. Karla and Martha felt they had to obtain good formal qualifications to be valued in a culture that valued only 'accredited' knowledge.¹¹⁶

4. What further issues do the personal narratives of the participants raise?

¹¹⁶ A list of these constructs, as uncovered by the participants through reflection on their experiences is found in Appendix IX.

The narratives raised issues of identity, agency and social justice. The lack of diverse options of representation and modal choice in the community was one such issue, discussed above. Issues of formal assessment raised by Wayne and Damien affected the life-course of all the participants, sometimes barring the way to further education and desired employment. Critical reflection identified power structures underlying attitudes, such as those of gendered discourse and role stereotype, making explicit the embodied perception of that experience. Martha reflected again on her humiliation at work and said:

Martha: *If you don't write, you are not good in society! And I find that very unjust. People seem to think that they have a right to patronize you or humiliate you, by shouting at you when you make mistakes, and we are expected to tolerate it!* (Lines 431-439)

Through this critical reflection, the participants then reviewed the experiences they had perceived as shameful or humiliating, including issues of identity and agency explored in Chapters 6 and 7, by considering how factors they were uncovering, some of which are listed below, influenced their perception of such experiences. A full list of such factors is found in Appendix IX.

Table 5 Constructs uncovered through critical reflection

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A dearth of options of representation in the community led to non-participation, often labelled ‘apathy’ and ‘lack of motivation’ .
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A culture that viewed persons who did not read or write at a certain level and in a particular way as of no consequence, as either ‘lazy’ or ‘stupid’ fostered the fear of ‘being found out’ as unable to read and write.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not keeping up’ could only occur when performance of reading and writing was measured by age or peer cohort, irrespective of other factors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A culture of segregation and a low tolerance for diversity led to participant experiences of being sent to a trade school, or pulled out of class for extra tuition ‘for your own good’.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A label of dyslexia could only be applied in a society that viewed reading as a definable, measurable cluster of skills to be acquired and assessed.

Removing the label

This brought us back to the label of dyslexia. The participants initially storied experiences which included failure, or struggles with literacy events with their peers, especially in a school community where emphasis was on technical skills rather than participating, making them prone to accept the label of dyslexia. By labelling an individual dyslexic, an implication of personal deficit was made, masking the way the cultural system hindered participation. Like the teenagers in the video forum at the beginning of this chapter, the participants now tore off their labels for good.

A label redefined

As I looked back at how the participants and I perceived a label of dyslexia before undertaking this study, the difference was marked. The participants with a label of dyslexia who participated in this research initially collaborated to look for what supported them in their struggles with day-to-day literacy. Instead, they came to the realization, and I along with them, that their participation in literacy was affected by their own perceptions shaped by attitudes and values of the cultural environment where their experiences took place. The effect of experiences on their perception of their own agency

became more visible as the participants' critical reflections made apparent the power structures in the constructs perpetuated by the dominant element in society.

The participants did not conclude that they were victims of some culture-ogre either, because, as Holloway and Todres (2003) contended, through reflection they realized that they were "dynamic agents who could take an active part, based on the way in which they interpret the situation" (p.352).

At the beginning of the study Martha made a statement, retained in her narrative, (Line 8) saying: *I am very bad at writing and it affects me, and who I am*. Reflecting on her narrative at the end of the study, she added:

Martha: *Today, that I have all my learning behind me, plus my training overall, they boost me to risk. For me RISKING is a lot, it's a big deal. I think that the first time I was angry. Today, at the end of the process, seeing it as a whole story, I am more composed and it makes more sense, reading and writing cannot be something separate, out there, it goes on all the time. I opened a box of books and found two missing. I left a note. It is used all the time as part of my life, maybe today I do not feel the need to hide my difficulty, because I can write enough for my needs, not fluently, with limits, but it's ok, I know I will get there. As I said before, I am Martha, not dyslexic Martha.* (Lines 527-535)

Through their new interpretation and redefinition of a label of dyslexia, they believed it was a socially unjust label of 'otherness', giving rise to exclusion from participation through implying a deficit in the individual instead of in the system.

An original contribution to knowledge

This study makes no claim to ground-breaking findings, but adds to the body of knowledge in the field of literacy by building on the work of others mentioned throughout the study, adding some new elements.

The process of interaction through which the participants both discovered and shaped their perceptions of their own experiences, through reflection on collaborative ongoing narrative, extending the collaborative practices expounded by Lassiter (2005b), was specific to this study and developed as the data unfolded, leading to insights about the culture that shaped their participation. Since, as noted by Rowsell (2011), "Fractures of self sedimented

into texts is a way of simultaneously viewing: agency, contexts, practices used by participants to carve out an identity and to make meaning” (p.335). This builds on studies of participation and agency found in Rogoff (2003) and Holland et al. (2001) among others.

Although some of the literature reviewed mentioned emotion in connection with literacy practice (Pahl and Allen, 2011; Bartlett, 2007, among others), there was no body of literature on the role of emotion as both the lens through which experiences of participation in literacy were viewed and the crucible in which they were forged. This study builds on the work of Katz (2012) by applying it to literacy participation and the emotions forged there.

This study found that participation in reading and writing was part of the everyday experiences of individuals, as shown in the work of Pahl and Rowsell (2006; 2012), with this study highlighting more evidence of transformed participation through experiences. It followed then that hindering participation in any way, including by not making available helpful technology, was socially unjust.

The importance of perception in determining agency and participation, as found in this study adds to the body of knowledge in the field of consciousness, as it applies to literacy.

Many have studied literacy as participation, however, to my knowledge, not through phenomenological, ethnographic and narrative methods. This study used a neurophenomenological approach within a framework of New Literacy Studies, to document knowing, meaning-making and learning which took place through emotion, discourse and artifact.

Implications for practice

In this study generalisations were not sought or made, however some implications for practice, from within the experiences of the participants might be drawn.

- In spite of all good intentions by successive educational administrations, the role of students as agents of their own learning has been somewhat neglected. Students generally perceived themselves, and were exposed to discourses, which positioned them as receivers of an education, reinforcing the transmission model in use in most schools,

where teachers were the givers and students the recipients of knowledge.

- A prescriptive curriculum and a rigid teaching environment often, as stated by Cummins (2005) “constricts teacher and student identities in classroom interactions” (p.147). Discussion on increasing student motivation and engagement with learning do take place, and some aspects highlighted in this study could inform these initiatives.
- In a move to engage student interest, students in Malta are to be given tablets to use in the classroom. For this to be beneficial, it needs to move away from just replacing one technology by another and allow for choice of modality by the learner, and flexibility for this technology to become an artifact of experience, as shown in this study...
- Emotion was given a key role in learning by the participants reflecting on their experiences. The role of the affective in learning is often given lip service, with training courses on how to engage and motivate students, but then when it comes to put these into practice there seems to be a fear of emotional ‘entanglement’ between students and teachers, especially with older students. Many of the negative key experiences of school described by the participants in this study would not have occurred within a culture of caring and personal empathy between staff and students. In many schools, what counts as ‘respect for authority’ demanded from students is no more than an institutionalised distancing to keep ‘messy’ emotions from raising their head.
- Many of the participants described assessment practices as unjust, suggesting these could be diversified and personalised, as in the use of portfolios dedicated to the various areas of learning, as explicated in Pahl and Rowsell (2005), “to provide an assignment or artifact that exhibits proficiency” (p.126). E-portfolios were shown by Hughes et al. (2010) to enhance many aspects of learning in higher education. Change in mode of assessment is a fearful prospect for the schooling system, and elsewhere, seen as a gradual erosion of their gate-keeping power in society in general.

