Exploring the Self-concept of Students with Dyslexia Exited from a Multisensory Language Therapy Program

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Abstract

To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark. —Victor Hugo

Schools and districts across the United States have historically avoided using the term dyslexia to describe struggling readers; however, laws and supports for students diagnosed with this challenge are beginning to shift the connotation of the word dyslexia from dys-(bad) and lexia-(reading) to indicate a struggle that can be remediated with intensive intervention (Birsh, 2011). The lack of identification coupled with the misinformation about the disability, along with limited appropriate and effective research-based reading interventions (Youman & Mather, 2015) have historically affected dyslexic students’ self-perception and thus their success in navigating academic and social struggles. By utilizing the self-determination theory (SDT) framework and subsequent subthemes of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985), this study sought to understand the experiences of 9th grade students with dyslexia exited from a middle school multisensory language therapy program. It specifically identified how they used skills to develop self-concept and achieve both academic and social success. Using a narrative methodology, this study engaged five participants in three individual semi-structured interviews. In-vivo coding and analytic memos assisted in examining the rich, thick experiences of the students exiting from an effective intervention and support program into high school, where the learning environment involved much greater autonomy with minimal support. It explored the efficacy of the learning and coping skills acquired through the intervention and the ways they used self-concept and self-efficacy to apply strategies to negotiate enhanced independent learning in the new setting. Overtime, the students began to develop the ability to access both internal and external factors that in turn allowed for more autonomy in their learning
process and their interactions with teachers and peers at school to face challenges in the new classroom setting and beyond.

Keywords: dyslexia, dyslexia intervention, reading difficulties, learning disabilities, self-concept.
Dedication

I would like to take this time to dedicate my dissertation to my orange sweatpants-wearin’,
dancing through my elementary school halls singin’, homemade cupcake makin’, rosary prayin’,
Parks and Rec watchin’, antique shoppin’, SINGLE mom who continues to inspire me each and
every day with her love of learning and her commitment to service for others. “You are like an
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“If Plan A doesn’t work, there are still 25 others letters to go. 204 if you are in Japan.”

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Students exhibit and utilize individual coping strategies to feel successful in their courses

Students access and/or maintain structural problem-solving strategies (tangibly use something outside of them) to meet their needs in learning

Students develop the capacity to access autonomous resources combining internal and external factors, sometimes ambiguously, to manage disability

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Students exhibit and utilize individual coping strategies to feel successful in their courses

Students access and/or maintain structural problem-solving strategies (tangibly use something outside of them) to meet their needs in learning

Students develop the capacity to access autonomous resources combining internal and external factors, sometimes ambiguously, to manage disability

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Chapter 1: The Dyslexia Difference

Dyslexia, once referred to as “congenital word blindness,” (Facklemann, 1992; Hinshelwood, 1917; Snowling, 1996; Uhry & Clark, 2004) is now commonly described as an unexpected shortfall in the area of reading and spelling (Lyon, 1995; Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 2003; Mody, 2003; Rispens & Been, 2007, Tijms, 2004). An estimated 17-21% of school-age children struggle with basic reading skills, and many of them likely have dyslexia (Ferrer et. al., 2015). According to S. E. Shaywitz (1998), dyslexia is:

a deficit at the level of the phonologic module [that] impairs the ability to segment the written word into its underlying phonologic elements. As a result, the reader experiences difficulty, first in decoding the word and then in identifying it (p. 308).

The shortfall causes the reader to become labored in their accuracy and automaticity in oral reading (Al Otaiba, Puranik, Ziolkowski, & Montgomery, 2009) which can also inhibit the student’s comprehension of the information in the text (Al Otaiba et al., 2009; Hudson, High, & Al Otaiba, 2007; Lyon et al., 2003, Mody, 2003). Because dyslexia is categorized as an unexpected deficit, these complications are not attributed to a cognitive difficulty or inadequate teaching instruction (Feeg, 2003; Lyon et al., 2003; S. E. Shaywitz, 1998; Texas Education Agency, 2014; Uhry & Clark, 2004). Indeed, Birsh (2006) stated that the use of multisensory methods for dyslexia remediation might allow the brain to physically change and “compensate for this neural disruption” (p. 50).

According to the National Reading Panel of the National Institute of Child Health & Human Development (NICHHD, 2000), explicit and systematic instructional methods are critical to student success in reading. Not only are these techniques beneficial for typical readers, these methods can also support students with reading difficulties such as dyslexia (Birsh, 2006). The
International Dyslexia Association (IDA) (2017) notes six essential needs for effective dyslexia remediation: (a) multisensory instruction, (b) methodical structuring of lessons, (c) direct and explicit teaching, (d) trained instructors apt at differentiation, (e) synthetic as well as analytic phonics instruction and (f) a comprehensive and inclusive look at the whole language.

**Statement of the Problem**

**Specialized programs for multisensory instruction.** Since its development, many districts (including the one that is the focus of this study) used the Multisensory Teaching Approach (MTA) program. This program, created by Margaret Taylor Smith in 1987, utilizes the technique of alphabetic phonics to support students struggling with reading and writing due to a dyslexia disability. Using the MTA approach, a student identified as having dyslexia receives small group or individualized instruction on phonics; including scaffolded instruction on decoding strategies. MTA’s program sought though its design to teach to mastery, allowing students to become proficient in one set of skills before moving to more challenging tasks. The program utilizes visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (VAK) methods of instruction and meets all requirements by the state of Texas for a dyslexia intervention program, yet due to the mastery checks, students who do not score high enough to “pass” are recommended to not move to the next level (or kit).

Due to the non-uniformity of dyslexia laws in the United States (Youman & Mather, 2015), many students have been often misdiagnosed and/or have not been identified as dyslexic as young children. S. E. Shaywitz (2003) estimated that “tens of thousands of children are going undiagnosed” (p. 132). Additionally, the self-concept of students with dyslexia has been understudied; for policy to change to support these students, more research in this area is required (Butler, 2008, Riddick, 1996).
This study defines self-perception of students with dyslexia as how students feel about themselves once exited from a language therapy program. Although multiple studies have addressed the needs of students with learning disabilities, research has not fully addressed students with dyslexia (Butler, 2008). Nicolson (2015) noted that programs and interventions need to take into account the entire student, not just the underlying causes of dyslexia. To fully understand the effect that dyslexia has on student self-perception, a more comprehensive understanding of methods of instruction and the social interactions these students face is required. Claasens and Lessing (2015) asserted, “students with dyslexia may experience barriers to self-fulfillment in the school setting” (p. 32). In addition, the authors stated that, due to their difficulties in school, students with dyslexia, especially adolescents, might be more “at risk for social, emotional and motivational difficulties than typically developing [peers]” (p. 32). As previously noted, research has largely focused on students with other types of learning disabilities; studies addressing dyslexia specifically are lacking. Additionally, many studies conducted on student self-perception and dyslexia have utilized retrospective analyses to understand what students felt before they were given a dyslexia diagnosis (Gibson & Kendall, 2010; Kosmos & Kidd, 1991; McNulty, 2003; Rawson, 1977).

