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Roy Alexander

E822: Masters Multi-Disciplinary Dissertation: Education, Childhood and  
Youth.

Inclusive Practice

The impact of socio-economic status on primary literacy and dyslexia  
pedagogy: a case study.

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### **Abstract**

This case study research proposal, grounded in a Foucauldian framework, investigates the inequalities in dyslexia diagnoses and literacy education between working-class and middle-class children in one primary classroom. The study critically interrogates the power dynamics inherent in neoliberal education and their role in perpetuating inequalities, by analysing the connections between identity, pedagogy, and dyslexia. The literature review explores how deficit thinking manifests and examines the implications for dyslexic students, particularly regarding how socioeconomic status affects deficit thinking and academic outcomes. The methodology aims to reveal the voices of marginalised students thus contributing to a more inclusive and equitable understanding of literacy education.

## Contents

Abstract.....	1
Chapter 1, Introduction.....	3
Part A, Chapter 2, Topic Literature Review.....	6
2.1 Student Identity and Deficit Thinking.....	7
2.2 Identity, Deficit and Dyslexia .....	12
2.3 Outcomes; Ability Setting, Assessment and Deficit Thinking.....	14
Part A, Chapter 3, The Conceptual Framework Literature Review .....	17
3.1 Introduction .....	17
3.1.a Themes Identified in this Literature Review .....	17
3.2 Social Justice and Critical Theory .....	18
3.3 Foucault and Governmentality.....	19
3.4 Critical Theory as a Tool of Transformation .....	21
3.5 Conclusions .....	22
Part B, Chapter 4, The Research Proposal .....	23
4.1 Title and Topic.....	23
4.2 Development of the Topic Literature Review .....	23
4.3 Development of the Conceptual Framework .....	23
4.4 Positionality .....	24
4.5 The Research Questions.....	24
Part B, Chapter 5, Research Design, Research Methods and Methods of Analysis .....	26
5.1 Research Design and Design Frame.....	26
5.2 Research Methods .....	28
5.3 Research Participants.....	29
5.4 Validity and Reliability.....	29
5.5 Research Analysis.....	30
5.6 Ethical Considerations.....	31
Chapter 6, EP Postscript – Narrative Critical Reflection.....	34
References .....	36
Appendices .....	44
Appendix A: EMA Reflection Evidence Grid .....	44
Appendix B: Gatekeeper, Teacher & Parental Participant Letters, participation consent forms. ....	47
Appendix C: Ethical Appraisal Form .....	52
Appendix D: Interview questions for the student focus groups .....	56
Appendix E: Interview questions for the teacher.....	57

## **Chapter 1, Introduction**

This research proposal examines how socio-economic identity influences the provision of support for dyslexia and reading difficulties in primary school classrooms and how these factors contribute to deficit thinking and affect academic outcomes. Employing a critical theory approach, it utilises qualitative methods to explore the manifestation of power relations and deficit thinking and its impact on the inclusion of students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

My secondary school teaching experiences are the reason behind my enrolment on this course and the starting point of the rationale of this research proposal. Those experiences involved teaching students with varying personal and educational backgrounds across all social classes experiencing varying levels of disability and inclusion. My observations of these experiences caused me to consider the impact of a person's background on their experience in school and resultant instances of deficit thinking. Despite the rhetoric of social mobility and a neoliberal curriculum that embodies and supports the aspirational nature of middle-class ideas and notions of literacy, I have typically witnessed middle-class and working-class children respectively following different academic or vocational pathways beyond Key Stage 4. These experiences led me to consider at what point in a student's career deficit thinking manifests and how does it affect the pedagogy they experience, specifically in the development and support of their reading and writing? Consequently, the focus of this research is to examine the impact of socio-economic status on primary literacy pedagogy, particularly regarding dyslexia, within a neoliberal curriculum.

The rationale for the focus of this research is further supported by specific modules and readings from EE814 and EE815. My introduction to the ideas of privileged forms of literacy and deficit thinking arose in EE814 from articles relating to Māori children marginalised by a colonial curriculum, (Bishop *et al.*, 2009). The parallels between the disengagement of Māori students and my experiences of teaching working-class children were obvious, as was the use of deficit thinking by the teachers. Riddel's article recounting the issues that disabled children in Scotland faced mirrored this phenomenon because differences in treatment, support and attitudes were dependent on the socio-economic status (SES) of disabled children and families, (2009). Finally, research that explored the power of pupil voice, (Arnot and Reay, 2007) and how power and inequality relates to class, (Reay, 2006; Reay, 2001) in UK education solidified the justification that my rationale for researching class differences in education was sound.

Studying literacy in EE815 helped develop the rationale in relation to these issues firstly from the perspective of groups that historically have not privileged the written word or considered it as literacy. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities who traditionally privileged their verbal

ontologies of literacy and cultural history over the written word, struggled to adhere to the norms of the neoliberal curriculum in England, (McCaffery, 2009.) Yet they have rich forms literacy, communication and storytelling, amounting to a wealth of cultural capital but which manifests negatively in educational contexts, (Levinson, 2007).

EE815 also introduced me to the disagreements and tensions relating to reading difficulties, dyslexia and the associated redistributive justice of resources and support. For example, dyslexia can be viewed as an individualised medical deficit requiring intervention and support and yet professionals cannot agree on a definition of dyslexia or the issue that a one-sized fits all medical approach that does not work for all students, (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014). On the other side of the argument are researchers who recognise a social construction of dyslexia, (Macdonald, 2009) and consider the impact of wider social issues on dyslexia and inclusion. Most researchers agree that SES has an impact on your ability to gain a dyslexia diagnosis which is more likely if you are middle-class, and less likely for working-class students who are more likely to have received some other special educational needs designation, (Knight and Crick, 2021). These elements of EE814 and EE815, coupled with my own experiences formed the basis of the rationale for the research. They also introduced me to topic specific issues of social justice, forming the final part of the rationale for the research which informs the investigation of the ways in which teachers and students navigate, support or subvert the hegemony of a neoliberal curriculum and the impact which that has on their literacy pedagogy and inclusive practice.

Recognising that these issues arise from existing power structures in society and institutions, the conceptualisation of the research is grounded in the critical theory ideas of Foucault. Although my appreciation of critical theory was awakened by Friere (2000) and Bourdieu (Carrington and Luke, 1997), the literature review evolved the conceptualisation towards a Foucauldian one, to critically examine the hegemony of educational institutions. Additionally, during EE815, my positionality evolved to a constructivist stance, reflecting my understanding that knowledge is ontologically constructed and epistemologically obtained through social interactions and experiences.

Foucault's ideas of hegemony and my developing positionality as a constructivist, centred the framing of the literature review using the concepts of governmentality, (Foucault, 2019) and disciplinary technologies (Foucault, 1977) around the themes of literacy, dyslexia and deficit thinking. These ideas underpin the neoliberal curriculum in England, and consequently reinforce and reproduce wider structural societal power dynamics.

The research questions as written in TMA01 and TMA02 sought to explore qualitative, narrative accounts from participants at the outset, but initially also looked to answer some questions

quantitatively. Although quantitative data would be useful to reveal where middle and working-class students are positioned in ability groups, or how they perform in exams, for example, this does not provide any data regarding the students' opinions about deficit thinking, and their attitudes towards pedagogy. Thus the conceptualisation of the research and framing of the literature review informs the development of the research questions and a qualitative research design to answer them.

- 1) What relationship is there between socio-economic identity, deficit thinking and dyslexia in primary schools?
- 2) When considering dyslexia how does deficit thinking manifest in the primary classroom and affect outcomes?

The goal of the research methodology is to produce rich narrative accounts of identity, dyslexia, and reading difficulties from children of various (SES) backgrounds and their teacher. The research will be conducted in a primary school in the North of England whose catchment area includes middle-class, working class and disadvantaged lower class communities. It reports higher-than-average instances of special educational needs, lower-than-average instances of dyslexia and routinely reports above average SAT scores in year 6.

## **Part A, Chapter 2, Topic Literature Review**

The purpose of this chapter is to explore and develop understanding of the key themes related to my research questions. These should drive the research and answer the “what, why and how” of what is happening thus generating new knowledge (Ercikan and Roth, 2006). The research questions are:

**Main:** What relationship is there between socio-economic identity, deficit thinking and dyslexia in primary schools?

**Sub:** When considering dyslexia how does deficit thinking manifest in the primary classroom and affect outcomes?

The key themes focussed on in this literature review are associated with the power relations present when considering socio-economic identity, dyslexia, and how deficit thinking regarding literacy and dyslexia within those identities manifest and are subsequently expressed in relation to pedagogical outcomes.

The literature searches conducted in this research proposal have been carried out using a rigorous and thorough methodology, to ensure that information presented meets high standards of academic quality and credibility. Specifically, the literature reviewed draws primarily from academically peer-reviewed journal articles, edited academic books and scholarly monographs, obtained through searches of academic databases such as Google Scholar, the Open University Library's online resources, Newcastle University Robinson Library, and the Publish or Perish software tool.

Search parameters used were; primary, identity, socio-economic, England, English, middle-class, working-class, dyslexia, reading difficulties, self-esteem, SATs, assessment, power, Foucault, governmentality, Bourdieu, habitus, exams, examination, authentic assessment, silent assessors, ability setting, and funds of knowledge. I conducted Boolean searches including some of these parameters at a time, e.g. ‘primary AND identity AND dyslexia’, ‘Identity AND deficit AND thinking.’ Priority is given to articles and books published from 2013 to 2024, although some previously dated relevant literature is referenced in these this chapters. In seeking contemporary research building on articles sourced in the OU modules, I use Publish or Perish and Google Scholar’s citation tools to search for contemporary articles citing module material.

My focus is students in England but because of parallels between the marginalisation of working-class and indigenous students I have included searches for articles that cite the study of deficit thinking in indigenous international communities too. Unfortunately using “English” as a search parameter often produces English speaking international articles, which were discarded when

irrelevant. Problems arising in my initial searches using the phrase “deficit” produced articles around Attention Deficit Disorder, which is often co-morbid to dyslexia, but might be a confounding factor, and so I am omitting these from my review.

I have also had some personal correspondence with key researchers in the field; Prof Elliott, Prof Reay, Prof Riddell and Prof MacDonald who all provided me with the names of other researchers to investigate.