- The social injustices in the public sector, as pointed out by the participants, are perpetuated by the lack of modal choices in the community.¹¹⁷ Individuals make meaning of interactions with officials through what they see as a problematic mode of participation, the written word communicated in obtuse and difficult language.
- Officialdom replicates social injustice by perpetuating the myth that present practices of representation have served so far, so they must be right for everyone, making change difficult. The emotion of fear is important in this area, as fear of the unknown, fear of losing dominance and control, fear of the so-called 'illiterate' taking positions of power drives the policies and statements of officialdom.

Areas for further research

This study, which was limited to one researcher and eight participants, raised a number of questions. It uncovered and explored some issues that hindered the participation of these eight persons in reading and writing. Further research would uncover other ways in which participation in literacy is being constrained or hindered.

The notion of dyslexia as social exclusion, put forward by this study, needs further research on culture and agency. The link between emotion and consciousness of literacy experiences, and the effect this has on participation in reading and writing as a social practice, could be examined further.

Current research on the role of third-space, discussed by Pahl and Kelly (2005) and Baker and Gutiérrez (2008) among others, brings together diverse cultures in reading and writing across multiple domains, as found in this study. The notion of spaces as internal to experiences of reading and writing, rather than physical or virtual locations where literacy takes place, is another area for further development, together with the way spaces shape experience by altering the roles of participants as happened at various points in this study.

¹¹⁷ Some areas mentioned were parking notices, eye-test facilities, court cases and email billing, contrasted with recycling venues and hospital, where colour-coding and visual information make meaning available in more than one way.

Conclusion

As I write this conclusion, my four – year - old granddaughter is painting in the kitchen. She paints a picture for Dora “for when I see her in a shop.”¹¹⁸

She comes over to show it to me, pointing out that at the top she wrote “To Dora, from Julia” with paint. I admire and praise.

Did it really matter that mostly the J and the V were clear? I do not think so, and neither did she. What counted, was the experience of our interaction – both shaped by and shaping perceptions, my admiration and her satisfaction, embodied through our discourse and in the artifact between us,

Learning takes place when the whole person, the thinking, feeling, acting person is involved in interaction. Through this study the participants and I have learnt much. The role of perception, shaped by and shaping the interactional, social practices of people in a community, the culture, turned out to be of utmost importance in the experiences reflected on during this research. These experiences and the reflections on them were constructed by, and in turn, constructed, emotions, discourses and artifacts. No part of the experiences in the participants’ narratives was of lesser importance than another, and although the study was about reading and writing, an experience could not be fragmented and a part extracted. Each experience was more than the sum of its elements, shaped by and in turn shaping perception of the whole experience through our interaction within the research. Exploring reading and writing as discrete events, as my original intention for this research had been, would have been too simplistic, and through fragmentation, much knowledge would have been lost.

For the participants in this study participation in reading and writing was hindered, directly through lack of modal choice and education policies, and indirectly through perceptions shaped by the culture of the community, which they in turn shaped. The labels of fearful, defiant, stupid, uncertain and so on, which they tore off during the research, had all contributed to their exclusion from participation. Their levels of reading, as measured by the system, which labelled them in the first place, have not really changed, but their participation

¹¹⁸ Certain supermarkets hold children’s days when persons in costumes of favourite television characters roam the aisles.

has. Alan attends prayer group regularly, reads the words on the big screen, not just for the songs but also the prayers. He plans to practise a reading to read on his own in front of the congregation, though he does not know when yet. Martha is a practising psychotherapist, still at odds with her mentor sometimes, as she types out reports and documents, but is happy with her level of participation and feels appreciated. Jenny has become an advocate for her shift of bus drivers, males included, writing emails and reports to the authorities and management of the service. Andrew still becomes anxious when in the company of many books, but appreciates that reading can be on computer and still count as reading. Damien would like to think he enhances participation in numeracy in his class, but he is not sure whether he should be doing that, since, he said, 'once they get out there who will support them?' A sad indictment of our society, I thought. Wayne is still fighting the system of accreditation, and is at the forefront of a petition to allow students the option of taking examinations in non-language subjects orally. That leaves Brooke and Karla. Brooke had 'torn off her label' before the research started, and in her course she asks for help as necessary to allow her to participate fully. I have lost touch with Karla on a personal basis, though through social media she reinforces her definition of reading and writing as a means of communication, in which she participates fully. As for myself, I am more aware of what hinders participation in reading and writing, with taken-for-granted assumptions, and, I will never go for an eye-test or to the petrol station without thinking of my participants and our journey together.

The journey: Some things I learnt along the way

From this journey, I take with me an awareness of what a powerful, underutilized resource positive emotional experience can be. The affective dimension in students' experiences, an understanding teacher, an empowering moment of praise or even elation and satisfaction at a job done well, can be transformative. The impact of the emotional experiences the participants perceived as positive lingered into adulthood, enhancing their lives even now.

To tie in with the above, the power of ruling passions to motivate and enable can be considerable. Although I had read literature on this, it was different seeing the faces light up when the participants shed their gloom and discussed what they were passionate about, Like Damien and science, and Alan about

travelling and interior design, the pride their expertise in such ruling passions brings can be utilized to empower participation in literacy practices.

It also became clearer how friendships can develop in the most unlikely fashion, and that true friendship makes for better research, since the respect afforded a friend, the sharing of power, the engagement in a common interest, can only enrich the relationship between a researcher and a participant, who, like a friend, gives freely from her experiences, always ready to share.

Discourse, and silence, was threaded through the study as words linked experiences in and out of the space of the research. Like the spaces between words on a page, the discourse in the research space was not only the speaking, but also, equally, the silences of reflection. Looking at the discourse highlighted the importance of spaces in shaping it. There were similar spaces in diverse locations, as when my house, a canteen or a salon became the research space, and different spaces in the same location, as when a salon alternated between a research space, a place providing a service, and a space for Alan to affirm an identity of an interior designer. Space mediated the discursive experience of the participants, linking the various ways of knowing and being. Knowing and being, inclusive of literacy and literate identities, were linked with each other and their contexts by objects, activities and even text, in the form of the narratives.

I had never thought of photographs in quite the same way as Alan used them, to construct his social being-in-the-world, linking first-person to third-person being, constructing self and social identity, and that of his friends in relation to him, as together they connected through photographs he posted online.

