Coping with dyslexia:
A transactional perspective

Submitted by Theodosia Thoma, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, September 2012.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the phenomenon of coping with dyslexia based on the perspectives of six Greek dyslexic adults, as expressed by themselves. The research is concerned with exploration of the phenomenon by standing out from linear reductionist approaches - whether pathologising person-focused or exclusively environment-focused - as well as interactionist approaches that are simplistically additive. Instead, the study explores the phenomenon of coping with dyslexia from a transactional perspective which assumes that the factors of coping are strongly interrelated, mutually affected and altered by the transaction, suggesting a more complex and holistic understanding of the phenomenon. More specifically, the study considers the adequacy of Schlossberg’s transitional 4 S System in explaining the experiences of individuals who cope with dyslexia.

To pursue the purposes of the study, a multiple case studies design was employed and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Findings suggest that for the participants, coping with dyslexia is not restricted simply to dealing with a set of difficulties, because the dyslexia ‘situation’ is a complex entity with a variety of aspects which relate directly or indirectly to literacy efficiency. Participants reported employing a complex and constantly evolving (across contexts and over time) system of different coping strategies. In fact, findings suggest that coping with dyslexia is not a stable entity but a transactional process which is characterised by fluidity, non-linear evolution and involvement of multiple factors. The 4 S System managed as an analytic tool to adequately identify and explain the complex transactionist relationships between the involved factors and the system of coping as a whole. Finally, in terms of effectiveness, findings suggested that there are no magic recipes. The usefulness of a coping or support activity seems to be an individualistic issue determined by contemporariness and so, a flexible approach towards coping with dyslexia is suggested.
To my supervisors, Phil, Ruth and Hannah,