**Deficiencies in the evidence.** Because dyslexia is a neurobiological disorder, students with this disorder will continue to have difficulty reading, to some degree, for their entire lives (S. E. Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2005). Due to the lack of research on dyslexia interventions in the educational community, data documenting the experiences of these students is deficient (Glazzard, 2010; Youman & Mather, 2015). Texas public schools, for example, follow the Texas Education Agency’s *Dyslexia handbook* (2014); however, districts may still create or utilize any program that stresses VAK methods, and they can develop their own timetables and create
review committees for any student referred for a dyslexia evaluation while utilizing Section 504 procedures. Section 504 is a part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a federal law designed to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

Section 504 regulations require a school district to provide a "free appropriate public education” (FAPE) to each qualified student with a disability who is in the school district's jurisdiction, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability.” (United States Department of Education, 2010). These services and supports are tailored to each qualifying student according to their specific needs to allow for an appropriate educational environment. Additionally, teachers working with students on reading remediation are not required to be trained as therapists in the area of dyslexia; they commonly have the minimum training requirements as allowed by the district and are only required to be trained on the multisensory method that the district has purchased for use or created (Texas Education Agency, 2014). In this context, this study explored the experiences of high school students exiting from intervention programs, particularly the challenges they face and the strategies they use to maintain positive self-perception without daily support.

The audience. By interviewing students who have recently exited a language therapy support program, this study aimed to inform teachers and therapists utilizing VAK approaches in dyslexia remediation courses to better understand how students with dyslexia perceive their disability and self-perception. This information could help the teachers and therapists prepare these students more effectively for life and learning after exiting a therapy program. It could also assist teachers and therapists in collaborating in the classroom before their students exit to adjust
curriculum and to put support groups in place to assist the students struggling with low self-concept.

**Significance of the Study**

Education in the United States is regarded as “free and appropriate” according to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) -- a legislative initiative that was passed in 2001 to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and to improve the federal role in holding schools accountable for student outcomes (NCLB, 2002). However, students with learning differences commonly do not receive educational assistance and interventions that meet their specific needs. In December 2015, NCLB (2002) was replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which only mentions dyslexia twice. The bill does not address the lack of knowledge that a majority of educators exhibit about the self-concept of students with dyslexia, nor does it include strategies to address the struggles this group of students constantly faces in the area of negative feelings about their difference. In short, these measures do not include strategies and support systems to create interventions and accommodations for professionals to implement that address self-concept (Humphrey, 2001).

**Impact for teachers.** Although the 1990’s were a prolific time in dyslexia research, and research is still ongoing (Otaiba et. al., 2009; Rispens & Been, 2007; Sidhu & Manzura, 2011; Youman & Mather, 2015), teachers still admit that they have limited information regarding dyslexia (Bell, 2013; Washburn, Joshi, & Binks-Cantrell, 2014). Bell (2013) also found that, “40/75 (53%) [of teachers studied] had little or no knowledge of the normal development of reading and 28/75 (37%) had little or no knowledge of phonics” (p. 108). These educators are continuing to create policies for dyslexic students based on limited information (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). Contributing to an understanding of dyslexic students’ self-concept could help
teachers and therapists become more cognizant of the issues that these students struggle with on a daily basis. According to Thomas (2012), “for the educator, research is a part of the craft” (p. 46). Providing teachers and districts more in-depth information about the self-concept of students with dyslexia and about how this relates to their behaviors in the classroom when coping with the disability might better equip educators to make important decisions for their students on a day to day basis. It may also encourage them to use research to develop policies that support students once educators and experts deem the intervention no longer academically necessary for success. The decision to terminate or reduce the intensity of an intervention is made by a student’s individual Section 504 committee; these committees are school-based and involve participation from the campus 504 administrator, the dyslexia intervention teacher or therapist, a general education teacher, and as well as the student’s parents or guardians.

**Impact for students.** According to S. E. Shaywitz (2003), dyslexia intervention should encompass the whole child- academically and emotionally. Additionally, there is not enough information documenting the emotional and physiological concerns of adolescent students with reading disabilities (Arnold et al., 2005; Goldston et. al., 2007). While this area of dyslexia remains understudied, research has shown that students with reading disabilities do suffer from emotional stressors that can trigger physical ailments, such as headaches and stomachaches (Willcutt & Pennington, 2000). Riddick (1996) concluded that “there appears to be little systematic research on the social and emotional consequences of dyslexia, despite the indications from personal accounts that some children and adults with dyslexia do experience such difficulties” (p. 51).
**Research Question**

The purpose of this narrative study was to investigate the experiences of students with dyslexia exited from a multisensory language therapy program. The following research questions guided the study:

- How do students with a dyslexia diagnosis who exit a middle school language therapy program view their ability to navigate the social and academic demands of ninth grade without daily support?
- How does that experience impact their self-concept?

**Key Terminology**

**Dyslexia.** A specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. Its diagnostic characteristics include difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition and poor spelling and decoding abilities (International Dyslexia Association, 2017).

**Academic language.** According to the IDA (2017), “academic language denotes that services offered to clients are educational and emphasize the teaching of reading, spelling, handwriting, and written expression. Therapy indicates that those services are intensive and therapeutic rather than tutorial (“Helpful Terminology of Dyslexia Information,” 2011).

**Academic language therapy.** Courses designed with a combination of multisensory and explicit teachings to support students with dyslexia, which are intensive and therapeutic rather than tutorial.

**Multisensory methods of instruction.** Instruction for students with dyslexia that utilizes a combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic methods (Birsh, 2006).

**Exit.** The participating district’s term for removing language therapy support from a student’s daily schedule through Section 504.
**Self-Perception.** How people see themselves in regards to a specific task.

**Theoretical Framework**

Because of the lack of interventions and laws supporting dyslexic students in the United States (Youman & Mather, 2015), most research is geared towards helping students qualify for/and receive support. Research, however, has not begun to address the student self-perception of themselves or how they handle being “on their own” after many years of receiving assistance. Section 504 protections are now available to students with dyslexia because of the Section 504 qualifier of “substantial limitation in one for more major life activity” or they are placed in Special Education under Specific Learning Disability (SLD); these programs just provide academic accommodations and support in line with what they require to meet the “average student.” This researcher has not found information on how dyslexic students manage the pressures of reading without the daily support of an interventionist.

In this context, it is important to analyze how students are able to use the skill sets gained during intervention programs and applying new competencies, to achieve greater levels of autonomy in more independent settings, which is essential to the success of their later academic pursuits. Key to this transference and application of skills is the development of students’ self-concept (feelings of self-worth and capability) combined with self-determination (the activation of their motivation). For the purposes of this study, to provide this analytical depth, self-determination theory (SDT) as articulated by Deci and Ryan (1985) was chosen as the framework theoretically informing the research. A detailed explanation of the theory, its critics, and its direct application to this study follows.

Deci and Ryan first conceptualized SDT in 1985 to understand different forms of human motivation. Examining psychological needs as their basis of inquiry, the researchers established
three subsets of STD: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. These precepts were shaped and explored throughout Deci and Ryan’s ongoing work and publications from 1985 to as recent as 2017. Ryan and Deci (2017) noted that “psychological needs are universally essential for optimal human functioning, regardless of developmental epoch or cultural setting” (p. 10). This theory has been applied to many areas including parenting, education, and schooling, as well as career guidance and athletic coaching. In 1985, Ryan and Deci (2000) sought to understand in what capacity social constructs contribute or hinder an individual’s intrinsic motivation, or the “doing context constitutes “our natural human propensities to assimilate and integrate knowledge” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 354).