Key themes arising from this review highlight that working class children and families experience deficit thinking from teachers and within themselves because of the positioning of their habitus or cultural capital, (James, 2011) or socio-economic status (SES) in relation to the governmentality of English neoliberal education curriculum, pedagogy and policy, (Foucault, 2019). This produces a wide range of differences and inequalities in pedagogy and outcomes, for example children from lower SES being overrepresented in lower sets (Boaler, Wiliam and Brown, 2000) and middle-class students being more likely to get reasonable adjustments and support in teaching and exams, in addition to extra time to complete exams, (MacDonald and Deacon, 2019). This is particularly evident in literacy education, where middle-class literacies are privileged, and in the diagnosis and support for dyslexia which varies significantly between working-class and middle-class children. Although reasonable adjustments and support are often given to students who struggle to read regardless of a diagnosis of dyslexia, the limitations of available support and the processes of applying for support also perpetuate the marginalisation of working-class children. Whilst articles often align or overlap, there is also tension and disagreement between researchers on what dyslexia is, how useful a diagnosis is for pedagogy and how diagnoses are or are not accessed. Consequently, this literature review explores these alignments, disagreements and tensions to shed light on the relationships between socio-economic status, dyslexia diagnoses, and deficit thinking.

Although the literature review included research related to primary school contexts, most articles addressing the key themes were primarily focused on secondary, further education, or university settings. This indicates that there is a knowledge gap relating these themes, and how they are interconnected, within a primary school setting.

### **2.1 Student Identity and Deficit Thinking**

Socio-Economic Status (SES) has played an important role in education and specifically literacy education for decades. Bernstein (1990) and Willis’ (1977) research discusses the different ways in which the working and middle classes use language in schools. Elaborated and restricted code are still present and related to SES, and the concepts of code switching, and code mismatches between



home and school for working-class and middle-class children are relevant and something that children (Arnot and Reay, 2007) and teachers (Martinez Sainz *et al.*, 2024) themselves are aware of. When code mismatch between the home environment and the school environment creates a sense of alienation for working-class students this leads to a lack of underlying shared meaning between students and teachers, leading to disruptive behaviour (Ravet, 2007).

Disruptive and resistant behaviours among working-class children share many characteristics (Chiang, 2019). While they may not be identical, there are notable similarities and overlaps between them. Willis (1977) describes the working-class students reporting being bored or being superior to the middle-class students and generally opposing the staff and curriculum. According to Willis (1977), students reject the elaborated voice of the school, because it is irrelevant to their lived experiences, and through this resistant behaviour they exert their working-class identity and their student voice. Chiang (2019) revealed that one of the reasons the studied student group exhibited resistant behaviour was to win non-academic recognition from teachers and classmates, whilst also creating enjoyment in a boring classroom not catering for their academic needs. Primary students in a study of disengagement also reported being bored and therefore would become disruptive to alleviate that boredom (Ravet, 2007). Looking at this from the perspective of voice, part of the reasoning for the disengagement was a lack of intersubjectivity (and understanding) between pupils, parents and teachers. Characterising resistant behaviour as disruptive reflects deficit thinking, as this behaviour serves as a valid form of non-verbal student voice. Primarily used by working-class students, it challenges the privileged middle-class pedagogy and language styles associated with elaborated coding (Bernstein, 1990). Therefore, rather than punishing these behaviours, teachers should recognize them as expressions of student voice. Student voice is central to Arnot and Reay's (2007) alternate theorisation of Bernstein in their article that problematises voice and explores the relationships between recognised pedagogic reproduction of "voice" whilst the "message", holds the context and meaning through a new framework of different types of 'pupil talk'. This may be what Bernstein describes as elaborated and restricted codes not disappearing but being "subsumed under higher order concepts" (Bernstein and Solomon, 1999). Using this framework, Finneran, Mayes and Black, (2023) argue that often the inclusion of student voice is nothing more than a distraction from wider social inequalities whilst ignoring the ways in which schools' privilege the voice and values of the middle-classes. For student voice to be an effective tool for change, there needs to be a recognition of the impact of class identity at the levels of policy and pedagogy and a recognition of how identity is manifested and expressed through verbal and non-verbal student voice. In recognising the influence of class identity on these types of student voice and to effect meaningful change,

researchers can use Arnot and Reay's tool, (2007) to elicit the voices of the silent or suppressed and not just middle-class legitimated voice and text. Additionally, to be a transformative tool, student voice needs to be overtly considered and actioned so that students participate in the decision-making process of their school, (Martinez Sainz *et al.*, 2024), with teachers, students and families engaged in a more collaborative approach. (Ravet, 2002). The ongoing lack of effective conversations between teachers and families of students with Additional Support Needs (ASN) from disadvantaged backgrounds has been a known issue in Scottish education for many years. Riddell (2009) noted that poorer disabled students tend to be treated and spoken to more negatively by classroom teachers than their middle-class peers, and are more likely to be assigned the Social, Emotional, Behavioural Disorder (SEBD) label than their middle-class peers who are more likely to benefit from a medical dyslexia diagnosis (MacDonald and Deacon, 2019). The treatment of working-class families by schools and their additional support needs (ASN) systems exemplifies deficit thinking in practice, perpetuating the inequalities these families face, which leads to significant consequences throughout education, leading to lower grades, reduced university graduation rates, and diminished financial rewards in the job market compared to middle-class families (Reay, 2022). In their 2017 paper, Riddell and Weedon note that the policy rhetoric of inclusion is present but despite this, injustices and treatment of poorer students persist. The voices of the disadvantaged families are also still not being heard, whilst students from poorer backgrounds are still being treated more negatively in class than their middle-class peers, in addition to the SEBD label continuing to be disproportionately applied to working-class children with ASN. These inequalities persist in society and education, despite policies and rhetoric promoting social mobility through the concept of 'levelling up,' in which the recent Tory government embeds deficit thinking at the core of its social mobility policy, privileging middle-class aspirations over the identities of working-class individuals, who are seen as needing to 'level up' (UK GOV, 2022).

Christy Kulz's book *Factories for Learning* (2017) places identity and social mobility at the centre of an analysis of the marketisation of education through neoliberalism and academies. Despite neoliberalism and academies purported function being to create social mobility, (Kulz, 2017) they serve to create, maintain, and widen inequalities between the working and middle classes by privileging middle class normative values, assumptions and voice, over those of the working classes, (Reay, 2018). McLaren (2016) and Arnot and Reay, (2010) recognise the dominant normative middle-class language at the centre of neoliberal education which privileges middle-class families whose identity and various forms of capital align with neoliberalism. Neoliberal language policies serve to privilege Standard English education, continuing to marginalise other

identities, seen as a deficit when compared to the aspirational Queens English with children being told to “say it like the queen” (Cushing, 2021b, p329). The preferential use of standardised English is also to be exemplified by teachers and scrutinized through policy, day to day use and standardized exams, (Cushing, 2021a). These conceptualisations of social mobility achieved through neoliberal education and realised using Standard English are intrinsically linked to individual identity (Payne, 2017, p ix) and therefore moving “up” from lower, inadequate working classes to higher middle classes, the basis of social mobility, can be considered a form of deficit thinking. Working class regional accents, dialects and therefore identities are to be stamped out and even when working-class students reach higher education through the meritocracy of social mobility, the impact of their identity within this field produces “habitus dislocation” and feelings of deeply negative self-image manifest as a form of internalised deficit thinking (Reay, 2021c, p57). Cushing (2021b) concludes that English language “correctness, accuracy and appropriacy” are deficit notions masquerading as aspiration and that inclusivity arises when education utilises local contexts and repertoires of language and identity within a critical language policy framework. This idea aligns with Moll’s concepts of, (Rios-Aguilar *et al.*, 2011) and Reay’s suggestion to use, funds of knowledge (2021b). Despite decades of research regarding SES identity, rights-based rhetoric and policy and neoliberal concepts of social mobility, class inequality persists. Working class secondary students continue to demonstrate resistant student voice and behaviour against neoliberalism and are routinely treated differently when it comes to pedagogy and any rights-based notions of equality. This difference in treatment is founded in deficit thinking, an idea referring to the problematic mindset that attributes the academic underachievement of students, particularly those from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds, to perceived individual or cultural deficiencies instead of systemic and institutional factors, (Davis and Museus, 2019).

This part of the literature review reveals how deficit thinking manifests because working-class SES students are constrained to conform to middle-class ideals and norms within a neoliberal curriculum in England, however deficit thinking also occurs for racially marginalised students internationally. There are distinct and obvious ways in which racial marginalisation can be compared to the marginalisation of working-class students within education in England. Sharma (2018) using three frameworks to explore the links between neoliberalism and deficit thinking demonstrates not only that teachers engage in deficit thinking towards racially marginalised students but discovered that the students experience internalized deficit beliefs. Calling for critically transformative spaces in schools as part of the solution, Sharma (2018), quoting Hooks (1994), concludes that the importance of recognising that education should consider all cultural

identities, particularly those previously excluded, if education is to become more empowering and inclusive.

Davis and Museus (2019) similarly conclude that an effective anti-deficit thinking strategy is to ensure that marginalised voices are placed at the centre not only of pedagogy, but policy and importantly also research. Their four-point conclusion focus on the importance of analysing how deficit thinking is a result of several interconnected elements which all need to be considered critically. Another international project where I would argue that this has happened successfully is the To Kotahitanga educational research programme in New Zealand where a colonial curriculum has for decades produced deficit thinking. Inclusion, social justice and improved outcomes were achieved by using anti-deficit thinking and counter narratives of the marginalised Māori children and families, (Bishop *et al.*, 2009). The students and teachers considered their different socio-cultural identities and engaged in a pedagogy of constructivism and meaning-making, succeeding in challenging these issues and closing the inequality gap (Counts, 2024.) However, Walls and Johnston, (2023) warn us that a focus on constructivist methods ignores evidence that direct teaching methods of literacy produce good results. This seems like a redundant argument when policy makers and teachers should be using every tool at their disposal to deliver inclusive literacy education. This racial marginalisation of students is relevant to the marginalisation of working-class students because in all cases there is a one-size-fits-all neoliberal and/or colonial curriculum that presents preferred ontologies and epistemologies of teaching and learning whilst ignoring those of the marginalised.

A tool mentioned earlier in this review and closely linked to student identity is Moll's (1992) funds of knowledge. Funds of knowledge as a tool of critical pedagogy is supported by Busher (2014) who discusses family influence as not only identify forming, but also providing essential support networks for HE students. Rios-Aguilar *et al.* (2011), co-authored by Moll, challenges the notion that these funds of knowledge are cultural capital that everyone (usefully) has, since under-represented students and their educators do not know how to utilise it. The idea of funds, and how this overlaps with cultural capital is discussed by Lewis and Demie (2015) who highlight a lack of privileged cultural capital for the working classes and discuss the importance of working with parents. Given that Moll's 1992 paper is over three decades old, and that Reay's recent number one suggestion for socially just transformative pedagogy is utilising funds of knowledge (Reay, 2021b) it is difficult to understand why education policy makers are still not including the voices and lived experiences of the working classes in order to bring about the changes that the rhetoric of politicians and educators suggest they seek.