A theme which stood out from the beginning of the research, but which space constraints did not allow me to develop, was that of 'funds of knowledge', the knowledge gained, as argued by Gonzalez et al. (2013) and Moll et al. (1992), through experiences in language and activities. The participants mentioned many different areas, such as sewing, photography, and interior design, which constructed knowledge. Discussions with Wayne made me realize that these were not accredited in any formal manner, ending up devalued and not considered in domains of higher education and the job market. The participants' reflections led me to examine my ideas of social justice from their perspective, an 'insider' view, questioning how ready we were to give up our

perceptions of the way things happened, not necessarily memories as such, but our feelings about them. It was very difficult for the participants and me to lay open experiences to this process, knowing that through discussion what we held as true and inviolable could change. I asked myself whether Karla refused to discuss because the past was painful or because she hugged her resentment to herself, and was afraid of losing it?¹¹⁹

A lesson I take away from this study is the unpredictability of research, the adventure, the excitement and the confusion that the data as it developed brought with it. I learned not to take anything, least of all so-called straightforward experiences, at face value, an oxymoron for sure because a face can be viewed from many angles, but to reflect and listen, open to surprises, resisting the 'temptation of certainty'.

¹¹⁹ Losing preconceptions is quite painful and confusing, as Brooke's anger which flared when she reflected on her being taken to the educational psychologist when she thought she was reading well, to be assessed to be entitled for support.

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Appendix I – Development of personal narratives as data

<p>Time line of the development of data: Each of the meetings with participants entered below are given in more detail on their individual time charts in Appendix II, where for each participant there is a chart with the way the data developed including type of data (notes, recording or other), the interview transcript and the personal narrative including poetry where available. Documents as approved by the Ethics review board are found in Appendix III.</p>	
Nov / Dec 2011	Informal talks with persons labelled as dyslexic and their families to formulate research questions.
25/1/12	Attended meeting with the Malta Dyslexia Association to discuss research and find participants
5/3/12	Ethics Review Board approval
17/3/12	Interview with Andrew
19/3/12	Follow-up with Andrew
9/4/12	Interview with Jenny
20/4/12	Follow-up with Jenny
3/5/12	Interview with Martha
10/5/12	Follow-up with Martha
17/5/12	Following a meeting with my tutor - Move towards a more narrative approach
1/6/12	Meeting with Brooke Informal conversation Interview Discussion
21/6/12	Meeting with Jenny narrative, reflection
22/6/12	Brooke: transcript /reflections
23/6/12	Brooke: Reflecting on experiences in narrative, and on changes in perspective.
30/6/12	Work on Narrative with Andrew
3/7/ 2012	Met with Alan for Informal visit.
9/7/12	Martha: Personal story development
3/8/12	Informal conversation with Karla and mum, interview
05/08/12	Informal visit with Wayne
10/08/12	Interview with Wayne
13/8/12	Follow-up with Wayne
1/9/12	Karla: Creating narrative from transcript reflections
2/9/12	Wayne: Discussing themes from transcript

7/9/12	Jenny: discussing themes in narratives; own narrative
12/9/12	Informal meeting with Damien
14/9/12	Interview with Damien
18/09/12	Interview with Alan
21/9/12	Follow-up of interview with Damien
28/9/12	Follow-up and discussion using transcript with Damien
5/10/12	Update of narrative with Brooke
13/10/12	Follow-up with Alan
1/11/12	Work on Narrative with Andrew
2/11/12	Conversation with Alan
1/12/12	Conversation with Alan mainly on fear / difficulties met in community settings.
1/12/12	Wayne: Personal story development
13/12/12	Jenny: Finalising personal story
18/12/12	Social interaction with participants including others
22/12/12	Damien: Social interaction including others
5/1/13	Conversation / reflection with Martha
13/1/13	Karla and mum: Update of narrative
2/2/13	Discussion on issues with Alan
5/2/13	Final meeting with Brooke
12/2/13	Discussed writing on identity and discourse with Andrew
25/3/13	Personal discussion plus writing task help with Martha
13/5/13	Martha: Retrospection on poem and personal story
27/5/13	Martha: Final Retrospection on poem and personal story
28/6/13	Unplanned meeting with Damien. Discussed personal issues with view of changing parts of narrative.
17/9/13	Finalised narrative with Andrew
29/10/13	Damien: Retrospection and personal story
31/10/13	Wayne: Finalised personal story
2/11/13	Met Jenny to read parts of what I have written so far
23/11/13	Martha: Discussed my writing
2/12/13	Retrospection on all data discussed through conversations as collated into personal story with Alan

Data set

Interviews	In-depth ethnographic interviews
Process of development of the narrative as data	Record of interactions including duration and locality / notes, recordings of conversations and discussions
Excerpts from reflective journal	Presented as data on development of the process of data development – part of a larger document
Narratives	Developed through reflection and discussion of experiences
Poems	From data / Data / Focus the data

Appendix II Transcription conventions used

1. In transcriptions, the initials NPB for the researcher are used.
2. Ellipsis (... or): at the end of a word/phrase/sentence or in the middle of sentence indicates a short pause, while a longer ellipse indicates a pause long enough to encourage turn taking.
3. Since both researcher and participants are bi-lingual, code-switching often occurs, and some Maltese interjections, such as 'ehe' form part of the dialogue, as there is no direct English replacement for this, a word which affirms what the other speaker says, but is more casual than 'yes'. Otherwise, Maltese words that cannot be translated are found within single quote marks, e.g. 'insomma', and, where the meaning is not clear from the text that follows, an explanation is given. Some translations are given below.
4. Non-verbal data relevant to what is being said is placed within < >, e.g. <laughed nervously>.
5. Square brackets are used to indicate any show of emotion relevant to the context e.g. [upset].
6. The use of capital letters indicates a raised voice.

The following words found in the transcript are loosely translated to mean:

Ehe: agreement

Ehhee: doubtful agreement

Emmm: uncertainty

Insomma: Maybe; so and so; not so much.

Appendix III – Participant data

A set of data for each participant consists of the time / space interaction chart showing the duration and location of each interaction between the participant and researcher, the in-depth interview and any applicable notes, poem, where available and the narrative. The time / space charts and poems are found in the appendices, but only a sample of the interviews and narratives could be included here due to space constraints.

Data development charts

Alan					
Locality	Date	Activity	Data	Duration in minutes	Comment
Social venue	25/1/12	Group invitation to participate	N/A	90	During an activity organised by the dyslexia association
Cafeteria	3/7/ 2012	Informal visit	Conversation / field notes	30	Discussed information sheet as approved by ethics review board, generalities.
Salon	18/09/12	Interview	Recording	80	asked for certain data not to be included. Some topics to be edited out of transcript
Salon	13/10/12	Follow-up	Recording	90	Clarification and discussion; some topics to be edited out of transcript
Cafeteria	2/11/12	Conversation on wish to read, family members Use of visuals in community settings	Field notes	40	Some themes evident in interview transcript; more insights on both our parts.
Valletta / shopping	1/12/12	Conversation on fear / difficulties met in community settings.	Field notes	30	Unexpected meeting. Helped Alan use an ATM / coffee and mutual discussion.
Social Venue	18/12/12	Social interaction including others	Field notes	120	I saw a different aspect of Alan to include in ,personal story'
Online through Facebook	various	Passive viewing	Notes	various	Avoids using words; puts different pictures and clips regularly - identity
Salon	various	I occupy the role of client / conversation on daily life.	Addition to personal story	various	Attitude different when he is in the role of service provider. An effective agent. Reflection on data collected.
Salon	2/12/13	Retrospection on all data as collated into personal story	Recording / Addition to personal story.	159	Reacts emotionally to data presented as personal story; reflects and adds more data on new realisations.