Young children are naturally curious, and according to the researchers, learning during early development is a process that is motivated intrinsically. Throughout the beginning years, a child develops intrinsic motivation through exploration and play. It is important to note that a child’s environment does affect intrinsic learning. Caregivers who do not allow children this freedom to play and create can diminish a child’s innate ability to learn through these methods (Bernier, Carlson, & Whipple, 2010; Grolnick, Frodi, & Bridges, 1984). Additionally, parents who do not support psychological needs after infancy may contribute to the development of many undesirable behaviors in children, including less intrinsic motivation.

According to Ryan and Deci (2017), just as parental support impacts learning and development of children, SDT proposes that support systems in schools and educational environments may also affect student development, learning, and achievement. By focusing on high autonomy, or a strong degree of independently motivated learning, in the classroom, Ryan and Deci (2017) stressed that a shift to greater autonomy can support and affect child development. According to the researchers, “choice, acknowledgement of feelings, and
opportunities for self-direction were found to enhance intrinsic motivation” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 353) and were essential to autonomy.

Permitting or encouraging the development of these three aspects of behavior, the authors asserted, allowed individuals to have greater autonomy in their learning and thus more intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In this context, according to Deci and Ryan (1985), the particular outcomes that the individual wants accomplished fuel different types of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic). Although both intrinsic as well as extrinsic stimuli can motivate students, the authors stated that intrinsic motivation allows the students to be more independent in their learning (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Furthermore, Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) added that “motivation, performance, and development will be maximized within social contexts that provide people the opportunity to satisfy their basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy” – in short, for self-determination (pp. 328-329).

**Subsets of SDT.** Within the theory of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985), the three designated and distinct subsets, relatedness, competence, and autonomy relate to the psychological needs of individuals. Although these areas differ from each other, it is important to note that, according to Ryan and Deci (2000), all three of these needs must be nurtured to allow self-determination to flourish. Ryan and Deci (2000) noted that the value of the importance of each need can fluctuate in certain instances, according to the individual’s social and sociocultural environments.

In addition to this difference, the ranking of importance of the needs may vary due to the age and experiences of the individual. As stated by Ryan and Deci (2000):

[I]ndeed, the mode and degree of people’s psychological need satisfaction is theorized to be influenced not only by their own competencies but, even more important, by the
ambient demands, obstacles, and affordances in their sociocultural contexts. Thus, to posit universal psychological needs does not diminish the importance of variability in goals… but it does suggest similarities in underlying processes that lead to the development and expression of those differences (p. 75).

In short, both the universal psychological needs and variance in valuations coexist.

**Autonomy.** Within the theory of self-determination, Ryan and Deci (2017) uncovered three basic needs necessary to support individual development and well-being. The first need mentioned, autonomy, focuses on the need for the individual to “self-regulate one’s experiences and actions” (p. 10). Although sometimes confused with independence and/or freedom, Ryan and Deci (2017) stipulated that autonomy is observed when individuals’ behaviors are “self-endorsed, or congruent with one’s authentic interests and values” (p. 10). The authors additionally observed that “in most developed nations, once children move beyond toddlerhood, learning becomes...an institutional matter” (p. 352), thus compromising autonomy.

Although learning throughout early childhood is motivated intrinsically (Ryan & Deci, 2017), the authors observed that controlling environments in the home and school can negate a student’s ability to stay intrinsically motivated (Bernier et al., 2010). In addition, Ryan and Deci (2017) stressed the importance of autonomous support in learning, which Bernier et al. (2010) asserted “consists mainly of scaffolding, respecting the child’s rhythm, and ensuring that he or she plays an active role in successful completion of the task” (p. 355).

Yet, it is important to note that autonomy does not mean that the individual is void of any outside influences. According to Ryan and Deci (2017), an individual’s behavior can be influenced by others (teachers, parents, leaders, etc.) and remain autonomous. The authors’
claimed that autonomy “reflects an acceptance and valuing of the direction and guidance that these inputs provide” (p. 57).

**Competence.** Competence, alternatively, focuses on the need for an individual to feel effective. Although multiple researchers (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Deci, 1975; Harter, 2012) have explored this area, in the realm of STD, the idea of competence constitutes one of the basic needs that allow individuals to feel productive. Ryan and Deci (2017) revealed that “the need for competence is evident as an inherent striving manifested in curiosity, manipulation, and a wide range of epistemic motives” (p. 11). Although competence is one main factor of STD, the authors caution that situations where the individual perceives negativity (such as difficulty in task and negative criticism) can hinder it.

**Relatedness.** Lastly, relatedness focuses on how individuals feel connected on a social level. Significance and belonging are two of the main areas of social connection described by this phenomenon. Ryan and Deci (2017) described relatedness as being an integral part of a “social organization” (p. 11). This includes contributing to the group as well as “showing benevolence” (p. 11). Angyal (1941) previously articulated this ideal as homonomy. Deci and Ryan (1985) utilized the ideas of homonomy, or “the feeling of being connected to others and by being a significant member of a social group” (p. 11), to explain why contributing to a cause and supporting others are important to meeting an individual’s psychological needs.

A lack of satisfying these three individual areas of need, Ryan and Deci (2017) cautioned, can significantly affect motivation and well-being. The authors warned that without these needs, individuals will not only lose motivation, but may develop other negative behaviors such as insecurity, addiction, and even psychopathy, aptly described by the authors as “passive or fragmented modes of functioning” (p. 11).
Subtheories of SDT. SDT theory in its infancy later expanded to include six additional sub theories. This researcher chose two of these sub theories to highlight the multiple facets of the phenomena under study: cognitive evaluation theory (CET) and organismic integration theory (OIT). According to the authors, these two sub theories developed within the original theory of self-determination to explore one the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Cognitive evaluation theory (CET) and Organismic Integration Theory (OIT). According to King and Howard (2016), CET is defined as how “the social environment affects the psychological needs of individuals by supporting or hindering different types of motivation—those emanating from the self (intrinsic motivation) or those coming from others that become internalized and integrated (external motivation)” (p. 60). Deci and Ryan (1985) introduced CET as a sub theory to SDT that aimed to understand under what circumstances are needed to allow an individual’s intrinsic motivation to thrive. While CTE focuses on internal motivation, Deci and Ryan (1985) defined OIT as:
… a construct that pertains whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome. Extrinsic motivation thus contrasts with intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing an activity simply for the enjoyment of the activity itself, rather than its instrumental value (p. 60).

This sub theory explores the relationship of external motivation to internalization. As stated by Ryan and Deci (2017), OIT “inclines humans naturally to internalize extrinsic motivators that are endorsed by significant others” (p. 183). According to OIT, although external motivators are used at times to influence individual behavior, it is important to note that the degree that an individual internalizes this perceived locus of causality (PLOC) can differ, thus affecting the individual’s autonomy.