This section of the literature review has identified various ways in which deficit thinking emerges as a consequence of undervalued and overlooked identities that differ from the normative, privileged middle-class ontologies and epistemologies of education, knowledge, and learning. This has led to the development of the research questions in relation to how deficit thinking manifests in the classroom and how it is linked to identities of socioeconomic status. The next sections explore the interconnectedness of Identity deficit thinking specifically in relation to dyslexia and the consequences this has for a range of outcomes.

## **2.2 Identity, Deficit and Dyslexia**

The Equality Act (2010) provides schools with the legal framework whereby students with dyslexia are entitled to a statutory provision of reasonable adjustments from the school, when that student has an official diagnosis which defines them as disabled. This places dyslexia as an individual medical identify deficit, an idea that has been around for decades, (Anderson and Meier-Hedde, 2001). Inclusion is usually redistributive in terms of time and resources whilst learning, and with additional time given to complete the standardised end of year exams that all students must complete. In my most recent teaching practice, all dyslexic students received the same amount of additional time regardless of the extent of their differences, and support in lessons was limited, however students were also able to seek additional support outside of timetabled lessons. This 'inclusion' is limited in that it places the deficit within the student who needs to be "fixed" (Nieminen, 2023, p623), not the teaching or assessment that needs to be modified to meet the needs of the student. Inclusion, positioned as a fix for an individual identify deficit, does not consider the issues that some families have when applying for and accessing dyslexia tests (Riddell and Weedon, 2017) or affording the cost of a dyslexia test (Macdonald and Deacon, 2019). When considering the distribution of the dyslexia label in relation to several factors, Knight and Crick (2021) highlight a key finding that the dyslexia label is not evenly distributed across a population but is distributed according to SES. Higher instances of dyslexia occur in middle-class groups, but higher instances of generic special educational needs occur in working-class groups. Since the dyslexia label comes with additional provision in the support of reasonable adjustments, then this finding supports the idea that redistributive justice is not equal or equitable. Being middle-class with parents in professional careers and having the highest levels of income were significant environmental factors as strong contributors to gaining a dyslexia diagnosis, leading to this imbalance of justice. Significantly, when considering SES and income together, working-class families on high incomes are still unlikely to gain a dyslexia diagnosis, (Knight and Crick, 2021), leading them to conclude that the diagnoses of dyslexia is a contributing factor towards perpetuating the reproduction of class inequality.

With such a strong link between middle-class SES and dyslexia diagnoses, a rights-based protection and provision of support for dyslexic students should be simple and free to access as a GP appointment, as MacDonald and Deacon (2019) suggest. However, this continues to place power away from families and students and instead in the hands of medical professionals. To achieve genuine fairness regarding support for dyslexia, Elliott and Grigorenko (2014) argue that diagnosis and therefore power should be placed with the teachers who provide the same level and range of support for all students with any type of reading difficulty.

Whilst individually localising cognitive deficits as disabilities or differences within the student can be useful in redistributive support, it is problematic in that it ignores social factors, (MacDonald and Deacon, 2019). Further issues arise when exploring the definitions (Elliott and Gibbs, 2008), and causes of dyslexia. Whilst there is usually an element of word blindness, or other medical issue (Kirby, 2020) in many cases this assessment of the individual deficit ignores the varying ways in which reading difficulties are defined or socially constructed (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014; 2014a), and then supported as a function of the students' class, family income and parental cultural capital (Macdonald, 2009; MacDonald, 2010). Regardless of the relevance of the binary debate between medical and social models of dyslexia to individual students, these socially constructed models (MacDonald, 2010) are linked by teachers and students to deficit-based ideas about student identity, (Kirby, 2020), which then manifest in the classroom. Kirby (2020) also concludes that it is the "concerned parents" who push for a dyslexia diagnosis for their child to ensure support for dyslexia that may or may not be present for "garden variety" reading difficulties (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014). This highlights another potential manifestation of deficit thinking to consider in the process of applying for a diagnosis; the testing, stigma and shame that accompanies it. Mullings and Preyde (2013) point out that although diagnosis comes with accommodations in the form of reasonable adjustments, a diagnosis of a disability can produce negativity around potential stigma attached to those accommodations, because education is "built for people who are normal."

These issues and arguments are linked to identity and the various levels of deficit thinking of dyslexia and reading ability. Consequently, this leads to a very messy and confused landscape of definition, policy, application processes and support which middle-class families are more likely to engage with than their working-class classmates and neighbours. This section of the literature review regarding dyslexia, considered in the context of the first section reveals a complex and sometimes contradictory landscape of research spanning decades, encompassing conceptualizations of identity, dyslexia, and deficit thinking. This then generates the full version of

the main research question asking what relationship there is between SES identity, deficit thinking and dyslexia in primary schools.

### **2.3 Outcomes; Ability Setting, Assessment and Deficit Thinking**

As a teacher, one is always mindful of preparing students for assessments and exams and the various outcomes measured when a school is inspected by OFSTED, whose inspection framework also considers students' behaviour, attitudes, and personal development, (UK GOV, 2023).

Standardised assessments and ability setting are core concepts in primary and secondary education in England, (Myhill, 2005) with standard English at their core, (Cushing, 2021a; Cushing, 2021b,) therefore this section of the literature review explores the links between dyslexia, deficit thinking, and the specific outcomes of ability setting and standardised assessment.

To place children into sets, schools must define what their 'ability' is, which means schools decide not only how to assess students, but what counts as useful knowledge to be assessed. What is and is not valued as worthy of measuring contributes towards the defining of ability within any hierarchy or assessment according to Yarker, (2013). Subsequently placing children of similar 'ability' into sets produces inequalities such that marginalised groups are over-represented in lower sets (Boaler, Wiliam and Brown, 2000). One explanation is that standardised tests privilege middle-class literacy (due to its alignment with the curriculum) and they do not consider the prior knowledge of some groups of students (Myhill, 2005). This assessment of progress within a curriculum that privileges middle-class normative literacies subsequently produces invisible literacy practices known as silent assessors, (Hipwell and Klenowski, 2011) which marginalise students who have a lack of understanding of the contextual demands of these tests. McGillicuddy and Devine (2018) reflect on this in a primary school context where setting is overt, as an act of symbolic violence towards ethnic minorities, the working classes and those with ASN who are overrepresented in lower groups. Deficit thinking is openly expressed by the teachers as an act of "othering of children" (McGillicuddy and Devine, 2018, p93), those in lower sets who might hold others back, and who struggle to follow the rules. They also agree with (Apple, 2006) and Nieminen, (2023) that a neoliberal centralised curriculum with standard assessments and target setting reduces teacher's agency and autonomy to mere deliverers of the neoliberal curriculum, as a major factor in the power dynamics of marginalisation. It is worth also noting that the deficit implications of ability setting are not restricted to working class SES students according to Boaler, Wiliam and Brown (2000), but also top set students experiencing excessive stress due to high expectations and accelerated pacing of lessons.

In their study of Finnish university students, whilst Nieminen (2023) revealed some of the positive effects of a dyslexia diagnosis in terms of recognition and support, students also revealed an array of deficit thinking held by others and themselves. Whilst Nieminen labels this as internalised ableism and a stigma it is also an example of self-held deficit thinking because students see themselves through the lens of “deficit” and as a “burden” (Nieminen, 2023, p628). Glazzard (2015) supports the idea that a dyslexia diagnosis can help remove negative self-esteem, emphasizing the significance of a socially constructed view of dyslexia placing the issues of deficit within society and not the individual. There is also an observation that primary literacy teaching and assessment historically focused on the writing content and story rather than the contemporary focus on correctness, and that this significantly increased positive self-esteem, (Glazzard, 2015). The impact of standardised assessments on self-esteem for learners with dyslexia, even with reasonable adjustments, can be one of failure, (Glazzard, 2010) despite the effect of a successful dyslexia diagnosis producing positive feelings of self-esteem. Wilmot *et al.*, (2023) in exploring the relationship between dyslexia and self-esteem in young children, uncovered similar feeling of stigma found by Glazzard (2010). Some students vocalise the negative feelings as a direct consequence of the visible reasonable adjustments and support they were provided, a form of internalised deficit thinking. In addition, the Wilmot *et al.*, reported students as being aggressive, refusing and resisting some demands placed on them (2023) in a similar way to Willis’ schoolboys of the 70s, (1977) and Chiang’s working-class students, (2019). Wilmot *et al.*, (2023) found this leads to mental health issues but these can be ameliorated with strategies such as counselling for stress, relabelling the deficit as a “difference” (Wilmot *et al.*, 2023, p 44) and ensuring that the family is involved, which is a suggestion highlighted in the first part of this review by Riddell, (2009) and Moll, (1992). Wilmot *et al.*, (2023) also recognise that diagnosing and providing support for dyslexia requires significant time and resources. Given that middle-class children are more likely to be diagnosed with dyslexia than their working-class classmates (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014), this review highlights the important socio-economic based power dynamics related to literacy and dyslexia in English schools.

The second research question is generated from thematic connections observed across the literature review, especially the links between dyslexia, deficit thinking and socio-economic status. When considering outcomes focussing on ability settings and standardised assessments, the review revealed a shortage of research connecting these with dyslexia AND deficit thinking, in primary schools. This review therefore reveals a gap that the second research question arises from and seeks to explore.



Together, both research questions derived from this literature review aim to reveal the impact of deficit thinking, whether conscious or unconscious, held by teachers and students relating to literacy pedagogy, dyslexia, and how this impacts academic outcomes

## **Part A, Chapter 3, The Conceptual Framework Literature Review**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The literature review in chapter 2 identified a complex web of power relations shaping student identity within the field of literacy and dyslexia. The ways in which a neoliberal curriculum privileges middle-class ontologies and epistemologies around educational values, cultural capital, and literacy, combined with middle-class aspirations of social mobility, disadvantage working-class students and families. The research questions aim to help investigate and interrogate how this occurs in a primary school classroom, by revealing and questioning this power imbalance.

Research that reveals power imbalance, leading to emancipatory and transformative change, is rooted in critical theory which recognises that ontologies are shaped by social, political, cultural, ethnic and gender experiences of those being studied, and their epistemologies are subjective, (Allison and Pomeroy, 2000). This chapter of the literature review therefore explores the educational hegemony of middle-class identity, culture and values through a critical theory lens, (Allison and Pomeroy, 2000, p94). It explores Rawlsian concepts of social justice (1999), and the critical theories of Foucault to develop a conceptual framework that is suitable for researching the issues being interrogated by the research questions.

My teaching, lived experiences, and studies at the Open University have shaped my ontological position to become structuralist, primarily drawing on Foucault's concepts of power and discourse, which emphasise how social structures influence and construct individual behaviours and identities.

My epistemological position is rooted in critical theory and reflective Foucauldian postmodern thinking, particularly regarding the social construction of knowledge, the power dynamics at play, how dominant narratives marginalize others, and how identity is fluid and constructed by educational institutions in relation to socio-economic status.