Andrew					
Locality	Date	Activity	Data	Duration in minutes	Comment
Social venue	25/1/12	Group invitation to participate	N/A	90	During an activity organised by the dyslexia association
My house	17/3/12	Interview	recording / field notes	45	Discussed information sheet Did interview
My house	19/3/12	Follow-up	Recording / notes	20	Extended discussion on various topics
Cafeteria	30/6/12	Narrative	Alterations directly on transcript	45	Clarification and discussion
My house	1/11/12	Narrative	Alterations directly on transcript	45	Clarification and discussion

Brooke					
Locality	Date	Activity	Data	Duration in minutes	Comment
Social venue	25/1/12	Group invitation to participate	N/A	90	During an activity organised by the dyslexia association
Vacant classroom	1/6/12	Informal conversation Interview Discussion	Field notes and recording	60	Discussed information sheet and consent form and research, interview Discussed and clarified issues.
Library	22/6/12	Creating narrative from transcript /reflections	Transcript / narrative	20	Reflected on childhood experiences..
Cafeteria	23/6/12	Reflecting on experiences in narrative, and on changes in perspective.	Development to narrative	20	Re-reading, reflecting and conversation
Library	5/10/12	Update of narrative	Narrative	20	Update of narrative
Empty classroom	5/2/13	Nothing to change or add	Narrative	20	

Damien					
Locality	Date	Activity	Data	Duration in minutes	Comment
Social venue	25/1/12	Group invitation to participate	N/A	90	During an activity organised by the dyslexia association
His house	12/8/12	Informal visit	Conversation / field notes	30	Discussed information sheet as approved by Ethics Review Board [generalities].
Library	14/9/12	Interview	Recording	93	Extended discussion on various topics
Canteen	21/9/12	Follow-up	Alterations directly on transcript	45	Clarification and discussion (half of transcript)
Canteen	28/9/12	Follow-up	Alterations directly on transcript	45	Clarification and discussion (rest of transcript)
His house	various	I am a student in an art class while Damien tries to teach me to draw; talk on visuals daily life.	Addition to personal story	various	Very knowledgeable
Social Venue	22/12/12	Social interaction including others	Field notes	120	Same table at staff lunch. Spent some time discussing literacy, others included. Spent time discussing personal story one-to-one.
Library	28/6/13	Unplanned meeting	Notes	30	Discussed personal issues, bordering on issues in the personal story as well.
Online through Facebook	various	Actively promoting exhibitions and attendance in cultural events		various	Assertive identity as artist
My house	29/10/13	Retrospection on all data discussed collated into personal story	Recording switched off	90	Retrospection

Jenny					
Locality	Date	Activity	Data	Duration in minutes	Comment
Social venue	25/1/12	Group invitation to participate	N/A	90	During an activity organised by the Dyslexia Association
My house	9/4/12	Interview	Recording	75	Information sheet; consent form; interview and discussion.
Cafeteria	20/4/12	Follow-up	Field notes	90	Clarification and discussion
Cafeteria	21/6/12	Shaping narrative, reflecting on experiences; selecting what was to be included.	Narrative	40	Discussion spilled over to personal matters, both disclosing privileged information
My house	7/9/12	Discussing themes in narratives; reflecting on own narrative	Amendments, additions and explanations in narrative	90	Narrative discussed at length, including personal information and more experiences around narrative
Jenny's house	13/12/12	Finalising personal story	Recording And narrative	120	Negotiation and revision
My house /her house	Various	Reading and discussing various sections of study	Writings	various	Together we read parts as I wrote about participants.

Karla					
Locality	Date	Activity	Data	Duration in minutes	Comment
Social venue	25/1/12	Group invitation to participate	N/A	90	During an activity organised by the Dyslexia Association
My House	3/8/12	Informal conversation Interview Discussion	Field notes and recording	90 (of which 40 are recorded)	Discussed information sheet and consent form and research, interview (Karla uncomfortable at recording). Discussed and clarified issues mostly with mum.
My house	1/9/12	Creating narrative from transcript reflections	Narrative	45	Karla found it very distressing to reflect on childhood experiences..
Online spaces	Various	Updates mainly of an academic nature e.g. changing one of her subjects from a science to sociology	Development to narrative	various	Status updates
Library	13/1/13	Update of narrative	Narrative	20	Update of narrative

Martha					
Locality	Date	Activity	Data	Duration in minutes	Comment
Social venue	25/1/12	Group invitation to participate	N/A	90	During an activity organised by the Dyslexia Association
My house	2/5/ 12	Informal visit	Conversation	30	Discussed reasons for the research and her proposed role
My house	3/5/12	Interview	Recording	70	Very dense and emotional. Participant asked for a meeting with no recording.
My house	10/5/12	Follow-up	Field notes	50	Clarification and discussion Martha asked for help with some work she is doing.
My house	Every two weeks s	Discussion / Supported Martha writing.	Creation of personal story	various	Work / discussion
My house	9/7/12	Personal story development	Recording	40	Discussed conference attended/ experiences
Social Venue	18/12/12	Social interaction including others	Field notes	10	Came with a friend. Introduced me to her, and a three-way conversation on reading and writing took place.
Library	5/1/13	Conversation	Field notes	45	Friend's difficulties; poem
My house	25/3/13	Personal discussion plus writing task help	Recording / story	60	Family / work situations
My house	13/5/13	Retrospection on poem and personal story	Recording	70	Final changes to story
My house	27/5/13	As above	Recording	120	. Final changes to story

Wayne					
Locality	Date	Activity	Data	Duration in minutes	Comment
Social venue	25/1/12	Group invitation to participate	N/A	90	During an activity organised by the Dyslexia Association
His offices	5/08/12	Informal visit	Conversations/ field notes	40	Discussed his son and why he was at the meeting in January; His school days; information sheet as approved by ethics review board and generalities.
His offices	10/08/12	Interview	Recording	80	Discussed his philosophy of reading and writing apart from personal experiences.
Telephone	13/8/12	Follow-up	notes	20	Clarification and discussion
Skype	2/9/12	Initializing personal story	Personal story	40	More clarification and amplification
Skype	1/12/12	Personal story development	Personal story	30	Retrospection
Social Venue	18/12/12	Social interaction including others	Field notes	10	Very brief interaction, introduced to his wife and children.
Telephone and Email	31/10/13	Finalised personal story	Personal story	50	Impossible to fit a face-to-face meeting due to participants' work pressure.