Turban, Tan, Brown, & Sheldon (2007) asserted that this concept “measures the reasons for one’s actions and ranges along a continuum from internally motivated to externally motivated behavior” (p. 2376). It is important to note that, although Deci and Ryan defined the theory of self- determination in 1985, scholars have added new information to this theory multiple times. One such revision was the restructuring of the original categories of internal and external motivation. According to Turban et al. (2007), “although researchers originally only differentiated between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation” (p. 2377), more recent conceptualizations (Sheldon, Turban, Brown, Barrick, & Judge, 2003) have described two forms of controlled motivation, external and introjected; and two forms of autonomous motivation, identified and intrinsic” (p. 2377). This expansion allowed researchers utilizing the theory to explore the effects of motivation on PLOC more thoroughly.

**Studies utilizing SDT.** A study by Benita, Roth, and Deci (2014) examined mastery goals from the lens of autonomous as well as controlled settings and found that when students
were motivated autonomously, “they had more positive emotional experiences that when mastery goals were adopted in controlling contexts. Furthermore, when mastery goals were autonomously motivated, they led to more interest and engagement than when the motives underlying the controls were controlled” (p. 372). In addition, Vansteenkiste et al. (2010) found that the different motivations (autonomous and controlled methods) for a task did explain the varying results (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Pulfrey, Buchs, & Butera (2011), meanwhile, looked at students graded on an assignment in regards to their motivation. They discovered that when students had the knowledge that they were being graded, they began to develop avoidance goals and showed decreased autonomy in performing the task. In regards to STD theory, Ryan and Deci (2017) stressed that “autonomy supportive learning climates...have a positive influence on the students’ motivation, learning, and psychological adjustment” (p. 373).

**Critics of the theory.** Although SDT (Deci & Ryan; 1985) addresses the correlation between motivation and “psychological flourishing” that can be seen in many different domains, (educational, sports, careers), other researchers have claimed that the authors’ findings contradict and/or question the validity of the SDT theory. Researchers Cameron and Pierce (1994) created a study to determine if rewards undermine intrinsic motivation. They concluded that "teachers have no reason to resist implementing incentive systems in the classroom” (p. 397) and recommended eliminating the cognitive evaluation theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In 1996, Ryan and Deci claimed that Cameron and Pierce (1994) were examining the theory as a reward system “rather than how factors affecting perceived autonomy and perceived competence influence intrinsic motivation” (Ryan & Deci, 1996, p. 33). Additionally, the use of tangible rewards and the effect that this has on intrinsic motivation has been widely debated.
Deci, Koester, & Ryan (1999) debunked a claim made by Eisenberger & Cameron (1996) that rewards do not decrease intrinsic motivation. In addition to this finding, the researchers found that negativity (such as due dates and pressure from superiors) weakens an individual’s intrinsic motivation. Yet, according to Ryan and Deci (2000), “choice, acknowledgment of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction were found to enhance motivation because they allow people a greater feeling of autonomy” (p. 70).

While these critiques raise important points of SDT, Deci and Ryan’s approach remained not only a valid framework to apply to this study, but it was particularly useful because of the clarity with which it explores student motivation’s intersection with autonomy. This was essential in the context of dyslexic students interviewed in this study given that they were transitioning from an environment that provided a significant level of structure and support towards a learning experience (high school) where they received given greater independence and opportunities to use self-direction.

**Application to research study.** This study used SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and its subsequent revisions and additions to address the research question. By utilizing SDT, this study investigated students’ experiences and perceptions of high school after they no longer had daily support available to them. This theory aimed to help understand how students perceived themselves after they exited a multisensory language therapy program and no longer received support through daily intervention.

Specifically, Deci and Ryan’s three sub-set components of SDT – competence, autonomy, and relatedness – provided a clear conceptual scaffolding from which to analyze the dynamic of students moving from a situation where less independence and autonomy were needed into a more open structure characterized by greater autonomy. In this way, the theory
directly assisted the researcher in evaluating the extent to and the ways in which the students’ self-perceptions contributed to their capacity to self-motivate and self-direct to meet new challenges, mobilizing their competency and relatedness skills to function more autonomously.
**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review comprehensively examines dyslexia as a developmental difficulty (Ferrer et al., 2009; Nicolson, 2015). It also includes information on dyslexia identification, laws, and regulations supporting students. It further explores dyslexic students’ self-perception. Due to the lack of research regarding dyslexia and self-perception, the review looks to literature on other specific learning disabilities (SLDs) and the impact that diagnoses and research from this perspective has had on self-perception.

**Organization of the Literature**

This literature review aims to provide an understanding of the struggles that students with dyslexia face daily in regards to reading, writing, and spelling. It begins with a historical overview of the history of dyslexia and with a description of the myths that have been associated with the disorder. The review proceeds to analyze the history of Texas law because the participants chosen for this study were Texas Public Schools students beginning high school. These students (born after the enactment of state dyslexia laws in 1986) were often diagnosed prior to fourth grade based on primary grade assessments conducted in accordance with the Student Success Initiative (TEC 28.006, 1997), through which funding was allocated to public schools to support early intervention and screenings.

The review also outlines testing procedures and identification through Response to Intervention (RTI), special education, and Section 504 to analyze the many different ways state and federal initiatives identity and assess students. It proceeds to discuss program shortcomings and the lack of cohesion amongst different programs, given that the participants received diagnosis and assessment through various methods. The chapter also explains the use of the discrepancy model. This method of assessment has been replaced in Texas by a holistic view
yet some states continue to base dyslexia services on the IQ equivalency scale (Birsh, 2011). The review also explains the concept of student perception after diagnosis to reveal the need for more cohesive guidelines between all states to ensure students receive the proper interventions for their diagnoses. Without appropriate support, the researcher contends that these students begin to experience low perceptions of self. Accommodations provided to students with dyslexia and the outcomes of these are also outlined. Finally, the review provides an overview of the idea behind the theory of positive dyslexia (Nicolson, 2015) adapted from the positive psychology theory of Seligman (2002), which asserts that focusing on positivity and strength is imperative to dyslexic student success.

**History of Dyslexia**

Dyslexia intervention is frequently misunderstood and misdiagnosed. Although many colleges are now requiring students in education departments to have one class related to reading disorders, many teachers in the classroom are still confused on what characteristics are associated with dyslexia. Misguided assumptions about dyslexia prevalent since the 1980s include beliefs that all dyslexic students read backwards, flip letters, and can be “healed” with intervention (Uhry & Clark, 2004). The majority of these myths have been highly discredited, but many still hold sway with teachers. Educators have had access to information about dyslexia for over a century; however, many teachers remain extremely ignorant about the complexities the disorder involves.

Literature previously described dyslexia as a predominantly male disorder because of differences in behavior; this has also been discredited (Richardson, 1992; S. E. Shaywitz et. al., 1990; Uhry & Clark, 2004). Because some of the traits associated with dyslexia resemble symptoms of ADHD and ADD, boys are commonly identified as dyslexic earlier and more
frequently than girls (Uhry & Clark, 2004). Although researchers have explored what is now known about dyslexia with greater confidence over the last 30 years, many former inaccuracies about dyslexia persevere. As Richardson (1992) observed, visual and auditory interventions were common in the past, as were tactile approaches for dyslexia intervention, but not until 1988 did researchers advocate that a combination method of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (VAK) methods were needed for successful dyslexia intervention programs, which informs many dyslexia interventions today. As Richardson (1992) described, “remediation has been most successful when all avenues of approach are fully utilized as in the combined multisensory approaches, which address speaking as well as reading and writing” (p. 46).