#### **3.1.a Themes Identified in this Literature Review**

Chapter 2 revealed several key issues and themes. The neoliberal curriculum, pedagogy, and exams function as tools of governmentality, being rigidly fixed and inherently unfair to any identity other than middle-class. This rigid pedagogy frames dyslexia as a medical deficit, despite efforts to treat it as a social construct or a neurodivergent difference. If identity is predominantly shaped by social factors rather than individual choices and considering that identity significantly affects a student's self-worth and a teacher's perception of student attainment, then a conceptual framework that prioritizes identity is essential. Identity is socially constructed and influenced by aspirational ideas of social mobility; therefore it should be dynamic, however, SES is typically static

for most people most of the time (Reay, 2021c). While some individuals achieve social mobility and benefit from it, such cases are rare and occur gradually. Even when achieving upwards social mobility, working-class identity typically persists (Payne, 2017, p. 158), leading to internalized deficit thinking that manifests as negative self-esteem (Reay, 2021c, p. 61). If we consider that ontological knowledge is socially constructed from a complex web of power relations (McLaren, 2016, p133) and that the curriculum prepares non-middle-class identities for “subordinate positions” in society, (McLaren, 2016, p147) then deficit thinking is inevitable, whether expressed by the teacher, or manifested within the student as low self-esteem. Furthermore, viewing dyslexia as an individual learning disability, rather than acknowledging the curriculum's lack of accommodation for diverse learning styles and socioeconomic factors, perpetuates these issues. This epistemological mismatch between students’ understanding and pedagogy contributes to the ongoing marginalization of non-middle-class students, reinforcing the hegemony of middle-class norms.

### **3.2 Social Justice and Critical Theory**

The ontological positioning of identity as a function of SES and the epistemological construction of deficit thinking in relation to the concepts of inclusion, the diagnoses of dyslexia and consequent support violate the Rawlsian principles of social justice (Rawls, R. 1999). Specifically the difference principle, which in this educational context should seek to ensure the worst-off students are the most advantaged through additional support but which is discarded in favour of the privileged middle-classes who are more likely to gain a dyslexia diagnosis and benefit from additional support, (Rawls, 1999, pp.65, 92.) In their exploration of policy and practice on the formation of student identity, Gamarnikow and Green (2003) support the Rawlsian idea of education as a tool for social justice through social mobility for everyone but with the most disadvantaged progressing at the more accelerated rate. This cannot happen if the educational system views identities as “differently credentialled”, (Gamarnikow and Green, 2003, p212). Additionally, when education is viewed through a critical theory lens as a potentially emancipatory practice, it must go beyond merely meeting social and economic needs and also seek to fulfil the need for people to enjoy their life in society (Rawls, p87). The emancipatory application of critical theory to pedagogy is discussed by Freire (2000) as a challenge to transmissive teaching methods, with the teacher in power holding knowledge and distributing it to students as passive recipients. In critical pedagogy, recognition and power is consequently given to student identity and voice with emancipatory knowledge being co-constructed, (Freire, 2000). McLaren (2016, p133-134) posits a modern view of Critical Pedagogy as being useful in challenging the social construction of knowledge in relation to the privileged white middle classes. In examining the connection between neoliberal education

and society, he suggests that a critical pedagogy approach is ideal because it asks dialectic questions that challenge the hegemony of a capitalist curriculum and the ideas that the purpose of education is to provide workers for the capitalists (McLaren, 2016. P135). This section of the literature review demonstrates that a theory of social justice in education, emphasizing the recognition, valuing, and active engagement of working-class student identities, will facilitate the exploration of the themes of identity and deficit thinking identified in Chapter 2.

### **3.3 Foucault and Governmentality.**

Further development of the conceptual framework takes inspiration from Kulz's outline of Foucault's theories of governmentality (2017) being employed by schools to create "docile bodies"; compliant individuals who can be controlled, utilised, modified, and enhanced, (Foucault, 1977, p136) Kulz's research framework combines Foucault with Bourdieu's ideas relating to the legitimacy of identity and culture, (2017, p25-26) which would be an interesting integration of conceptual tools to explore as part of a PhD. However for the purposes of this Extended Proposal, the focus is exclusively on Foucault's ideas of governmentality which serve to embed and re-enforce middle class norms, practices, and rationales through all aspects of education in England. Considering the concepts of curriculum and educational policy the conceptual framework can be refined by exploring Foucault's ideas of governmentality (2019). Governmentality refers to the "art of government" (Foucault, 2019, p207) which describes the rationalities, techniques, and practices through which the conduct of individuals and populations is shaped and governed (Foucault, 2019). Governmentality sheds light on dominant educational discourses, institutional policies and structures which work to produce the environment that privileges desirable student identity, behaviour and literacy revealed in Chapter 2, while simultaneously marginalising undesirable identities, including that of the working classes. A critical theory conceptual framework based on governmentality will facilitate the exploration of the ways in which marginalised students and families are forced to conform to middle-class standards of standard English literacy and those of behaviour and achievement.

One way that Foucault describes power relations in the conceptualisation of governmentality is biopower, which can be said to be a way of exercising medical power "over the population", (2019, p329). This form of power, along with other forms, pervades everyday life contributing to the formation and pathologisation of one aspect of identity through categorization. (Foucault, 2019, p331). An instance of marginalization resulting from the medicalization of dyslexia within the framework of biopower occurred in 2014, (Lewthwaite, 2014), when the then Minister for Universities and Science proposed cuts to the Disabled Students' Allowance (UK GOV, 2014).

Although the planned cuts to the Disabled Students' Allowance were never implemented, the students who would have been most disproportionately affected were those with dyslexia and those from the lowest income backgrounds, who are more likely to be applicants for the allowance, (Lewthwaite, 2014). Lewthwaite also highlights how disability, being defined as an individual medical deficit ensures that the power to provide additional educational support resides in institutions (2014, p1162). Considering this, it is worth noting that in Chapter 2, tensions arose between researchers who recommended providing free medical diagnoses for all students, and those who felt no diagnoses were necessary if teachers, families, and students just worked together to improve pedagogy. A free medical diagnosis whilst appearing superficially to be an equitable solution is still an example of biopower, whereas teachers, students and families working together is more aligned with a critical pedagogical solution, where the voices of the marginalised are included and empowered, (Freire, 2000). By considering Foucault's concepts of governmentality and biopower as part of the critical theory conceptual framework, the research proposal can explore a more focussed analysis on the ways in which power operates to shape the identities of marginalised students.

Foucault's "technologies of the self" is a concept determining the ways in which an individual can change, reflect on improve their identity through processes of self-examination and self-improvement, (Foucault *et al.*, 1988). Educationally one way to do this is to gain qualifications through examinations. Examinations in education serve as a technology of the self, encouraging students to engage in self-reflection about their knowledge and skills, and they are embedded into pedagogy as an endlessly repeated "ritual of power", (Foucault 1977, p186.) Exam results are measured against a middle-class normalised set of standards which are related to expected behaviours and validated knowledge, and they contribute to how students are ranked and how they perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others, thus influencing self-identity and social status, (Foucault, 1977, p145-146). In neoliberal education, the exam therefore encourages students to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset of improvement of their self, so that their qualifications can be traded in a capitalist society for a job, producing money to improve the quality of their lives. However, a neoliberal curriculum that restricts the available qualifications and enforces middle-class ontologies and epistemologies of learning and literacy will continue to perpetuate the marginalization of others, even in the case of dyslexic students who are typically given extra time to complete exams. Furthermore, chapter 2 revealed that support for students with dyslexia is more accessible to middle-class students, who are more likely to receive a diagnosis. Moreover, all students must strive towards success in the examination as a measure of their individual value, (Kulz, 2017, p171) therefore when considered from the perspective of

dyslexic identity where dyslexia diagnoses are a form of biopower, this represents a subtle tool of marginalisation of the working-classes.

Disciplinary power, which in education describes the ways in which schools implement and enforce rules and polices to produce “docile” students, (Kulz, 2017, p24-25) can be observed in the way students are tested in official exams. The panopticon-esque conceptualisation of the examination as a disciplinary mechanism is such that it imposes power relations on students via a means of desirable knowledge and behaviour reproduction, functioning as a form of surveillance which objectifies individuals as it qualifies and ranks them, (MacMillan, 2009). The examination functions as a key mechanism of disciplinary power within the educational system and it is part of a panopticon of power, generating the docile state required to facilitate the “automatic functioning of power” in schools, (Foucault, 1977, p201). Furthermore, outlined in Chapter 2, examinations privilege middle-class students by aligning with their ontologies and epistemologies of educational knowledge frameworks, thereby reinforcing and reproducing existing social inequalities within a neoliberal educational context.

Overall, the physical architecture of schools (Kulz, 2017, pp. 39-40), combined with the application of Foucault's concepts of governmentality and biopower, the notion of qualifications as a middle-class technology of the self, alongside the examination system as a form of panopticon, highlights how these elements reinforce the panoptical nature of contemporary educational environments (Kulz, 2017, p. 56). Together, these elements illustrate how seemingly neutral and scientific practices of discipline, assessment, and evaluation serve as powerful mechanisms of control over both students and teachers

### **3.4 Critical Theory as a Tool of Transformation**

A critical theory research (CTR) approach transforms practice because of the inherent assumption at the outset that there is a power dynamic involving a dominant hegemony, and marginalised groups. Ozga (2013) highlights three ways that a CTR approach can effect change. It reveals dominant normative assumptions and challenges them, and it can uncover the impact of policy on students, and it also sets out:

*“to explore how injustices and inequalities are produced, reproduced and sustained.”*  
(Ozga, J. 2013)

A CTR approach must be transformative, aiming to effect practical change not only in classroom pedagogy and the normative deficit thinking surrounding marginalised groups but ideally also at policy level. To be transformative, according to Yaakoby, any research approach utilising critical theory must challenge the false consciousness (2013) surrounding the ideas of social mobility and

middle-class aspirations of neoliberal education. This leads to students transforming from being docile subjects (Foucault, 1977 p135-169), into becoming more critical as a result of the awakening of their critical consciousness, (Freire, 2000).