Sample from Martha's Interview, notes and narrative

Interview	Notes	Story
<p><i>...NPB: Very nice.</i> Martha: <i>She used to work with a friend of hers. Her friend used to sew the dresses and she used to decorate them. And she used to invent lots of things. This gold embroidery and all that. That yes, she used to be paid for that, imma when she used to help people in the village she never got paid for it. And whoever had any problem, he used to go to her and ask for help. And then she used to sew the uniforms for hospitals, I don't know if you remember, those striped uniforms,...</i> NPB: <i>Yes, I remember.</i> Martha: <i>She used to do those. She used to be paid for those.</i> NPB: <i>Tell me something about your childhood once we are talking about your mother.</i> <i>(some parts removed at participant's request)</i> NPB: <i>What's your earliest recollection of print?</i> Martha: <i>Sixteen.</i> NPB: <i>No, of something, anything, to do with print. At home, maybe your sister, with a book, or a letter. When a letter used to come by mail what</i></p>	<p>Excerpts from a larger body of notes, which were made either during or after meetings 10/5/12 Martha asked me not to record this conversation but agreed that I could make note when I get home, which I will show her next time we meet.... We read some of the transcript and I asked her to clarify statement re husband. She cried. I cried too. We discussed various rather personal issues including relationships with others in her life: Continuous arguments with her husband and her sister because they do not believe in her and do not think her capable of studying and becoming something. They tell her she is wasting her money. The priest in her parish gives her things to do, and instead of saying thank you talks behind her back; her mother is not very well, always in pain, and she cannot bear to see her suffering like this anymore; she is also rather worried about the literacy levels of various nieces and nephews. She also talked</p>	<p><i>I want to be known as Martha because it's a name I always dreamed of calling a daughter, had I ever had one. I have given the name to my two god-daughters.</i> <i>I am 50. This year I have qualified as a Gestalt psychotherapist, and now I am building a web-site about counselling for infertility challenges, because this is what I do, and I am the only one in Malta. It has been a long hard trip, but at last I am very bad at writing and it affects me, and who I am. I read a lot of books; I love reading books, I drown in a book. While studying I couldn't read as much as I wanted to, because I'm not disciplined. If I start reading a book I prefer to continue reading it than continuing what I have to study. So at that time, and even right now, as I have to get myself and my career going, those kind of books are on hold. (finalising this story, I have to add that now I am allowing myself some time to read).</i> <i>I read my first book at the age of sixteen. I started reading Enid Blyton. And</i></p>

<p>used to happen? Martha: <i>I don't know. I don't know. No, I don't think I used to participate. No, I don't know.</i> NPB <i>No, whether you remember somebody else.</i> Martha: <i>My elder sister, I mean, she took over my father, when my father died, at the age of eight.</i> NPB <i>You were eight when he died.</i> Martha: <i>Me and my twin were eight.</i> NPB <i>You had a twin? Yes, I am a twin. Em, and my elder sister, she stopped going to college...</i> NPB <i>And how old was she?</i> Martha: <i>Eighteen, there is ten years between us exactly. And she ...</i> NPB <i>So she stopped studying?</i> Martha: <i>Because she...she's from the previous marriage, my mother's first marriage, and there's ten years between us exactly. She's on the first of April and we are in July. And she took over my father's (role).</i> NPB: <i>And before your father died you don't remember anything?</i> Martha: <i>What I remember is that.... Its flashes, that I used to get a lot in trouble at school,</i></p>	<p>about difficulties caused by literacy struggles, already brought up in the interview, clarified certain questions which cropped up in transcription and removed certain parts of transcript. Today Martha also asked me to help her by checking English spelling and writing in some work she was doing. I agreed. She will be coming to my house, and we will leave a bit of time afterwards for my research. 9/7/12 Today she describes her experience of a conference she attended. Highlights for narrative:!No by force. Three day before I went up I got a scolding at work, about a letter, because I wrote 'lose connection' instead of 'loose connection', "WHAT A SHAME, WHAT A SHAME, YOU ARE GOING TO MAKE THE COMPANY LOSE FACE" and he went on and on. I remained with my mouth open. This was Wednesday and I left Thursday. So I am not talking about months ago. ...And now when I see her I will tell her that someone like me, with dyslexia, lectured me for two days and was not ashamed to ask for help with writing and spelling,</p>	<p><i>then I started reading novels and magazines. (I realise now that probably I was too frightened to read because of the lack of support and awareness, and pressure to read at school once I finished at the age of sixteen it was just me, no one to make me feel ridiculous. She used to get us up one by one, and after I would have had a difficulty to read, she would ask the next one to read, turn to me and say "Now, was that difficult.)</i> <i>I did not have an easy childhood. When I was eight my father died. I do not remember much about my early years. What I do remember about when I was young was the panic at home about my father, because he was always sick, in hospital, and mummy was always crying.</i> <i>It was so bad in the house that I blocked, and the blockage took everything.</i> <i>Whatever happened before I was about sixteen is only in flashes. If I had to describe my house, it's as if we used to live in a dungeon, always in the dark. In reality, we lived in a very old house, with a very big</i></p>
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<p><i>because of homework, and because I copy wrongly, from the blackboard, and I'd be thrown out of class, my ear I still cannot touch it.</i></p> <p>NPB: <i>What about earlier? They used to pull you from it?</i></p> <p>Martha: <i>Yes, they used to pull me from it.</i></p> <p>NPB: <i>Where were you at school?</i></p> <p><i>St Mathilda, Marfa. (A small Church school). Discussion referring to certain persons at the school, some of whom are still alive and identifiable</i></p> <p><i>What I remember when I was young was the panic at home about my father, cause he was always sick, in hospital, mummy always crying, but otherwise. But I know what happened. Nowadays that I've studied psychology, it's like, it was so bad in the house that I blocked, and the blockage took everything.</i></p>	<p>and admit she has dyslexia. This was Wednesday. But he really shouted at me and scolded me. I remained staring at him, over an 'o'. WE ARE NOT A COMPANY TO BE MADE FUN OF and so on and so on. In front of my desk and shouting and shouting. I was reception that day, so everyone could hear him. she was writing on the board, at one point, the other lecturer told her "Jane, you don't spell that that way!" all she said was "Oh, it's my dyslexia. Spell it please....." As cool as a cucumber, and I remained with my mouth open. If she were to work with me they would send her flying. Right now I'm feeling that it's not worth the years I have been studying, (her Maltese supervisor) _____ preaches, criticizes..... Then I went there and I felt competent, respected for what I am trying to do, and how well I know my work.</p>	<p><i>yard in the middle, and a very big garden at the back side, so my house would have been always full of sun, but I don't remember it.</i></p> <p><i>There was always so much pain and crying around!</i></p> <p><i>My father's first heart attack was when I was six months old. And then he died when I was eight. So in those eight years he was always struggling in and out of hospital. My mother had passed through a very bad trauma before my father's sickness; Her first husband had been killed. He was at work, and he was going from work to the bank, transferring money to the bank, and he was robbed and killed. That was my sister's father. She was only a year and nine months. This was on the 24th February, 1955, and then on the first of April she turned two.</i></p> <p><i>Lines 1 – 42 out of 546</i></p>
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Appendix IV Sample from research log.