Dyslexia, once referred to as “word blindness” (Hinshelwood, 1917; Uhry & Clark, 2004), can be categorized as a developmental disorder (Nicolson, 2015; Uhry & Clark, 2004) which occurs despite adequate intelligence and instruction. According to Uhry and Clark (2004), three areas of deficit for dyslexics include “language form [which] involves phonology…morphology…and syntax” (p. 33). Dyslexics also struggle with semantics (meaning) and pragmatics (the use of words) (Uhry & Clark, 2004, p. 33). Dyslexia is described as an unexpected shortfall in the area of phonological processing as well as a neurobiological disorder that inhibits the individual from accurately decoding words. This factor contributes to a lack of fluent (accurate and automatic) reading (Texas Education Agency, 2014).

Uhry and Clark (2004) asserted that “scientists have known for well over 100 years that some otherwise high-functioning individuals have unexpected difficulty with learning to read” (p. 23). This deficit causes the student to labor in their accuracy as well as lack automaticity in the fluency component of reading, which then can inhibit their comprehension of the information (S. E. Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2005). According to Richardson (1992), dyslexia is a disorder
under the umbrella of aphasia, which means “loss of speech” (p. 42). Lyon et al. (2003) noted that “these difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language” and that the characteristics are “often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction” (p. 7).

Over time, many theories outlining dyslexia have emerged; many are as confusing as the disorder itself. Notions regarding dyslexia as a phonological disorder, rapid auditory processing, and as related to visual difficulties are just a few of the explanations researchers have developed for dyslexia (Uhry & Clark, 2004). Consensus that a phonological deficit is the cause of dyslexia has more recently developed (Texas Education Agency, 2014, p. 10; Uhry & Clark, 2004). In this vein, S. E. Shaywitz and Shaywitz (2005) recognized that “speech is natural and inherent, while reading is acquired and must be taught. To read, the beginning reader must recognize that letters and letter strings (orthography) represent the sounds in spoken language” (p. 1302). The Texas Dyslexia Handbook (Texas Education Agency, 2014) also acknowledged that these deficits are “unexpected” for the students’ age and educational experiences and are not due to language difficulties (p. 8).

Although dyslexia cannot be “cured,” according to Birsh (2011), “it is possible that people with dyslexia can compensate for this neural disruption with the help of multisensory components within the lesson taught” (p. 50). Birsh (2011) also noted that students who experience multisensory instruction to address their dyslexia benefit from this specific structure of learning. Utilizing visual, auditory, and kinesthetic methods as well as multiple opportunities for practice is highly beneficial to dyslexic students (Nicolson, 2015).

The Texas Dyslexia Handbook (Texas Education Agency, 2014) and the original bill promoting it in Texas (HB 157 in the 69th Legislature) defined dyslexia and related disorders and
mandated screening and treatment for students in local school districts (Miller, 2014). This law passed in 1987. Throughout the late 1980’s there was a resistance to this law in Texas and, in early 1990, a legislative hearing was called to discuss the mandates, which confirmed the need for the law and which, in 1992, led to the creation of Texas’s first dyslexia handbook containing the requirements for statewide implementation. In the late 1990’s, the Texas state legislature established the need for early identification in reading difficulties, and, in 2004, a “bundling of accommodations- oral reading, extended time” were added to the list of allowable accommodations for students with dyslexia (Miller, 2014) due to the state’s high stakes testing initiative. Although multiple revisions of the Texas Dyslexia Handbook (Texas Education Agency, 2014) have since been published throughout the years, the fundamental concepts of identification and of remediation for reading difficulties have remained consistent (Miller, 2014). New theories and empirical data have been added to the Texas Dyslexia Handbook (Texas Education Agency, 2014) reflecting and updating this focus.

Testing and Identification

The lack of homogeneity in national laws addressing dyslexia identification has meant many students are either incorrectly identified or never receive diagnosis. Holistic approaches most readily detect dyslexia; ill-informed therapists and untrained teachers conducting testing commonly incorrectly identify students, leading to misguided interventions and unnecessary stress and anxiety for the student (Altieri, 2008). Researchers Chung, Ho, Chan, Tsang, and Lee (2010) asserted that the most pressing concern is the need to correctly diagnose and assess students with dyslexia, and many students do not receive diagnosis at all.

Current eligibility for identification (the Existing RTI Model, 2015). Prior to the overhaul of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, the discrepancy
model was used to evaluate students with learning disabilities. Amendments to IDEA (2004) meant that the discrepancy model ceased in use to determine student eligibility for special education services. The process of Response to Intervention (RTI) became the more common approach used to determine admissibility for special education services and for Section 504. According to Lipson, Chomsky-Higgins, and Kanfer (2011) RTI was established to “reduce the number of students who become identified as having a learning disability by preventing reading difficulties” (p. 204). The idea of “closing the gap” is one of the main purposes of RTI. Closing the gap can be considered as (a) “narrowing the gap” (Torgesen, 2005) between student performance and reading level, and (b) remediating a student’s shortcomings to meet grade level expectations.

Although RTI contains no specific model for how to assist students with dyslexia, many districts apply a three-tier system for support (Otaiba et al., 2009). Students may move from tier to tier at any time their individualized support committee deems appropriate, yet, according to the Texas Dyslexia Handbook (Texas Education Agency, 2014), “the use of a tier process should not delay the inclusion of a student in dyslexia intervention once dyslexia is identified” (p. 14). Identification should lie with a committee well-informed about the student’s history, testing data, information from teachers, and other means to successfully place the student in the least restrictive environment (LRE) according to their specific needs (Office of Civil Rights, 2008).

Issues within the RTI system have arisen, and many researchers caution against relying solely on RTI for identification. The RTI model was put in effect to decrease the number of referrals to special education, but once enacted, research soon showed that these “one size fits all” interventions were problematic for students. Because dyslexic students need intensive, explicit phonological intervention, many RTI programs are not suited to their individual needs
Additionally, many classroom teachers are not familiar with reading concepts and/or assessments for dyslexia evaluation (Otaiba et al., 2009).

According to Lipson et al. (2011), “many schools and districts have created RTI systems that move straight from screening to instruction without looking more closely at the individual student, an approach called the direct route” (p. 204). The direct route approach, when accompanied by standard protocol (only one form of testing) has shown to be detrimental to student remediation (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003). Consistent with Lipson et al. (2011), “it is becoming quite clear that instruction focused on the wrong thing not only does not help students, but it may actually be harmful” (p. 205). With states that do not screen specifically for dyslexia, schools are using screening measures for basic reading deficits and are not equipped to target specific phonological deficits for dyslexic students (Lipson et al., 2011). These types of assessments do not provide or include sufficient information to determine holistically what students need to devise an individualized or differentiated method (Lipson et al., 2011). States that do not have a specific dyslexia intervention protocol risk identifying students incorrectly. Students who qualify for RTI are frequently placed in general reading intervention programs, which may not target their specific deficits. Lipson et al. asserted, (2011), “students who are struggling for success in the classroom deserve differentiated instruction and tailored interventions in supplemental settings” (p. 207).