### **3.5 Conclusions**

The topic literature review revealed that working-class students experience deficit thinking, negative self-esteem and display resistant behaviours. This occurs due to the oppression resulting from forms of governmentality that create an identity mismatch with the school environment, which, through surveillance and discipline, aims to produce docile bodies, (Foucault, 1977, p135-169). Even though some children can demonstrate limited flexibility in adapting to the governmentality of school by adopting a white middle-class mask, (Kulz, 2017, p168,) this is not maintained out of school and some groups of students simply do not adapt in this way at all. Identity mismatch also influences the designation of a dyslexia or SEBD label, and resultant inequality in provision of appropriate student support in the form of redistributive justice. Whilst the Foucauldian concepts of governmentality help to frame the problem more widely, Foucault's concepts of surveillance through the examination, biopower and discipline allow the refinement of a focussed, qualitative conceptual framework that can allow the researcher to explore the ways in which students and teachers express, hide or adapt their identity as they navigate the school environment. Therefore, to investigate the manifestation of deficit thinking in the classroom and its relationship to dyslexia and social class identity, qualitative methods will be employed within a case study methodology that utilises critical discourse analysis (CDA) to elicit the voices of students and teachers. CDA would facilitate the problematization of dominant educational narratives rooted in policy and curriculum, as well as their manifestation in expressions of identity related to deficit thinking. CDA tools, such as the analysis of narrative accounts, interviews, and focus groups, are particularly relevant as they prioritise the lived experiences and voices of marginalized working-class students and the attitudes and perceptions of their teachers. The literature review revealed that working-class students are overrepresented in lower ability sets and in the lower bands of exam results. While this could be explored quantitatively in a larger follow-up research project perhaps as part of a PhD, the use of CDA tools within this small-scale educational project will allow for the collection of relevant qualitative data in the form of teachers' and students' feelings and opinions regarding these issues and how they might relate to self-esteem and deficit thinking. The types and amount of data required to produce meaningful results will be limited to one classroom and to a limited elicitation of CDA data, and this will constrain the proposal to a size commensurate with a small-scale investigation, (SSI).

## **Part B, Chapter 4, The Research Proposal**

### **4.1 Title and Topic**

Title: 'A Qualitative Exploration of Socio-Economic Identities' Impact on the Primary Pedagogy of Literacy and Dyslexia.'

The research topic examines the disparities in literacy education between working-class and middle-class children, with a focus on how deficit thinking manifest in the classroom. It explores the implications for students with dyslexia, analysing how these issues influence self-esteem and academic outcomes.

### **4.2 Development of the Topic Literature Review**

The topic literature review has shaped my understanding of deficit thinking by building on my study relating to literacy and dyslexia in EE815 and particularly how marginalisation emerges from the mismatch of working-class student identity within a neoliberal curriculum. It also highlighted systemic inequalities entrenched in educational settings, where middle-class literacies are privileged over others, with Kulz (2017) and McLaren (2016) providing detailed insight into these problems. My understanding of the tensions between the individual and social construction of dyslexia, and the impact of socio-economic status on diagnosis and inclusion developed because of EE815 course material and the various works of Profs Elliot and MacDonald. The problematising of middle-class values and norms of literacy began with Prof Reay and Prof Riddel's articles studied in EE814 and was developed further in conjunction with my own readings of and expanded search of their work, alongside Dr Cushing's research relating to literacy pedagogy in neoliberal English schools. The topic review helped me develop and synthesise these ideas concerning entrenched biases and deficit-thinking towards students from different class backgrounds, and how they operate together to perpetuate and reproduce disadvantage for the working-classes

### **4.3 Development of the Conceptual Framework**

Drawing from a comprehensive literature review, this section outlines the development and justification of a research proposal grounded in a Foucauldian conceptual framework. Initially, Kulz's conceptualisation of integrating Bourdieu and Foucault appeared relevant (2017, p23-31) particularly in relation to Habitus and how this intersects with identity. However, Foucault's concepts of institutional governmentality (2019) and the panopticon, surveillance and discipline, (1977), along with the ways these ideas interact with technologies of the self (1988) such as biopower, provide an effective framework for interrogating the power relations in schools. As I developed my understanding of the Foucauldian framework, I recognised that a postmodern approach, acknowledging the fluidity of identity construction within educational institutions, is



more suitable for exploring the complexities of power relations present. In contrast, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital while useful, seem static and inflexible. A Foucauldian postmodern framework enables the examination of how language and discourse shape my understandings of social realities, aligning with postmodern critiques that emphasise the constructed nature of meaning.

#### **4.4 Positionality**

The Foucauldian framework, incorporating ideas about the constructed nature of knowledge and meaning, aligns with my positionality as a constructivist researcher; through my ongoing study of social science, the literature review, and my readings of Foucault, I developed an appreciation of the fluidity of identities and the impact of power dynamics on knowledge construction in educational settings. My own socio-economic background is relevant because my parents were working-class, and I am a first-generation university graduate who as an undergraduate embraced Conservative idea of social mobility. I also have reading difficulties and although I have never been diagnosed with ADHD or Dyslexia, my school reports are full of comments about my struggles with reading, and with my inability to stay on-task. These aspects of my identity persist, and in tandem with my studies and the literature review has deepened my understanding of my experiences as both a learner and a teacher, contextualizing my positionality as a constructivist researcher. Focusing on the lived experiences of working-class students alongside my own identity, encourages me to recognise my positional biases and assumptions, especially in how I interpret neoliberal educational practices.

#### **4.5 The Research Questions**

Through my study and the literature reviews I have developed two main research questions

- 3) What relationship is there between socio-economic identity, deficit thinking and dyslexia?
- 4) When considering dyslexia how does deficit thinking manifest in the primary classroom?

I first posed research questions in TMA03 of EE814, these were influenced by my scientific perspective as a physics graduate, with a traditional positive approach involving observable, measurable behaviours of teachers, students and their families. At that stage there was no mention of the impact of deficit thinking on inclusion, and instead the questions focused on broad but superficial ideas of student and family voice and family involvement in the school, based on initial readings of Riddell, (2009) and Moll *et al.*, (1992). Over the course of my study, I have developed a deeper understanding of Foucauldian concepts, critical theories and critical pedagogy which coupled with my development of a constructivist position, have led to a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of complex social dynamics. Accordingly, the final version of my

questions demonstrate a reflection of my developing understanding of the consideration of power dynamics, wider social contextual factors, and the consequent manifestation of and impact of deficit thinking.

## **Part B, Chapter 5, Research Design, Research Methods and Methods of Analysis**

### **5.1 Research Design and Design Frame**

The research design is informed by the conceptual framework rooted in Foucault's critical theories of power and discourse. This approach facilitates the construction of a methodology that acknowledges that a hegemony exists and therefore a power imbalance is present. In also recognising that knowledge is socially constructed it seeks to highlight the ways in which some student voices are privileged, and others are marginalised. Consequently, the design frame and methodology will consider appropriate qualitative methods to reveal participant knowledge and opinions relating to the problems interrogated by the research questions.

In relation to education, McLaren states that since knowledge is ideologically constructed by institutions, it is linked to the specific interests, and social relations of those institutions, (2016, p145.) This power is historically rooted in discursive practices that are essentially a rule book that relate to a particular socially contexted environment. McLaren notes that when these Foucauldian concepts are applied to schools, they constitute a set of rules that determine which voices and opinions have authority and are therefore privileged, (2016, p145) and these are the dominant discourses. It is clear from the literature review in previous chapters, that in England, the dominant discourse of education is one of middle-class social mobility. Since marginalised discourses of education are considered not as important as the dominant discourses, using Foucault's framework to inform the research design will give the researcher an opportunity to reveal and highlight those marginalised discourses. Chapter 3 demonstrated that Foucault's concepts of governmentality, biopower, and technologies of the self are linked to the interconnected and co-dependant nature of knowledge and power, which are in-turn shaped by the interactions between students, teachers and schools. These concepts provide a foundation for a research design frame to examine, uncover, and analyse qualitative data related to student identity and how these identities are influenced by institutional experiences of literacy pedagogy. Using a research design based on critical theory, will therefore reveal to the teacher and students the power relationships present, how these are formed and navigated, (McLaren (2016, p146) and how they inform practice. This should enable them to work together, more dialogically and aware of hegemonic 'banking' teaching methods, empowering them toward a more equitable model of critical pedagogy, (Freire, 2000).

People in power create knowledge that supports and perpetuates power relationships and imbalances and social institutions are the main vehicle for this, (Brookfield, 2005, p137.) Brookfield uses Foucault to highlight that whilst dominant discourses consist of literacies and

worldviews that reflect existing comparative power structures, they also give rise to resistance, (2005, p138-144.) Power and resistance go hand in hand, and this framing of Foucault's theories to examine power in higher education is equally applicable to primary education settings.

Brookfield, referencing Foucault, (1982, p. 211), states that power and resistance are so closely connected, that examining resistance is a "plausible starting point for the analysis of power," (Brookfield, 2005, p141.) Resistant behaviours are well documented and studied, forming a significant feature of the themes of power and deficit thinking studied in the literature review in part A. Consequently, the Foucauldian analysis of power and resistance by McLaren and Brookfield justifies how this conceptual framework informs the research design and methodology, allowing the critical exploration of the issues raised by the research questions.

Given the issues of power and discourse, the small-scale of the research proposal and the context of a single classroom within a primary school, these elements support the choice of a case study design frame as suitable for investigating the problems. Costley, Elliott, and Gibbs, recommend the use of case studies to examine the issues in a way that can be useful beyond the initial research phase, and therefore being valuable for further research, with ongoing applications in work-based projects, (2010, p89-90.) The definition of a case study is broad and overlaps with other research terms, but case studies are especially suitable for giving participants a voice within the research through narrative methods, (Scott and Morrison, 2006.) The use of case studies to investigate real-life events is recommended because they reveal the lived experiences of participants through direct interactions between participants and the researcher, (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p377.) According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, another advantage of case studies includes their use a tool to explore social truths, examining conflicts between viewpoints which can lead to improving equity and social justice, especially in educational policy, (2018, p379.) One key disadvantage for the researcher to be mindful of is the possibility of researcher bias influencing the case study. This is something which can be mitigated with researcher reflexivity, but this is not always achievable, (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, p379.)

Considering the problems interrogated by the research questions, the Foucauldian conceptual framework and the size of the setting, the next step in developing the research design is to examine which case study methods would be most suitable to elicit genuine voice from the participants.

## **5.2 Research Methods**

To elicit voice, particularly marginalised student voice, within a case study format, interviews will be used. Narrative and semi-structured interviews offer the opportunity to gather rich, contextual data in the form of thick descriptions of their experiences, (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, p377). Interviews allow the researcher and participants to investigate these experiences in a flexible way, permitting the exploration of the problems in the research questions, but also allowing the participants to exercise agency and autonomy in directing the conversation, subsequently providing answers that privilege marginalised voices, (Li, 2010). Narrative interviews utilise only a few, open questions and are designed to elicit long, detailed and information-rich answers (De Fina, 2009), however they are more suitable for longitudinal studies, (Costley, Elliot and Gibbs, 2010, p93-94). For this small-scale study one primary school teacher semi-structured interview will be conducted, alongside three focus group interviews with their students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Semi-structured interviews are suitable because they allow the researcher to encourage some narrative accounting, whilst using prompts and questions to keep the interviews aligned with the research questions and to resolve any uncertainty in meaning, (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, p511). Semi-structured interviews allow the participants to express themselves and fully engage in the research process, whilst enabling the researcher to use open questioning to explore unanticipated development of the direction of the interview, (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, p513-514).