A document of over 10,000 words which helped me reflect and reason out what I was learning on my journey. In it I would write down my reactions after interviews or transcribing, what I thought about articles I read, argue thoughts out too ridiculous to articulate to my supervisor, or too vague, feelings of unease, to which I went back after my pilot project, and even those episodes when ideas come together, episodes I went back to over and over again

25th January 6: 30 a.m. *As I sit huddled over my keyboard, cold, waiting for the heating to kick in, I ask myself the same question I asked myself as I climbed out of bed an hour ago: What am I doing here, feeling bereft, something missing. As I look at the document open in front of me for the umpteenth time, I notice a spelling mistake, and busily arrange it, then remember I sent the draft off yesterday, so the text is in limbo,*

In two days' time I will have an opportunity to meet my participants, or at least some of them. What if no one is interested, no one has the time?

2nd March *A month ago I thought I was about to embark on my research – how wrong I was. Since that time I have resubmitted my application for the ethics review board, an exercise that made me really focus on what I need to find out.*

5th April... *I got ethics clearance and did my first interview. I seemed to panic at one point because I felt that instead of opening up about reading the interviewee was shutting me out.... a whole confusion in my mind about what method to use for analysis is not helped by the fact that my data seems to fit into each method ...*

1st May *Transcribing is a long and arduous task – that's what everyone said. However, what they did not say, is the AHA factor while you are listening and have now more time to assimilate what the interviewee was saying. ...*

22nd June ...

Somehow, something doesn't feel right, though.

5th July... *Something is nagging me and I haven't figured out yet. Once I started discussing with Andrew he is opening up more, and I am letting him talk even when not related to literacy; I am letting them all talk, and I just listen and record,*

7th August

Yesterday I had a discussion with Martha as we went over some of the incidents she mentioned in her interview. She needed to talk I think ... left me feeling drained. When she was telling me about how the nun used to pick on her and pull her ear I couldn't help it when she started crying but cried along with her. ...

17th September... *Patrolling the Borders of Otherness: Dis/placed Identity Positions for Teachers and Students in Schooled Spaces Elizabeth Hirst ...The space occupied by the figured world of struggling and reluctant readers is not a physical space but a social*

9/11/12... *I find I need to discuss ideas and bounce them off someone just to give them some sort of form - writing of identity takes shape as similarities and difference ? ...*

27th December *Two people close to me have died this past year, and I am waiting for a third to go. This set me thinking hard this morning along the lines of identity. Who are these people? A question put in that way cannot be answered. To answer it I have to say "who were / are these people for me? ...*

2/2... *I feel like I am taking the 'long way' through this and trying to invent the wheel as I am sure so many people have been there and done this! What struck me with Alan today, which had not happened before when we discussed bits of his story and data, as when we talked about his childhood, the houses he renovated and so on, was that a number of times he told me that a. it was like a book, which from Alan is very meaningful ...*

14th February 5:30 am. *Travelling straight from work so I got up early and put on TV at 5:30. Hardcore and a man I did not recognize and he was talking about a new glass building in London and he said, as he spoke about himself: "you know, I was not good at school, so although you know that what you do is good, every time you do something you are surprised at it." I found out then that it was Renzo Piano. He spoke about listening and ...*

Lay awake trying to figure out why this negative feeling about numbering utterances or lines in my transcripts. Have been reading around topic. Just read Roulston. I am not sure yet, but somehow I think it's because no one 'answer' is an answer to a question asked by me directly but a culmination or exploration of a theme either discussed further up in the interview or still to be further explored later on.

5th March *...I feel as if I have now come a full circle back to Husserl and embodied experience ...It is as if by going over the data of their lived experiences they could shift their perspective, 'like moving physically to see another aspect of the view, which itself changes because you are looking at it. Does this make sense? Is this anything to do with what I wrote in the beginning?*

1st May *Autopoesis still nagging. ... So a person cannot be a non-reader, just a participant that by his participation generates the system which generates him right? AGHhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!*

Appendix V Sample of poems

Found-data poem –Composed by me to identify themes and express concepts that were proving to be difficult in prose.

Tell Me Who I Am

<i>Who am I as I walk Up and down Mountains and valleys of self-doubt?</i>	<i>Drab side roads of uninspiring career paths Industrial grey areas of adapted texts Denuded of any beauty The weaving of words can hold</i>
<i>Who am I as I flounder Afraid In deep rivers of self-pity? Or lose myself In a maze Of roads called intervention Often leading to the dead-end boredom Of simplified texts</i>	<i>Bramble choked alleys of assessment Pulling me back in countless, irritating snags Ripping away the last shreds Of what I think I know. How can I tell you who I am?</i>
<i>Or helplessness and ridicule</i>	

Some of the participants asked for help to make up poems of their own.

Wayne's poem

<i>With silken fetters Of words and letters They bind Unkind</i>	<i>A being must be Cut loose and let free To soar</i>
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Resentment (Karla's Poem)

<i>Why me? Don't you agree? They said I was stupid. They said I was dumb. An excuse For bad teaching</i>	<i>Wherever, whenever I want. And now I know I have the key To enter</i>
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<p><i>I sweated and toiled Their master plan foiled.</i></p> <p><i>Why didn't they teach me Reach me?</i></p> <p><i>I sweated and toiled Their master plan foiled I made it</i></p>	<p><i>I keep it close Afraid that I will lose it So shiny and so bright So fragile and so new</i></p> <p><i>And yes My sister always had it Why me? Don't you agree?</i></p>
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Martha's poem

<p><i>Ignorant I AM NOT The paper proves it. You told me I would never amount to much You called me careless, lazy Lazy I WAS NOT</i></p> <p><i>I am afraid My ear hurts from YOUR pulling I am afraid of making a mistake But still I tried</i></p> <p><i>Your doubts became mine I hugged them and fought them</i></p>	<p><i>And one believed in me</i></p> <p><i>So I believed in me AND I WON</i></p> <p><i>I know I am not stupid I guess I always knew I sometimes cannot write so well Is all</i></p> <p><i>I am not lazy or ignorant I guess I always knew</i></p> <p><i>THE PAPER PROVES IT</i></p>
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**Appendix VI –Letter sent through Malta Dyslexia Association and
Ethics Review Board documents**

Dear Members

Your voice counts. My name is Ninette Pace Balzan. Some of you may know me through the lectures on mind-maps I did for the Association last year. I am doing a study for my doctorate in literacy and language and I would like some of you to take part. I will be present at your next meeting and after the speaker finishes I will tell you more about my study.

I want to find out what you think about reading and writing, what you find supports you best to practice reading and writing, and what helps you talk about it. I will ask you what difficulties you have met and the kind of support you have received over the years and what support you feel you should get now.

I look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

Thank you

Ninette Pace Balzan



**The
School
Of
Education.**

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23 February 2012

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Dear Ninette

ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER

That's the way I see it: Identity, agency and modal choices of persons with a label of dyslexia

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved.

We recommend you refer to the reviewers' additional comments (please see attached). You should discuss how you are going to respond to these comments with your supervisor BEFORE you proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Dan Goodley', written over a horizontal line.