Scholars have not adequately addressed the reasons behind incorrect identification of dyslexia. In the past, many scholars and educators thought a medical professional exclusively needed to diagnose dyslexia; however, this is inaccurate. The literature has revealed that individuals trained in the holistic approach to identification perform the most successful testing for dyslexia. This includes diagnostic testing (formal assessments) and gathering of data
(classroom work, spelling tests, teacher and parent interviews). Only when all of this information is considered can a true diagnosis be made (Texas Education Agency, 2014).

The literature claims the process for the identification of learning disabilities (LD) in the United States is outdated and unclear:

- Over the past 30 years, considerable evidence has accumulated concerning how children learn to read and why some experience difficulties... procedures used to assess children in schools, especially as part of the determination of eligibility for special education services, continue to be dominated by conventional and... now obsolete representations of the federal definition (Fletcher et al., 2002, p. 28).

Prior to 2004, the United States used the definition of LD from previous editions of IDEA, amended in 1992 and in 1997 (Fletcher et al, 2002). For students with reading difficulties, the characteristics qualifying them as having a reading disability were based on the discrepancy model. Inconsistencies between IQ and achievement have to be severe in one or more areas of oral expression, listening and/or reading comprehension, written expression, or individual word reading.

Research cautions against using IQ and discrepancy models (Fletcher et al., 1998; Uhry & Clark, 2004), yet the U.S. educational system for many years based much of decision-making regarding LD on discrepancy models (Joshi, 2003). As Meisinger, Bloom, and Hynd (2010) observed:

[T]here has been a great deal of controversy in recent years over the appropriateness for diagnosing reading disabilities, with many researchers arguing that the traditional IQ/achievement discrepancy model under-represents children with lower IQ when, in fact, the cognitive deficits found in poor readers are the same regardless of IQ” (p. 9).
Fletcher et al. (2002), meanwhile, asserted that

…the assessment of reading disabilities and other forms of LD has been heavily influenced by the federal definition of LD adopted by the US Office of Education in 1969…LD is indicated when a child exhibits a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability…children are eligible for special education as learning disabled if their achievement score is some degree below their IQ score (pp. 28-29).

Uhry and Clark (2004) warned that this type of model is unreliable to diagnose for dyslexia because there are no set guidelines for evaluation. They used the example that tests are not normative for the same population. Additionally, no guidelines determine the level of discrepancy needed for diagnosis. Researchers have confirmed that using the notion of dyslexia as a “phonological processing deficit” leads to much more accurate diagnoses (Fletcher et al., 1998; Uhry & Clark, 2004, p. 58).

Because multiple tests and informal data are needed for identifying reading disabilities, students all over the United States are being tested with inconsistent data and many, without proper identification, begin to experience failure. As McNulty (2003) explained, “identification and intervention promote understanding of learning disabilities and facilitate better academic and vocational outcomes” (p. 363). However, because of the testing inconsistencies and the consequent feelings of failure, students begin to suffer from low motivation and self-efficacy (Glazzard, 2010; Humphrey & Mullins, 2002).

**Confusion regarding Section 504 and special education support.** According to Section 504, which was first used as an antidiscrimination law, students who are believed to have a life limiting activity can qualify for protection. As stated previously, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibited discrimination based upon disability; it guaranteed the
civil rights of students with disabilities to have their educational needs met on par with non-disabled students. According to the Texas Dyslexia Handbook (Texas Education Agency, 2014), both state and federal mandates for dyslexia must be utilized in accordance to their guidelines. States without dyslexia guidelines may choose to evaluate students through Special Education (IDEA, 2004), yet in Texas, dyslexia evaluation and support is provided throughout general education because of legislative mandates. Additionally, this strategy sometimes leads to adding students into Section 504 for protection against discrimination for their disability. This is now the beginning step to dyslexia diagnosis in the state of Texas. Assessment of students in Texas may also occur through special education, yet this usually occurs when the student needs more support (Texas Education Agency, 2014).

Although all states must follow Section 504 protocol to protect students from discrimination, the federal mandate categorizes the life limiting impairment as a reading impairment, not dyslexia. In the area of reading, students’ needs are vast, ranging from phonological support (dyslexia) to comprehension and fluency. Scholars have asserted that this makes the identification of dyslexia and other reading disorders inconsistent nationwide, with some states offering appropriate interventions and other accommodations; while other states limit support to Section 504 federal compliance guidelines for protection against discrimination (Youman & Mather, 2013).

In the past 20 years, information regarding dyslexia has had to shift drastically from previous belief systems. The 1970’s brought forth a basic definition for the disability with deficits in reading despite adequate instruction and average intelligence (Critchley, 1970, p. 11). There have been many overhauls of this definition throughout the years, but most recently, reading fluency was added to IDEA in 2004. Although students may receive intervention for
single word reading, fluency may still continue to lag. Meisinger et al. (2010) noted that “more research is needed to explore reading [disabilities] characterized primarily by a lack of fluency” (p. 2).

**Student Self-Concept after Diagnosis**


Researchers have contended that early intervention for dyslexia and other reading disorders is the key to decreasing the number of poor readers in later grades (Otaiba et al., 2009; van der Leij, 2013). In 1991, Raviv and Stone (1991) created a study to detect whether or not high school students with LDs diagnosed prior to second grade held a higher view of their own individual self-concept as compared to students with LDs diagnosed after second grade. Second grade became the cutoff to distinguish between two different subsets of students – those diagnosed based on preschool screenings and observations, and those who received some formal instruction prior to an LD evaluation (Raviv & Stone, 1991). Segmentation occurred based on the students’ level of LD severity by applying Myklebust’s evaluative approach (1968). Groups were then divided into mild, moderate, and severe. The authors also created a control group with adolescent students without LDs. Each group contained 49 students, and the median age for participants was 15.8 years.
Specifically, Raviv and Stone (1991) used the Offer Self Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) created by Offer, Ostrov, and Howard (1982) and then created two studies with these participants. According to Raviv and Stone (1991), the first study was created to “investigate possible differences in various aspects of self-image between adolescents with LD and a control group of adolescents without LD” and to “study the self-image of the subjects in relation to the severity of the disability and the time of its diagnosis” (p. 603). In the second study, parents received the Offer Parent Adolescent Questionnaire (OPAQ) (Offer, Ostrov, & Howard, 1982) to explore parental awareness of students’ self-esteem and LD diagnosis.

Studies were consistent in showing that students with a LD diagnosis did experience lower bouts of self-esteem and low self-image in a school setting, yet these students’ relationships with others scored as high as the control (Raviv & Stone, 1991). Harter (1985) agreed that these students put much more value on social relationships than school. Raviv and Stone (1991) added that the students with “LDs [tried] to compensate for academic failures by discounting the importance of school and over emphasizing the value of social activities” (p. 606).