The choice of focus groups for the students is to ensure they are comfortable in a setting and group that includes their friends and classmates, facilitating collaborative discussion. This method is more likely to elicit conversation between them, promoting the “cross-fertilization” of ideas and producing reliable and valid data relating to their honest opinions and feelings, (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010, p96). I considered including only one group of students from mixed socio-economic backgrounds but expanded it to three after tutor feedback raised concerns that the epistemologically privileged voices and opinions of the middle-class students might drown out those of their working-classes peers, given that their perspectives align more closely with the norms of the school. Using three focus groups of four different students, twelve in total, will enable a comparison between the focus group data sets and will reveal if and how this occurs. Therefore, one group will be exclusively middle-class, the second exclusively working-class and the third, a mix to provide three separate contexts for comparison.

### **5.3 Research Participants.**

The teacher will be selected based on their experience and willingness to discuss literacy inclusion, dyslexia and the socio-economic identity of their students. Given the nature of the conversations about identity and how this relates to pedagogy, class and deficit notions, the selection of the teacher should be influenced by their willingness to honestly discuss these sensitive issues, therefore assurances of confidentiality will be paramount.

Focus group student participants will be chosen based on their varied socio-economic backgrounds and in relation to their reading ability. Inclusion of students with diverse literacy levels will ensure fairness and reliability of the results and reduce any bias towards students who for example are either dyslexic or not. Permission slips will be reviewed to ensure there is inclusion of a representative sample of parents who define their child as either able to read well, dyslexic, or experiencing reading difficulties, (appendix B.) After categorising participants by SES, using nationally recognised categories, (Office for National Statistics, no date), I will then use a method of random selection to pick participants from these lists to remove my own biases and to ensure fairness of participant inclusion.

In the letter and permission slip to the parents (appendix B), the questions are asked in isolation of factors such as income or home location, to avoid conflating the impact of class status with other factors identified in the topic literature review, (Knight and Crick, 2021.) When choosing participants and selecting interview times, the researcher should be mindful of contextual issues relating to the school, such as exams or inset days, and how this impacts the planning of the project. Issues relating to the ethics of participant selection and their justification are discussed in the ethics section.

### **5.4 Validity and Reliability**

In addition to the elements of fairness and reliability previously mentioned, research should follow BERA guidelines to ensure credibility and reliability, (2024). Article 57 outlines the requirement for every aspect of research to be robust and fulfil standard levels and markers of quality and integrity.

To enhance the validity and reliability of this research, several strategies will be implemented, (Scott and Morrison, 2005, p253-255). The design of the case study, utilising multiple data sources serves as a method of triangulation that strengthens the validity of the findings. Post-interviews, and where possible, I will share the preliminary findings with the participants to ensure their perspectives and opinions have been accurately represented and give them an opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings. Thick descriptions will enhance the credibility of the research by providing rich, detailed and contextualised accounts of the participants experiences, in their own

words. By capturing diverse participant voices, this also ensure that the findings reflect the complexity of the primary school community being researched. The researcher will engage in reflexive practices throughout the process, critically reflecting on positionality, preconceptions and any potential influence on the data collection and analysis ensuring the participant accounts remain genuine and left in context, (De Fina, 2009.)

### **5.5 Research Analysis**

Qualitative thematic analysis of the interview transcripts will be used to interpret the data, in alignment with the power dynamics highlighted by the Foucauldian framework and to effectively use the data to answer the research questions. To analyse transcripts of participant responses in detail, the research will use qualitative coding methods outlined by Saldana (2016, p1-31), identifying and matching participant opinions, ideas and concepts to thematic codes. Using a deductive coding analysis process informed by the framework the following codes could be used to organise the data:

#### **Biopower.**

Identifying ways in which the participants talk about dyslexia, or any aspect of the medicalisation of literacy abilities, including what is 'normal' or 'neurodiverse'.

#### **Privileged Literacies.**

Identify normative discourses involving middle-class ideas, or notions of aspiration or social mobility, and include ways in which participants feel their forms of literacy are overlooked or not valued.

#### **Discipline and the Panopticon.**

Note mentions of rules, bad behaviour, punishments and rewards and how experiences and expectations of this affect experiences in the classroom. How do the participants feel about being observed, monitored or assessed, and how does this affect their behaviour and participation.

#### **Technologies of the Self.**

Identify ways that the participants view themselves and each other, particularly in relation to their identity, self-worth and expectations in relation to learning and self-improvement.

Once coded, this data should be reviewed again and coded into broader themes reflecting Foucauldian concepts that can be interpreted to help answer the research questions.

Theme 1: Power relations in literacy pedagogy exploring how biopower and privileged experiences manifest in children's lives contexted in their socio-economic status.

Theme 2: Surveillance and self-regulation to analyse the influences of panopticonic and disciplinary practices in relation to 'good' behaviour, 'resistant behaviour' and engagement.

Theme 3. Identity and agency will be used to analyse how technologies of the self mould participant understanding of literacy skills in the context of their social class and how this relates to deficit thinking.

For the final stage of analysis, the researcher must recognise the importance of issues of hegemony, power and marginalisation in relation to literacy education, and by extension the use of language. Linguistic practices in educational domains "mediates power in other domains" and to this end, Fairclough provides a resource for critical analysis of the thematically organised data, which is not of itself emancipatory, but is a useful tool of critical awareness, (2010, p529-530.) Fairclough proposes a four-stage methodology of critical discourse analysis, outlining steps which facilitate a focus of research analysis on "wrongs", (2010, p226). He suggests that wrongs are likely to be related to inequalities, one of which is access to resources, whilst another is in relation to cultural identity. While employing Fairclough's framework as a methodology is beyond the scope of this small-scale investigation, when modified it serves as a useful tool of critical analysis of discourses within the thematic analysis. For this EP, and to ensure its results can be used to challenge power dynamics and be transformative, the first and last stages of Fairclough's methodology, (2010, p226) are modified to form an analytical tool with two key foci.

- 1) Focus on a problem of social injustice through the lens of verbal meanings.
- 2) Identify ways to remove or compensate for or remove mechanisms of marginalisations.

Fairclough stresses the importance of using CDA tools appropriately, in that their purpose is to focus on the ways in which people can challenge and change discourse, (2010, p227).

## **5.6 Ethical Considerations**

In discussing coding analysis, Saldana emphasises that being a "rigorously ethical" researcher is essential not only for handling data but also for respecting participants (2016, p. 29). The emphasis on the term "rigorously" stresses the need for researchers to be brutally honest with themselves, treating participants with respect and reporting all data, even if it does not directly address the research questions. Additionally, transformative educational research aimed at enhancing the understanding of complex socio-economic problems must include a range of perspectives. Furthermore, research should be conducted in an "open-minded and inclusive" manner (BERA, 2024). This entails critically and reflectively questioning trust, power, confidentiality, anonymity, and agency for all involved throughout the planning, delivery, and evaluation phases of the project. Costley et al. argue that a cornerstone of ethics is maintaining an "ethic of care" (2010, p. 43-44)



towards participants. This is important since participants must make themselves vulnerable to discuss problems honestly and openly. Starting from a utilitarian perspective of ethical considerations, the researcher must evaluate who will benefit from the research; the researcher, participants, and the school (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009). Additionally, framing this in the context of the conceptual framework, the researcher should assess whether the results will meet the Rawlsian requirements of social justice (1999, p. 65-68).

My ethical considerations began during the writing of EE822 TMA01 when deciding whether to complete an extended proposal or small-scale investigation (SSI) in a school known to me. I have family ties to a local primary school, and through my personal experiences, I recognised that the school could enhance the inclusion of disabled students. Whilst I therefore considered approaching the school regarding an SSI, I decided not to do so on ethical grounds, feeling uncomfortable with my positionality as a potential researcher with close personal ties to parents whose children I would be researching. These concerns relate to the relational layer of Stutchbury and Fox's ethical table, (2009, p496) which this section uses to inform ethical considerations, and in particular the relevant questions posed within each level of their framework, (2009, p405-496). Additionally, the ethical appraisal form, permission and consent letters in the appendix give further context and information regarding specific ethical actions to be taken, and their rationales, including considerations of confidentiality, informed consent and data protection.

An ethical research design must communicate the purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits of the study to participants to seek informed consent (The Open University, 2024), with ethical clearance being sought from the school or council's ethical committee and the researcher following the school's ethical code of conduct. Communication and consultation with a local gatekeeper, the headteacher, begins with the introduction and discussion of the proposed research, with the possibility of further discussions and presentations with them, their leadership and safeguarding team. Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, (2010, p. 54) emphasise the importance of this, as gatekeepers in schools primarily work to protect their vulnerable children, their confidentiality and that of their staff. Some specific questions to consider from the external/ecological layer of Stutchbury and Fox's table (2009, p. 495) relevant to gatekeepers and safeguarding include reflecting on the school's awareness of its relationship with the community, as well as any cultural or social values and norms as part of that environment. Also, will the research make efficient use of the respondents' time and resources? Does the proposed research pose any issues relating to any legal frameworks, looked after children, and are there any risks to any of the participants? Adhering to BERA guidelines is essential, and the Stutchbury and Fox Framework encompasses all the BERA principles at different levels of the framework (2009, p. 502).

Deontological considerations include considering access to the raw data and findings, whilst maintaining confidentiality through anonymity. Honesty with and informed consent from the participants forms the basis of our deontological layer, particularly with those directly affected by and involved in the research, with a clearly and regularly stated principle that they can withdraw at any time, (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009, p496. Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, emphasise the researcher's duty of an ethic of care, particularly in relation to reflecting on their intent and goals for the research (2010, p58), which fits in deontologically with the idea of reciprocity. The researcher must reflect on whether they have clearly explained the "implications and expectations" to the participants. This includes considering their availability, and the parameters of the roles of the researcher and the participants (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009, p. 496).

Finally, returning to the relational level of the framework (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009, p. 496), the researcher will be transparent with all participants, respecting their individual autonomy and agency. To ensure the views and voices of participants are accurately reflected, the researcher must engage collaboratively with and respond to feedback throughout the project. Clear language and inclusive dissemination of anonymised results and conclusions will involve the school, but more importantly, the families and community of the participants. This commitment not only ensures the involvement of professionals and academics in the dissemination and reflection of results and recommendations (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010, p. 194-195), but also facilitates the ethical inclusion and empowerment of marginalised voices in the process of promoting social justice and in any future research projects. This section emphasises the need for ethical research to consider the relevant questions from the ethical framework tool. However, researchers must be also mindful that the consideration of ethics is an ongoing process, and that personal judgement is paramount, (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009, p 493.) Furthermore, the researcher should not focus on one perfect "system" to tackle ethics, but to maintain an inherent "ethical literacy" in their research, (Flinders, 1992.)