Professor Dan Goodley
Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel

cc Kate Pahl
Enc Ethical Review Feedback Sheet(s)

Information Sheet

I am a student reading for an EDD degree with the University of Sheffield. I would like to know what you think reading and writing are, and how you use reading and writing in your everyday life.

How I plan to do this

We will meet and discuss reading and writing. With your permission I will record these discussions. These will be used only by me for research. You will be asked to review this information before it is used. All names will be changed, and nothing that can show who said what will be written up.

Should you decide not to take part or change your mind about taking part in this study at any time you are free to do so.

Time required from you:

- A meeting with me for about two hours. Possibly followed by another meeting should anything from the interview be unclear
- I may visit with you, at your convenience, at home or places where you use reading and writing. We will keep a record of what reading and writing you do most often.
- At the end of the research we will discuss and reflect on all that we have shared together on reading and writing.

Should you need more information before deciding whether you want to take part, we can meet and discuss further.

Thank you for your interest,

Ninette Pace Balzan MEd

21441466; 77141466

Title of research study: Reading and writing in everyday life
Name of Researcher: Ninette Pace Balzan

Consent form - Please initial each statement you agree with.

- I have read and understood the information sheet. ____.
- I had an opportunity to ask questions, and I have understood what my role in this study is. ____.
- I know that I take part because I choose to do so, and can leave the study at any time I wish to. ____.
- I know that my name will not be used but that I will be known by another name in anywhere this information is used. ____.
- I know that information given by me will be recorded and stored, to be used for study purposes. ____.
- I can ask to see any information collected from me and about me at any time during or after the study. ____.
- I can ask for parts of the information which I so choose to be deleted. ____.
- I understand that information gathered during this study will be used in research and learning. ____.

Having read and initialed all of the above I agree to participate in this study.

Name and signature of participant: _____

Name and signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

Appendix VII NVIVO Themes

Windows taskbar: Start, Micro..., Chrome, uTorrent, Skype, litera..., Desktop, EN, 19:16, 30/04/2014

Application: literacy in everyday life.nvp - NVivo

Menu: File, Home, Create, External Data, Analyze, Explore, Layout, View

Search: Look for: [] Search In: Nodes Find Now Clear

Left Panel: Nodes, Relationships, Node Matrices

Bottom Panel: Sources, Nodes, Classifications, Collections, Queries, Reports, Models, Folders

Status: & NPB 41 Items

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
literacy events	5	106	07/06/2012 09:22:45	NPB	08/09/2012 15:08:46	NPB
cultural-historical	5	22	09/06/2012 06:16:07	NPB	29/06/2012 15:04:33	NPB
sponsor	2	2	09/06/2012 15:31:49	NPB	29/06/2012 15:15:58	NPB
Identity	4	29	09/06/2012 07:29:09	NPB	29/06/2012 15:04:25	NPB
domains of literac	4	35	07/06/2012 09:24:54	NPB	07/06/2012 09:38:41	NPB
visual	3	9	09/06/2012 07:01:25	NPB	29/06/2012 15:15:58	NPB
childhood	4	28	07/06/2012 22:10:40	NPB	08/09/2012 15:08:46	NPB
reading	4	60	09/06/2012 06:21:37	NPB	08/09/2012 15:08:46	NPB
bilingualism	3	12	09/06/2012 07:02:56	NPB	08/09/2012 15:08:46	NPB
literacy practice	5	16	07/06/2012 09:26:06	NPB	08/09/2012 15:08:46	NPB
work	4	13	07/06/2012 22:33:54	NPB	29/06/2012 15:02:55	NPB
computer	4	25	09/06/2012 06:48:10	NPB	08/09/2012 15:08:46	NPB
age	4	4	07/06/2012 22:29:17	NPB	29/07/2012 09:54:17	NPB

Appendix VIII Discourses selected together with participants as falling under three categories

The discourses below were selected together with participants, under three headings. The first discusses discourses of the participants which represent the social realities they feel they are living, the social activity of their experiences. The second portrays discourses participated in through Interaction with the social world, to interpret and construct reality, while the third is concerned with the participants' ways of being-in-the-world, the language they used to construct self-knowledge

Discourses reflecting social realities

Brooke: *At the age of five, I was sent to another school, considered one of the best church schools for girls on the island. I was told I was very lucky to have a place there since it is difficult to get in, only through a lottery.*

Martha: *My mother... was never sent to school and she is ninety-three. In the village she was much respected... and no one was ever bothered by the fact that she could not read or write... To earn a living and keep us she used to embroider.*

Jenny: *After Form 3, I went to a Trade School ... to a school of Art and Design. ... being a girl my mother was more interested in my knowing how to cook and clean the house and so on... I would have had to go to the one in Floriana probably and end up working in a factory, because that taught sewing.*

Alan: *After that, [Trade school in Floriana], I started working in a factory. I suffered. It was something horrible, like being a robot, always doing the same thing; Eight hours of repetition. I was on jeans, eight hours of putting in rivets, always the same thing.*

Wayne: *it's very different now....[However] The teachers still don't get it, they still try to solve it by "Would you like a hand out Peter, Are you sure?" "Are you ready?" So the other kids feel he is getting special attention ... the dynamics of friends is messed up ...then you do not belong.*

Damien: *Society only values script. ... There are many issues in court because of this problem. People think they own certain property because the lawyer interpreted wrong, and then they have to get an architect to reinterpret and say what belongs to who.*

Constructing, Interpreting and interacting with social reality

Alan (primary school): *In class, whenever the teacher asked me to read I used to say that I didn't want to, never that I couldn't.*

Alan (Trade School): *I had to do some reading and writing while I was there, but very little. For some reason I was not so afraid there, I think because the reading and writing was about things I knew about and that interested me, and then when I did the exams I passed.*

Jenny (Trade School): *...and you have just the basic Math, English and Maltese, which most of the time wasn't done, because the type of students that used to attend trade schools at the time didn't like the subject, and I was one of them! So we used to do everything not to have the lesson done, especially with the Maltese and English; Math was OK.*

Karla: *I was always worrying at school but no one ever asked me why. Instead, they told my mother to take me for tests since they thought I was very stupid and could not understand people talking and so on. However, I could, and I thought something bad was wrong with me, or that I was being bad.*

Wayne: *They [American business partners] wake up in the morning, and they, at least the ones I know, are full of excitement. They're very positive, and if you say 'how are you?' they'll say "great!". In Malta, if you say 'How are you?' you get 'not bad', 'getting by' which feels so negative. But using the tools my friends have shown me I can, through the way I speak, communicate enthusiasm.*

Andrew: *Instead you can listen to the news. Nowadays it is easily available on all media even if you just look at your computer you see news online Even though you're reading it's not the same.*

Being –in-the-world

Martha: *I can write enough for my needs, not fluently, with limits, but its ok, I know I will get there. As I said before, I am Martha, not dyslexic Martha.*

Karla: *Nowadays I think of myself as a good reader and writer. I use reading all the time from the moment I wake up and check the expiry date on the milk for breakfast!*

Brooke: *Now that I am a student here (post-secondary college for Art and Design) I do not feel I have any difficulties with reading, though sometimes I make a mistake in my spelling.*

Wayne: *I have to keep telling myself, reminding myself, on a daily basis that I work very hard. ... You have to keep telling yourself "I can do this". You have to say it out loud 'I can do this'*

Alan: *I don't know what stops me, maybe it's fear, maybe it's my character, maybe I am scared of disappointing my father, but whatever it is I am going to keep trying and I will beat it in the end.*

Andrew: *If I had to choose between reading and doing something else, I think I would prefer doing something else. Basically, for me I don't think much of reading cause I don't enjoy it.*

Assessment

Both Fairclough, 2005, and Gee, 2013, discuss the lasting effects of discourse in creating perceptions and attitudes. Many of the participants discussed the lasting effects of discourses of assessment, what they felt each time they were assessed and found lacking.