According to Raviv and Stone (1991), the OSIQ is a self-report instrument containing 130 statements to be rated by the adolescent on a scale of one to six, from describing him or her very well (1), to not describing him or her at all (6) (p. 604). It is assumed that an adolescent’s self-image is many-sided and that one area will not necessarily correlate to another (Stoller, Offer, Howard & Koening, 1996). Perhaps this occurs because adolescent self-esteem may change due to new experiences (Hensley & Roberts, 1976). It is also presumed that adolescents can internalize their feelings enough to make the study reliable (Stoller et al., 1996).
Currently in the United States, 22 states have some variant of a dyslexia law (Youman & Mather, 2015). Many states have only recently incorporated the concept of dyslexia intervention and are just beginning to establish protocols and procedures for students. With less than 50% of the country utilizing current research regarding dyslexia and creating intervention programs, students throughout the United States are suffering, sometimes silently, because they do not understand why reading is so difficult. The research regarding self-efficacy and motivation is limited regarding dyslexia, given that not all U.S. students suffering with a deficit in phonological awareness are aware that they truly have a disorder due to the absence of laws in many states (Glazzard, 2010). In Glazzard’s study, the students mentioned were either; (a) not located in the United States or (b) had been tested later; therefore, their thoughts and stories were retrospective.

Gibson and Kendall (2010) used an emancipatory approach to identify if students with dyslexia felt feelings of negative self-worth. Students diagnosed and provided with support early on had much more positive attitudes about school and themselves than students diagnosed later in life. Gibson and Kendall (2010) documented student perspectives about their struggles with dyslexia. One student from that study, Lauren, stated: “I was in primary school when my teachers noticed...after that, I had someone come and help me every now and again. I just got on with it” (p. 191). In sharp contrast was Susan, a student who remained without diagnosis until college. She experienced verbal bullying, failure throughout school, and low motivation in school. According to Gibson and Kendall (2010), “low self-esteem and on-going confusion of learning barriers result in long-term problems with learner academic achievement” (p. 191). These same feelings were mentioned in numerous articles regarding self-esteem and lack of identification (Glazzard, 2010; Humphrey & Mullins, 2002).
Students not diagnosed with dyslexia during their primary school years often describe their school careers as “traumatic” (McNulty, 2003, p. 363). As expressed by Nalavany, Carawen, and Brown (2011), “many students with dyslexia recall their early school experiences as hurtful, embarrassing, and scary experiences” (p. 38). Low motivation in school can also be attributed to student’s low self-esteem. Anxiety and depression may also be linked to the feeling of failure throughout school (Nalavany et al., 2011). According to Burden (2008), “there is an urgent need for further research into the connection between developmental learning difficulties of a dyslexic nature and the ways in which these can and do affect a person’s sense of identity, possibly throughout their lives” (p. 194).

**Student concept of self in relation to learning disabilities.** Just as Charlie Brown tried repeatedly to kick a football without success, many dyslexic students constantly find themselves struggling with the basic reading tasks. According to Birsh (2011): “[I]ndividuals with dyslexia have difficulty gaining access to, and manipulating the sound structure (phonemes) of spoken language” (p. 11). Myths about dyslexia include backwards reading and “seeing” letters differently than non-disabled readers, yet these myths have been dispelled (Uhry & Clark, 2004). Dyslexia information and research is very sporadic and limited in comparison to other areas in education, due to the lack of consistent laws in the United States regarding testing, intervention programs, and accommodations (Youman & Mather, 2013). Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) public schools are now required to utilize “research-based” information (Birsh, 2011; NICHHD, 2000; Texas Education Agency, 2014) and instruction to create support for students such as RTI to aid in the identification of struggling students and support for students with reading disabilities (Otaiba et al., 2009, p. 15).
Due to limited information about dyslexia and the complexity of the diagnosis, (Uhry & Clark, 2004) many students suffering from dyslexia are bypassed completely or misidentified, and do not receive adequate support (S. E. Shaywitz, 2003). Durrant, Cunningham, and Voekler (1990) noted that this “contributes to lowered expectations for future success” for students (p. 657). More states in the United States are becoming aware of dyslexia and related disorders, and laws and procedures are beginning to be implemented to support students (Youman & Mather, 2015). However, accurate testing, early intervention programs, appropriate accommodations, and programs targeted to address the deep needs of dyslexic students remain deficient (Burden & Burdett, 2005; Lipson et al., 2011; Otaiba et al., 2009).

According to S. E. Shaywitz (2003), dyslexia intervention should encompass the whole child, academically and emotionally. Although school districts in Texas are required to provide reading intervention and to appoint an instructor trained in the multisensory techniques and characteristics of dyslexia (Texas Education Agency, 2014), general education teachers do not have adequate knowledge about the science required to support dyslexic students, particularly in reading (Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski, & Chard, 2001). In recent years, more research has been conducted regarding teacher knowledge and dyslexia, yet studies are infrequent (Washburn, Binks-Cantrell, & Joshi, 2014). According to a study conducted by Yurdakal and Kirmizi (2015), almost half of the teachers interviewed did not have adequate training and knowledge to support dyslexic students academically and/or emotionally. Additionally, the authors found that, due to the lack of support and knowledge about the deficit, the teachers interviewed noted that their dyslexic students were withdrawn in the classroom, teased by classmates, and developed low self-perception.
The United States Department of Education’s Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services issued a letter in 2015 guiding districts on appropriate measures they should take to clarify the dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia stigma in schools. However, a great deal of confusion exists regarding how to assess and remediate student progress. This is in large part due to the absence of a cohesive law for all states in terms of definition, testing procedures, and the identification timeline (Youman & Mather, 2015) as well to as a lack of training for teachers to help them recognize these difficulties (Lipson et al., 2011; Otaiba et al., 2009). Literature addressing dyslexia and motivation is inconsistent (Youman & Mather, 2015) in its assessment of recommendations for early intervention for dyslexic students (Birsh, 2011; Fletcher et al., 2002). According to Birsh (2011), research has shown that “intensive, phonologically based intervention” has made “significant and durable changes in brain organization, so that brain activation patterns resemble those of typical readers” (B. A. Shaywitz et. al., 2004, p. 931).

A review of the literature supports the definition of dyslexia given by the International Dyslexia Association Board of Directors in 2002 (Nicolson, 2015; Texas Education Agency, 2014). This aligns with the assertion that multisensory supports are needed for intervention (Birsh, 2006, 2011; Moats, 2014), yet the definition of “substantially limiting” given in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 lacks clarity. Currently, many states are defining the subset of “reading limitation” differently. Due to the lack of consistency in policy between states, students with dyslexia are receiving very different levels of support nationwide in terms of intervention and accommodations. This has led to inadequate data for dyslexic researchers to analyze how much dyslexia affects student self-perception. Compiling reliable data on student perception is extremely challenging because accommodations and interventions are provided in
many different capacities and by many different actors, and they vary extensively from state to
state.

In order to be effective, dyslexia identification needs to be conducted in the early grades,
and students need to begin to receive intervention as soon as possible (Birsh, 2011; Hall &
Moats, 1999). Remediation is vital, because fluency is critical for student success (Meisinger et
al., 2010, p. 1). Due to the lack of uniformity across state lines, (Youman & Mather, 2015) the
self-perception of dyslexic students has not been widely researched. According to McNulty
(2003), “the first generation of people diagnosed with dyslexia as children has now reached
adulthood. Research indicates that these adults often developed self-esteem issues in early
childhood when they began to fail or struggle with activities” (p. 363).