## **Chapter 6, EP Postscript – Narrative Critical Reflection**

The selection and development of my research focus on the impact of socio-economic status on education began during EE814, TMA 01, becoming aware of parallels in the marginalisation of working-class students and Indigenous students. EE814 and EE815 refined this to literacy pedagogy related to dyslexia and its connection to class. Initially, my framing of the problem and phrasing of research questions were quantitative, reflecting my early positivist position. However, through the literature review on the topic and framework, my understanding of the connections between various perspectives on disability, literacy, and pedagogy deepened. This led to a clearer awareness of how these theories relate to pedagogical practice, consequently, my research questions evolved from a quantitative to a qualitative nature. Tutor feedback suggested it was not clear in my topic review, how my questions had been explicitly generated and that review comments clarified some connections between ideas, so I included these in my chapter and clearly stated how the research questions were generated, (Appendix A, examples 3, 4.) Feedback on the clarity of my academic writing has been ongoing since EE814, and for this chapter, the tutor suggested I improve some specific sentences, which I did, (Appendix A, example 10)

As my understanding of the research focus developed, so did my comprehension of the frameworks and lenses of social justice and critical theory. This led to my positionality evolving into a social constructivist stance, initially framed through the lens of Bourdieu. As the extended proposal developed during E822, Kulz's book became significant in my development of my conceptual framework, (2017).

Understanding chapter 2 of Kulz, (2017, p19-36,) coupled with tutor feedback highlighted that my interpretation of Bourdieu as a conceptual framework was simplistic, while my understanding of Foucault was sophisticated and relevant. As a result of previous tutor feedback, I was developing my critical reading and my literature review skills, (Appendix A, example 8) and the need to understand and compare Foucault and Bourdieu was a catalyst for this development. After trying to combine both frameworks to form one unified conceptual framework and taking note of feedback from my tutor which suggested it would put the framework in tension with my methodology, and my research questions, I discarded Bourdieu and focussed on a deeper analysis of Foucault, (appendix A, example 5.) These insights were because of developments in my skill set which resulted from my improved ability to conduct research and apply it more effectively.

From the start of my study and on an ongoing basis, I have responded to feedback advising me to be less descriptive in my writing and more critical and synthetic in my analysis, by improving my

critical reading skills, and combining information from various sources to synthesise ideas, (Appendix A, example 8.)

Finally, my tutor gave feedback regarding how I framed my personal connection to the primary school and made suggestions to improve my simplistic take on ethical considerations. This feedback enabled me to use my new critical reading and literature review skills to gain a deeper understanding of the complex ethical tools and how to apply them, (Appendix A, example 2.)

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: EMA Reflection Evidence Grid

Category	Feedback Received	How did this shape my dissertation?
<p><b>Knowledge and understanding.</b></p> <p>Targets, reflections or feedback relating to knowledge of current debate and issues in your specific area of focus; drawing out concepts and themes; choosing a focus area for your dissertation; identifying and overcoming ethical issues.</p>	<p>1. <b>E822, TMA01</b></p> <p>Some of my key articles were old, and the authors had produced more up to date research. More contemporary research also needed to be included.</p> <p>2. <b>E822, TMA02</b></p> <p>A couple of pieces of feedback discussing a need to view ethics in the context of the Stutchbury and Fox ethical tool/framework, (2009), and suggestions that other publications, such as BERA would also be useful to use, to support my ethical position.</p>	<p>1. Some searches were constrained to dates from 2013 to 2024. I also emailed several key researchers to ask about their most recent research and for their recommendations on other, similar researchers with relevant contemporary published articles and books.</p> <p>2. Used Stutchbury and fox in more depth, widened my ethical perspective using Flinders, (1992), BERA, (2024), and Costley <i>et al.</i>, (2010) and applied this more profound ethical understanding to my ethical section of Chapter 5.</p>
<p><b>Critical analysis and Evaluation.</b></p> <p>Targets, reflections or feedback relating to justifying or challenging your personal perspective; interpreting and critically</p>	<p>3. <b>E822, EMA Draft chapter: Topic.</b></p> <p>Comments I had made for the tutor in the review section of the chapter if included in the chapter itself, would helpfully clarify my argument</p>	<p>3. A couple of comments intended for the tutor were slightly modified and added into the chapter.</p>

<p>analysing evidence and methodologies from your own and others' research; analysing and evaluating themes and issues; sourcing and critically reviewing a wide range of publications; creating an academic argument using synthesis; comparing and connecting practice and theory.</p>	<p>4. <b>E822, EMA Draft chapter: Topic.</b> The development of the topic implicitly describes how the research questions were generated, but you must state this explicitly.</p> <p>5. <b>E822, EMA Draft chapter: Literature Review.</b> Adding Bourdieu to the Foucauldian Framework overcomplicates it and makes it top heavy. It is unclear how Bourdieu improves the conceptual framework, especially for a small-scale investigation The research questions bear no relation to how this conceptual framework has developed from your original ideas.</p>	<p>4. At relevant stages in the topic chapter, when a particular review of themes or concepts helped to generate aspects of the research questions, this was explicitly referred to.</p> <p>5. I discarded the Bourdieusian element of the proposed conceptual framework and completed a more in-depth study of Foucault's theories and how they specifically apply to my problem. This allowed the final version of the research questions to be fully realised, relevant, and linked to the proposed methodology, additionally providing useful thematic codes directly from my interpretation of Foucault's theories.</p>
<p><b>Links to Professional Practice</b> Targets, reflections or feedback relating to: designing and/or applying research methods; developing ideas from previous research and frameworks; reflecting</p>	<p>6. <b>E822, EMA Draft chapter: Literature Review.</b> My title and abstract need an inclusion of some reference to the context of a primary school (known to me) and the overall qualitative nature of the project.</p>	<p>6. Title and abstract updated to include a simple reference to "primary school" and the qualitative nature of the research.</p>

<p>and making adaptations during the research and writing process; addressing problems in research design; identifying implications for practice and professional debate; challenging your own assumptions; managing workload and personal motivation.</p>	<p><b>7. TMA01 and TMA02 (E822)</b></p> <p>Occasional feedback to remind me that this project could lead onto more study, but also in its own right, could produce results that other researchers and teachers might find useful for practice.</p>	<p>7. In the relevant chapters, I included comments that some of my discarded ideas could be included if this project developed into a PhD, and I included comments on the possibility of this research forming a simple toolkit for teachers to critically analyse their inclusive practice.</p>
<p><b>Structure, Communication and Presentation.</b></p> <p>Targets, reflections or feedback relating to using academic style and referencing; presenting, managing and sharing information in different modes; communicating concepts, findings and ideas for different audiences.</p>	<p><b>8. EE814 &amp; 815, Various TMAs</b></p> <p>Throughout the beginning of my study, a core theme of feedback is that my writing is often too descriptive, and not critically analytical enough.</p> <p><b>9. E822, EMA Draft chapter: Topic.</b></p> <p>Improve elements of my writing style to make it more academic</p>	<p>8. Synthesise ideas and became more of a critical reader and writer by completing an online course and bought and used “critical reading and writing for postgraduates” by Wallace and Wray, 2011.</p> <p>9. I started to use Grammarly to make suggestions relating to academic writing style, some of which I incorporated through the entire EMA.</p>

**Appendix B: Gatekeeper, Teacher & Parental Participant Letters, participation consent forms.**

**Letter or email to the local gatekeeper**

Dear (NAME),

I am currently studying a master's degree with the open university and in my final year of the module "Multidisciplinary Masters Dissertation: Education, Childhood and Youth", (E822). I would like to carry out a small-scale research project at (NAME OF SCHOOL) as part of my final element of study. The small-scale project will involve exploring the ways that dyslexia and reading difficulties are supported, how this relates to socio-economic background, and how teachers and students feel about this. It will involve studying one year 6 class and their teacher by briefly interviewing the teacher and holding 3 focus group interviews with three diverse groups of students, all of which could be outside of teaching time. The interviews and focus groups aim to gather data regarding the experiences of the teacher and their students and this data will form the basis of exploring ways to improve inclusion and outcomes for all students.

I have written a complete research project plan, including safeguarding and ethical considerations for all elements of the project, timescales for completion, and effective and inclusive ways or sharing the results with all stakeholders. At this stage I would appreciate the opportunity to share the plan with you, discuss it and answer any questions you may have, and I am happy to share a full copy of the proposal with you in advance of our conversation. In addition to seeking your approval as the gatekeeper of (SCHOOLNAME) to complete this research, I would also seek relevant ethical approval from the university, and if needed from your governing body.

You can call me on (NUMBER) to discuss any initial questions you may have, and then it would be great if we could arrange a mutually convenient time to have an initial discussion about the project.

Kind regards

Roy Alexander BSc, MInstP, FRAS



**Letter / Email for Parents and Guardians.**

The Open University,

**Walton Hall**

**Milton Keynes**

**MK7 6AA**

(DATE)

Dear (NAME),

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Roy, and I am writing to you to tell you about a research project I am conducting at (SCHOOL). This research project aims to enhance our understanding of literacy educational experiences in our community and as part of this project, I would like to invite your child to participate in one or two brief focus group interviews.

The interviews will take place in school who will provide a safe and supportive environment for small groups of students to share their thoughts and experiences of teaching. I want to assure you that safeguarding and ethics are my top priorities and that of (SCHOOL). All information gathered will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and participants will remain anonymous in any published findings. Your child's well-being is our top priority, and they would be free to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The project will follow all data protection, safeguarding and ethical rules and at the end of the project all the data we gather will be destroyed. Once the results have been finalised, you will be invited to an optional debriefing, and this will give you the opportunity to find out about the results and ask any questions that you might have. I hope it will also help to broaden your understanding of the research, its findings and how this will be helpful for education in general.

If you are comfortable with your child participating in this research, please provide your consent by signing below. Additionally, I would appreciate it if you could share your job title and your highest level of education, as well as any relevant information about your child's reading ability, as this information will help provide context for the study.

Thank you for considering this opportunity for your child to contribute to important educational research. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at [Your Email] or [Your Phone Number].

Kind regards

Roy Alexander BSc, MInstP, FRAS

**Permission Slip for Parents and Guardians.**

I confirm that I, \_\_\_\_\_ give consent for my child to take part in the research proposal which is outlined in the attached invite letter.

I give consent for my child to be interviewed in a focus group with some of their classmates, and for that interview to be recorded.

I give consent for the interview to be used for the purposes of data collection and analysis for the sole purpose of the research project.

I acknowledge that I have been provided with all the information regarding the research project that I need to make this decision and confirm that I understand what the research project involves.

I confirm that I have been given the opportunity to discuss this with the researcher.

I understand that I can withdraw consent for my child's participation at any time, and I confirm that my child is aware that they can also withdraw consent at any time.