Brooke: *By the time I got to Form 1 I felt I was reading much better. But then we went to see the doctor again and he told my mother that I was much worse than I had been ...*

Wayne: *At first, across the board, I used to rely on my own intelligence to reason things out, but at that point, that's not what they were after. They were after you becoming a citizen of academia. If you didn't have those things you just didn't qualify. So by Form 3 my results all said: "We don't know what happened to Wayne," or: "He can work much harder", or: "Such a pity", and so on, and so I was branded as an underperformer, lazy, distracted, and all those words. Your classmates start looking at you differently too. They start expecting low marks from you at a certain point, so you start to not bother, because you will not get there. And your self-esteem affects the whole situation. The disparaging teachers, the discouraging ones, I still think of as a group. It was, kind of, the general attitude. You build defenses. Then you don't really fit in with your friends. And you feel pretty much an outcast if you didn't get there. ... I work very hard and I achieve a lot, but down there is a worm, that always keeps reminding you, that your teachers, in those vulnerable years thought that and told you those words which now have a very solid basis and are very hard to dislodge, During your school years you are very vulnerable... because academia labels you as a failure or a success on paper. ... Only two people looked at me positively at that time, and they stand out like a beacon, even now. One was the guidance teacher, who once told me:" What you do is not bad, just different. You will still get there, but in your own way"..... Another person was our English Literature teacher, who said, and even wrote on my reports, "What Wayne does in class is not being reflected in this report and what he did in his exams and this should require further investigation". He knew something was not right, and that I could be capable.*

Martha: *At the end of my school years, although I was happy to be out of there I was also sad because during the last two years we were divided, one group for those who were to remain studying and another for those who would later do office work such as shorthand, typing and so on. During shorthand I was fantastic, although I never passed from exams because I used to read instructions wrongly, for example not read double space and I miss doing that. So I would have done everything right but miss the double space. I was very fast in typing,*

shorthand was fantastic, but the block was that if I need to write something bombastic I wouldn't know how to spell it, NOT how to do the shorthand; but by then it was too late and no one would believe I could learn. All that counted were the exams. ... I took secretarial and no one thought it possible that since I had not learnt to write in all that time I could learn to write in the last two years By the time I left school, I felt cheated. I felt that I was capable, could do something, lots of things, but I was always stopped. I never thought that I wasn't capable. But I didn't know what and how and who and when I would find out what I could do.

Damien: *Thinking about my children, my daughter, who is in a so called "good" church girls school, in her report, next to every mark, if she got a 48 for example, would be written FAIL, FAIL. FAIL. As if we or she can't read the mark, and we are talking about two marks here.*

Power structures in discourse – issues of social justice

Jenny: *... and this teacher said, "LET me tell you what she wrote", and she gave the name and read what I had written to the rest of the class and made fun of me ... I don't think that teacher liked me at all. One day, the girl that was sitting next to me said that she was missing a rubber and so this teacher came along, ... and she turned my satchel upside down, everything fell onto the desk, and she went all through my things roughly and then she told me to pick it up, and she called me careless, .and obviously, the rubber wasn't there because I hadn't taken it. I was only about eight years old, and that made me very unhappy at school. So I used to go and try not to talk, being in the class because I had to go. Then with my mother it wasn't helpful at all because she didn't understand; for her generation, the teacher is always right . That's the way they used to think in those days. ... And then the other children look at you differently, and if the teacher picks on you they do too.*

Martha: *It's as if people are made of writing!! If you don't write you are not good in society! And I find that very unjust. A lot of people with dyslexia see it that way. People seem to think that they have a right to patronize you or humiliate you, by shouting at you when you make mistakes, and we are expected to tolerate it!*

Wayne: *I am not definite about this, but I think the power reading and writing gave you in society put you at the top of the food chain.... If you could read the bible you could tell the faithful what it said. So if you wanted to interpret that, or adulterate it, it put you in a position of power. Now that everybody can read and write, everybody can make their own experience, of what the bible has to say. But the church still clings to its structure for better or worse, cause there is a need for structure. So the power attributed to literacy is historical, and all about power. Even the way in which we have to learn to read and write does not have to be just one.*

Damien: *These students who cannot read, these people, are very hurt about it, They feel they are less of a human being than other people! And I think they are*

correct to a certain extent, because society makes you less! If you are living in a developed country you are less.

Alan : *At clubs and night spots things have improved, ... maybe because of tourists. But in other areas, especially our own government areas, things are not so good. We all pay taxes after all. Use more ways to give information. Parking signs for example, you cannot always understand the writing telling you who can park there, when and for how long. When parking, if I find a notice I do not park cause I wonder maybe it says I can only park for a limited time of something. Just last week, I received a paper [government notice] I read some of it, but I am not sure whether I understood it ... However, if at least they were to use simple words it would help, and with shorter sentences you would not get so confused.*

Wayne: *I don't think we need a devaluation of words, but we need an appreciation of images. I think this effort to validate right-brain has nothing to do with devaluing left-brain. And when we talk about left-brain and right-brain it does not refer to the actual physical brain. It's the philosophy.*

Appendix iX Constructs uncovered during reflection

<i>Reading and writing are skills everyone learns at school.</i>
<i>If you do not read or write well you are either very lazy or very 'stupid'. Shouting at 'stupid' persons helps them to understand.</i>
<i>Using supports, digital or otherwise, to read or write is not fair to the other students. Assessments weed out those that work from those that do not bother.</i>
<i>Segregated learning helps weaker students catch up.</i>
<i>If you do not learn to read with your year group there is something wrong with you. You must be 'assessed' and statemented as disabled to get help.</i>
<i>Men are the main breadwinners in a family and must get a good job with promotion prospects.</i>
<i>Women are the child-bearers and home-makers. They can study easy subjects such as art.</i>
<i>Some students are not good at school and should be prepared for 'manual' labour</i>
<i>Unless a certificate certifies what you learn, you have not learnt it. You are only as good as your exam results.</i>
<i>To be literate you must read from books. Anything else is not real reading.</i>
<i>A person has no right to expect information to be in anything but words.</i>
<i>It is shameful if you cannot interpret words, but fine if you cannot interpret simple diagrams! Someone will be assigned to interpret them.</i>
<i>Being bullied is part of life and toughens you up.</i>