to my parents, Konstantinos and Evaggelia,

to my brother, Yannis

and to Giorgos

without whose endless support this thesis would not have been possible.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Personal introduction</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Rationale and purposes of the research</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Outline of the thesis</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING DYSLEXIA AND COPING</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Understandings of dyslexia</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towards an agreed-upon definition?</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical and individual deficit model</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genetic and neurobiological approaches</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive approaches</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social model</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio-psycho-social model</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Understandings of coping</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person, trait-oriented approaches</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation-oriented, process-based approaches</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Effectiveness’</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactionist approaches</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional approaches</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with Transitions</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Conclusions from dyslexia and coping theories</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Research on coping strategies and dyslexia</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions from the review of the research on dyslexia and coping</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions of the study</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ontological, epistemological and theoretical perspective assumptions .......................... 95
Sample .................................................................................................................................. 104
Data collection method ......................................................................................................... 107
Data analysis methods and procedure .................................................................................. 111
Quality of the study: issues of validity and reliability .......................................................... 120
CHAPTER 4: ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ......................................................................... 124
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS ........................................................................................................ 137
A. SELF ........................................................................................................................................ 139
The participants ...................................................................................................................... 139
1. Personal and demographic characteristics ........................................................................ 141
   Gender .................................................................................................................................. 141
   Age and Life-stage .............................................................................................................. 142
   Ethnicity and Culture .......................................................................................................... 143
   Socio-economic status ....................................................................................................... 144
   Health status ...................................................................................................................... 145
2. Psychological characteristics ............................................................................................. 145
   Personality ........................................................................................................................ 145
   Maturity, awareness and sense of control: ......................................................................... 146
   Commitments .................................................................................................................... 148
3. Conclusions ......................................................................................................................... 149
B. THE ‘DYSLEXIA SITUATION’ .......................................................................................... 150
1. Characteristics of the situation ......................................................................................... 152
   Reading ............................................................................................................................ 153
   Writing ............................................................................................................................. 154
   Phonological discrimination ............................................................................................ 155
   Oral expression and vocabulary ...................................................................................... 156
   Concentration ................................................................................................................ 156
   Foreign Languages .......................................................................................................... 157
   Memory ............................................................................................................................ 157
   Visual perception ............................................................................................................. 158
   Practical thinking and agility .......................................................................................... 158
   Some ‘other’ characteristics ............................................................................................ 159
   General findings on the nature of the ‘situation’ ............................................................. 159
2. 4 S situational dimensions ............................................................................................... 161
   Trigger ............................................................................................................................. 162
   Timing ............................................................................................................................... 162
Control.............................................................................................................. 163
Role change....................................................................................................... 163
Duration ............................................................................................................ 164
Previous experience .......................................................................................... 165
Concurrent stress ............................................................................................. 165
Assessment and appraisal of the situation ....................................................... 166
3. Implications .................................................................................................. 168
Practical implications ....................................................................................... 168
Emotional implications ...................................................................................... 172
C. SUPPORT ...................................................................................................... 175
1. Types of support ......................................................................................... 175
   a. Situation-focused support ...................................................................... 175
      i. Medical support .................................................................................. 176
      ii. Mainstream support .......................................................................... 178
      iii. Alternative support .......................................................................... 178
      iv. Survival support ................................................................................ 179
   b. Financial support ..................................................................................... 180
   c. Person-focused support ........................................................................... 180
      i. Psychological support ......................................................................... 181
      ii. Social support .................................................................................... 181
   d. Moral support .......................................................................................... 182
2. Critical commentary on support .................................................................. 183
3. The support of environmental sources ........................................................ 191
   Family ........................................................................................................... 191
   a. School ...................................................................................................... 195
   b. University ............................................................................................... 199
   Diagnostic system and educational system ................................................. 201
   Dyslexia institutes ....................................................................................... 202
   Private tuition .............................................................................................. 205
   Peers and friends ......................................................................................... 206
   Society .......................................................................................................... 208
   Circumstances and coincidences .................................................................. 209
4. Conclusion.................................................................................................................. 212
D. COPING STRATEGIES ............................................................................................ 212
1. Situation-focused coping strategies ........................................................................ 213
   a. Medical coping strategies .................................................................................. 213
   b. Mainstream coping strategies ......................................................................... 215
   c. Alternative coping strategies .......................................................................... 217
   d. Survival coping strategies .............................................................................. 222
2. Person-focused coping strategies ........................................................................... 224
3. Avoidance coping strategies .................................................................................. 231
Critical commentary on coping strategies ................................................................ 234
   ‘Effectiveness’ .................................................................................................. 246
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION .............................................................................................. 249
Main findings:.............................................................................................................. 250
   a. Dyslexia as a whole situation .......................................................................... 250
   b. Environmental system of support .................................................................... 254
      Family ............................................................................................................ 256
      Educational system, school and university ...................................................... 257
      Dyslexia institutes and private tuition ............................................................ 260
      Society ........................................................................................................... 261
   c. Coping strategies system .................................................................................. 262
   d. Transactional coping with dyslexia: multiplicity of interrelated factors and
      emergence of an evolving entity .................................................................... 266
   e. The transitional 4 S system as an analytic tool for coping with dyslexia ........... 271
Relation to other research .......................................................................................... 274
Implications and suggestions of the study for the field ............................................. 281
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS .................................................................................... 286
   a. Summary of findings ....................................................................................... 287
   b. Unique contribution ......................................................................................... 290
   c. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research ................ 292
   d. Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 295
REFERENCES ............................................................................................................ 296
APPENDICES ............................................................................................................. 313
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Frith’s three-level framework of dyslexia .................................................. 50
Figure 2: Krohne’s hierarchical model of coping ............................................................. 65
Figure 3: Comparison of different approaches of coping ................................................. 66
Figure 4: Coping resources – the 4 S’s ........................................................................ 71
Figure 5: The individual transition ................................................................................ 74
Figure 6: Similar patterns in models of coping and dyslexia ............................................. 76
Figure 7: The Quintain of coping with dyslexia and the individual embedded cases ....... 92
Figure 8: Process of conducting the multiple case research ............................................ 94
Figure 9: ‘Ladder of analysis’: the process of within-case and cross-case analysis ...... 119
Figure 10: Normative ethics, meta-ethics and applied ethics in dyslexia research ....... 132
Figure 11: Process of transformation of ‘neutral’ characteristics into ‘dyslexia characteristics’ .................................................................................................................. 151
Figure 12: The support system during Eugene’s childhood ............................................ 186
Figure 13: Dyslexia as a whole situation ........................................................................ 253
Figure 14: Different types of support ............................................................................. 254
Figure 15: The emergent entity of support ..................................................................... 256
Figure 16: Different types of coping strategies ............................................................... 262
Figure 17: Factors related to the dynamic evolution of the coping strategies system .. 264
Figure 18: A transactional model of coping with dyslexia ............................................. 269
Figure 19: The Indian fable of the blind men exploring the unknown creature called an ‘elephant’ ............................................................................................................. 275
Figure 20: Difference in the conceptualisation of the entity of coping between most research in the field and the present study ......................................................... 280
# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Types of environmental support. ................................................................. 176
Table 2: Types of environmental support provided to Stelios in life-course. .......... 188
Table 3: Types of support provided by different environmental sources in different time periods........................................................................................................ 189
Table 4: Types of different coping strategies ............................................................ 213
Table 5: Examples of medical coping strategies. ....................................................... 214
Table 6: Examples of mainstream coping strategies............................................... 216
Table 7: Examples of alternative coping strategies. ............................................... 217
Table 8: Examples of survival coping strategies. ..................................................... 222
Table 9: Examples of emotional and cognitive coping strategies. ......................... 226
Table 10: Examples of avoidance coping strategies. .............................................. 226
Table 11: Characteristics of the operation of coping strategies.............................. 234
Table 12: Factors that contribute to the dynamic evolution of the system of coping strategies. ........................................................................................................ 237
Table 13: Synopsis of Stelios’s system of coping strategies..................................... 238
Table 14: Correspondence between types of support and types of coping strategies... 267
Table 15: Synopsis of 4 S strengths........................................................................ 272