I confirm my understanding that data will be anonymised, and that any data and recordings will be destroyed after the research project.

My Job title is: \_\_\_\_\_

My highest qualification is: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments regarding my child's reading ability:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Letter / Email for the Teacher to be interviewed.**

The Open University,

**Walton Hall**

**Milton Keynes**

**MK7 6AA**

Dear (NAME),

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Roy, and I am writing to you to tell you about a research project I am conducting at (SCHOOL). This research project aims to enhance our understanding of educational experiences in our community and as part of this project, I would like to invite you to participate in a one-to-one interview with me. The small-scale project will involve exploring the ways that dyslexia and reading difficulties are supported, how this relates to socio-economic background, and how teachers and students feel about this. It will involve studying one year 6 class and you, their teacher, by briefly interviewing you and holding 3 focus group interviews with diverse groups of students, all of which will be held outside of teaching time. The interviews and focus groups aim to gather data regarding the experiences of the teacher and their students and this data will form the basis of exploring ways to improve inclusion and outcomes for all students.

Your interview would take place in school and is an opportunity for you to share your thoughts and experiences of inclusive literacy teaching with me. I want to assure you that safeguarding, and ethics are my top priorities and that of (SCHOOL). All information gathered will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and participants will remain anonymous in any published findings. Your well-being is our top priority, and you would be free to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The project will follow all data protection, safeguarding and ethical rules and at the end of the project all the data we gather will be destroyed. Once the results have been finalised, you will be invited to an optional debriefing, and this will give you the opportunity to find out about the results and ask any questions that you might have. I hope it will also help to broaden your understanding of the research, its findings and how this will be helpful for education in general.

If you are comfortable participating in this research, please provide your consent by signing below. Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to important educational research. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at [Your Email] or [Your Phone Number].

Kind regards

Roy Alexander BSc, MinstP, FRAS

**Consent form for teacher**

I confirm that I, \_\_\_\_\_ give consent to take part in the research proposal which is outlined in the attached invite letter.

I give consent to be interviewed, and for that interview to be recorded.

I give consent for the interview to be used for the purposes of data collection and analysis for the sole purpose of the research project.

I acknowledge that I have been provided with all the information regarding the research project that I need to make this decision and confirm that I understand what the research project involves.

I confirm that I have been given the opportunity to discuss this with the researcher.

I understand that I can withdraw consent for participation at any time.

I confirm my understanding that data will be anonymised, and that any data and recordings will be destroyed after the research project.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C: Ethical Appraisal Form****E822 Ethical Appraisal Form****Masters: Education, Childhood and Youth**

**NB: it should be noted that The Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences students might encounter when undertaking 'in-person' data collection. It is therefore very important that you follow appropriate research protocols which should**

**Because ethical appraisal should precede data collection, a completed version of this form should be included with TMA02 for those developing a Small-Scale Investigation (SSI) and as part of the EMA submission for those completing an Extended Literature Review and Research Proposal (EP) form of the Dissertation.**

**include seeking Gatekeeper permissions to undertake any data collection within your setting and adhering to ethical principles for the safety of yourself and your participants.**

Fill in section 1 of this document with your personal details and brief information about your research.

For section 2, please assess your research using the following questions and click yes or no as appropriate. If there is any possibility of significant risk please tick yes. Even if your list contains all "no" you should still return your completed checklist so your tutor/supervisor can assess the proposed research.

### Section 1: Project details

a.	Student name	Roy Alexander	
b.	PI		
c.	Project title	A Qualitative Exploration of Socio-Economic Identities' Impact on the Primary Pedagogy of Literacy and Dyslexia	
d.	Supervisor/tutor	Dr Anita Pilgrim	
e.	Qualification	Masters in Education	
		Masters in Childhood and Youth	
f.	MA pathway (where applicable)	Inclusive Practice	
g.	Intended start date for fieldwork	n/a	

h.	Intended end date for fieldwork	n/a
i.	<p>Country fieldwork will be conducted in</p> <p><i>If you are resident in the UK and will be conducting your research abroad please check <a href="http://www.fco.gov.uk">www.fco.gov.uk</a> for advice on travel.</i></p>	n/a

Section 2: Ethics Assessment		Yes	No
1	<p>Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a ‘gatekeeper’ (e.g. Local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)? <b>Discussions would need to be held with the local gatekeeper, in this case the head teacher, and then any approval from ethical committees would be sought. See appendix.</b></p>	✓	
2	<p>Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a ‘police check’ or appropriate level of ‘disclosure’ before carrying out your research?<sup>1</sup> <b>I hold a active DBS check at all times due to my work, however checking with the local safeguarding team will ensure compliance with the schools DBS requirements.</b></p>		✓
3	<p>Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.<sup>2</sup> <b>See appendix for letters requesting participation, outlining the project, consent forms and the relevant letters/emails seeking consent will be sent to all potential participants. These forms and letters</b></p>	✓	

You must agree to comply with any ethical codes of practice or legal requirements that maybe in place within the organisation or country (e.g. educational institution, social care setting or other workplace) in which your research will take place. If required an appropriate level of disclosure (‘police check’) can obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales), Disclosure Scotland, AccessNI (Northern Ireland), Criminal Records Office (Republic of Ireland), etc.

<sup>2</sup> This should normally involve the use of an information sheet about the research and what participation will involve, and a signed consent form. You must allow sufficient time for potential participants to consider their decision between the giving of the information sheet and the gaining of consent. No research should be conducted without the opt-in informed consent of participants or their caregivers. In the case of children (individuals under 16 years of age) no research should be conducted without a specified means of gaining their informed consent (or, in the case of young children, their assent) and the consent of their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This is particularly important if your project involves participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16 years, people with learning disabilities, or emotional problems, people with difficulty in understanding or communication, people with identified health problems). There is additional guidance on informed consent on the Masters: Education and Childhood and Youth website under Project Resources.

	<b>include relevant details about the project, privacy, consent and other ethical matters.</b>		
4	Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)? If so, have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures? <sup>3</sup> <b>Participants will always be aware when they are taking part, and can also remove consent to participate at any time, with no issues.</b>		✓
5	Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through? <b>4 No, participants will not be interviewed repeatedly within that time period, if at all.</b>		✓
6	Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so, have you indicated how you will protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data? <b>I will be collecting audio recordings of the interviews and focus groups. All transcripts will be anonymised and kept confidentially and store electronically on an external hard drive, no data will be held in the cloud. Audio files will be password protected and destroyed after a set time. This is outline in the letter to participants, see appendix.</b>	✓	

7	Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data? <b>Participants will be given the opportunity to discuss outcomes as part of a debrief session, and this will be outlines in the letter to them.</b>	✓	
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<sup>3</sup> Where an essential element of the research design would be compromised by full disclosure to participants, the withholding of information should be specified in the project proposal and explicit procedures stated to obviate any potential harm arising from such withholding. Deception or covert collection of data should only take place where it has been agreed with a named responsible person in the organisation and it is essential to achieve the research results required, where the research objective has strong scientific merit and where there is an appropriate risk management and harm alleviation strategy.

<sup>4</sup> Where participants are involved in longer-term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times should be considered.

8	Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants? <b>No pilot needed.</b>		✓
9	Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants' confidentiality? <b>All transcripts, results and any conclusions shared with participants will be anonymised, all participants can remove consent for participation at any time and with no repercussions, all data will be destroyed in due course.</b>	✓	
10	Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a 'risk analysis' and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research? <b>Interviews and focus groups will be held in school, there is therefore very little chance of risk. As a precautionary measure, the researcher should discuss safety and risk assessments with the gatekeeper and/or safeguarding team, and comply with any local requirement for risk assessments.</b>		✓
11	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? <b>No</b>		✓
12	Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data? <b>No</b>		✓

If you answered 'yes' to questions **12**, you will also have to submit an application to an appropriate National Research Ethics Service ethics committee (<https://www.hra.nhs.uk/about-us/committees-and-services/res-and-recs/>).



## **Appendix D: Interview questions for the student focus groups**

Semi-Structured Interview questions for the student focus groups, developed in line with the Foucauldian conceptual framework. The intention is not to mention the headings, they are there as prompts for the interviewer. Encourage each student to share their thoughts and allow for discussion among them to gather diverse perspectives. Adjust the wording as needed to ensure clarity and engagement and be prepared to ask follow-up questions based on their responses but stay within the themes of the headings to ensure that data collected remains relevant.

### **General Background**

Can each of you share what you like most about reading and writing at school?

How do you think your home life affects how you learn in school?

### **Biopower**

Are there rules at school that you think help you learn? Can you give an example?

How do you feel when teachers talk to you about your progress or behaviour?

### **Privileged Literacies**

What kinds of books or stories do you enjoy reading and why?

Do you think some types of reading or writing are more important than others? Why?

### **Discipline**

What are the rules in your classroom? How do they make you feel?

How do you feel when you get in trouble for not following the rules? What happens then?

### **The Panopticon**

Do you feel like your teacher is always watching you in class? How does that make you behave?

Do you think you act differently when you know you're being observed, like during tests or presentations?

### **Technologies of the Self**

How do you think you could become a better reader or writer?

Can you share a time when you felt proud of something you learned or created in class?

### **Closing**

What do you wish your teachers knew about how you learn best?

Is there anything else you want to share about your experiences with reading and writing in class

## **Appendix E: Interview questions for the teacher**

Semi-Structured Interview Questions for the Teacher, developed in line with the Foucauldian conceptual framework. The intention is not to mention the headings, they are there are prompts for the interviewer. If the interview strays from the original questions, that is ok if the conversation remains within the context of the heading. Straying from the original questions and not adhering to the broad themes, runs the risk of producing less valid data.

### **General Background**

Describe your teaching philosophy and approach to literacy

What influence do you see socio-economic status has on how a students literacy experiences are shaped?

### **Biopower**

In what ways do you think school policy regulates student behaviour and learning?

How do you manage issues relating to diversity and inclusion for literacy in your classroom?

### **Privileged Literacies**

What literacy practices do you consider are the most important in your classroom?

What similarities and differences do you see in literacy skills between the working- and middle-class children in your lessons?

### **Discipline**

How do you establish classroom rules and expectations of behaviour?

What roles do these play in student engagement?

Can you describe some typical disciplinary practices you use? Are some more effective than others for different groups of students?

### **The Panopticon**

What awareness do students have of being monitored in the classroom?

How does this affect their behaviour and does that differ between groups?

To what extent do you encourage or discourage self-regulation among your students?

### **Technologies of the Self**

How do you help students develop their identities as learners?

What strategies do you use to empower students to take ownership of their learning, and how do you adapt that to different student backgrounds?

Closing

Are there any additional thoughts you have on how socio-economic status influences literacy and learning in your classroom?

How do you envision the future of literacy education in relation to socio-economic diversity?