It is important to examine laws passed before 2004 because students tested using this
older model are still currently enrolled in the U.S. educational system. Although these students
are currently approaching the end of their high school careers or have moved on to post-
secondary education, many dyslexic students may have been improperly identified as special
education students under the label of SLD. They may otherwise have been denied services based
on the IQ/discrepancy model, when what they truly needed was intensive phonological
intervention. Due to the lack of information and consistency nationally regarding dyslexia laws
and interventions (Youman & Mather, 2015), school-age students sometimes experience low
self-efficacy and self-esteem (McNulty, 2003; Altieri, 2008).

Support for students with dyslexia or LD reading diagnosis. During the 1980s,
incorrect assumptions about dyslexia abounded in the U.S. educational system. Many falsehoods,
such as the use of colored-filtered testing for remediation and assessing students by having them
brush their teeth to look for modality issues were subsequently disproven (White, 1983; Woerz
& Maples, 1997). Although these false assumptions and practices are not widely practiced today, outdated accommodations are still used to inform individual students IEPs and Section 504 Plans. For the purposes of this literature review, accommodations are defined as, “changes in the way a test is administered or responded to by a student…accommodations are intended to offset distortions in test scores caused by a disability without invalidating or changing what the test measures” (Elliott, Kratochwill, & Schute, 1999, p. 2). This is not to be confused with modifications, which involve altering the information assessed based on student needs (Cohen, 1990, p. 392).

**Accommodation caution.** Section 504; 104.34 requires that a group of knowledgeable individuals (Section 504; 104.34) is needed to decide which accommodations are necessary for each student with dyslexia or an LD, on an individual basis; however, many times, these “teams” are not qualified to make these decisions. This problem and the lack of research regarding accommodations (Bolt & Thurlow, 2004), as well as the vast differences in regulations state procedures nationwide (Youman & Mather, 2013), combine to create a great deal of confusion regarding the diagnosis of and interventions for dyslexia. Additionally, accommodations are being mistaken for modifications, and the misdiagnosis of dyslexia is being applied to other specific reading disabilities in special education; therefore, many students are not receiving the help they truly need. As Shriner & Ganguly (2007) aptly stated, “accommodations should not be used for the purpose of providing a generic benefit in relation to the skill being measured (the target skill or construct), nor should they be based on a categorical level” (p. 234).

**Positivity and Dyslexia: Can We Shape our Students’ Outlook?**

According to Nicolson (2015), the definition of dyslexia focuses on deficits. The definition included in the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) (2017) includes eight
negatives in its explanation of dyslexia. Nicolson (2015) asserted that this overabundance of negativity could significantly hinder students’ ways of thinking about their diagnosis. He referred to Seligman’s (2002) “pillars on positive psychology” to support his own thoughts regarding positive dyslexia. Nicolson (2015) determined that, to promote positivity regarding dyslexia assessment and diagnosis, students should be able to identify and develop their own individual strengths and be given support and counseling to help them identify careers that would support their assets. Moreover, he stressed that parents and organizations involved in dyslexia advocacy needed to understand the advantages, and not just the limitations, of this disability.

According to Klassen (2010), “students with LD [learning disabilities] need enough guidance, strategy instruction, repetition, and practice to develop confidence [so] that they are able to manage their own learning” (p. 28). Students who experience learning disabilities not only fall behind students academically, but they also struggle with their self-confidence (Klassen, 2010). Although research is limited regarding programs aimed at supporting students with dyslexia after K-12 interventions, Kleitman & Gibson (2011) stressed the importance of creating an environment for students to support their self-confidence, such as communication and relationships with teachers as well as promoting a positive classroom environment. Ames and Archer (1988) agreed that positivity among students is significant when the classroom environment allows students to set goals and be integrally involved in the course of their process of understanding and learning.

**Summary**

Research has documented that, given the lack of consistency regarding laws, identification processes, and accommodation support for school-age dyslexic students, not all dyslexic/SLD students in the United States are receiving appropriate educational interventions to
guide their learning process and to help them address issues of self-perception, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. With such a diversity of guidelines – or scant to no procedures – employed to address the needs of SLD students from state to state, many learners who should have been diagnosed dyslexic are never identified due to the lack of trained therapists and non-existent or inefficient dyslexia intervention programs. Research has revealed that this lack of efficient support systems is affecting students’ self-perception.

Given that programs from state to state are not comparable, research regarding dyslexic students and self-efficacy has been conducted with small sample sizes; it is also commonly conducted only in states or countries with dyslexia laws. In other states where dyslexia is not recognized, students who show they are significantly struggling with reading may be improperly referred to Section 504 or special education. Although these two programs offer protection and support for students, this is often minimal for dyslexics. Section 504 and the SLD programs in reading for special education do not respond to the phonological needs of the dyslexic student.

Although Texas does have laws and regulations for dyslexia support, students often do not receive appropriate interventions due to RTI shortcomings and/or a lack of trained professionals capable of diagnosing the disability. Although the Texas law has been in place since 1986, the procedural implementation of these measures is still in beginning stages, thus support for students is haphazard and often minimal. Given what we know about the lack of support in many states throughout the country, we can conclude that students who do not receive support for dyslexia do manifest feelings of low self-perception. Without proper laws and guidelines throughout the entire United States, data will be gathered and analyzed only in states with procedures in place for the disability. Students who are not in these areas may continue to
struggle and display even deeper feelings of frustration, which could possibly lead to low self-perception throughout their lives and limit their potential for success.

Research has suggested that, by utilizing a positive dyslexia approach in classrooms, school districts, and at home, students may be able to confront their learning diagnosis into a positive rather than a negative way, accentuating strengths those challenges may bring (Nicolson, 2015). Understanding the struggles of these students is imperative for interventionists, dyslexia organizations, and school personnel to create guidelines and programs suited to their individual needs.
Chapter 3: Research Design

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the self-concept of students with dyslexia once they exit a language therapy program. The following questions guided this qualitative study:

- How do students who exit a language therapy program in middle school see themselves without daily support from an interventionist?
- How does that experience impact their self-reported since of self-concept?

Qualitative Research Approach

This study used a qualitative research approach. The researcher chose this approach as most appropriate to immerse in the data collection process, meeting with students for interviews, and collecting student thoughts on multiple occasions, as well as hand coding the data. Analytic memos were used throughout the data collection and analysis processes to create organization of and to structure the multiple sources of data.

Since the researcher interviewed only one subset of 9th grade students in a particular district, generalizations about the self-perception of all students in high school with dyslexia cannot be made. Although this research cannot be applied to all students, the study does allow for a deeper understanding of students who are no longer receiving intervention support; it also creates a pathway for further research to be conducted regarding dyslexic student self-perception.

Additionally, individual experiences are subjective in nature. Due to the use of the (re)interpretation field in the hermeneutic circle, understandings of situations may be interpreted differently and become muddled between truth and fiction, due to experiences and emotions of the participants. Despite the interprevitist paradigm having no “truth,” it is important that the researcher correctly portrays information derived from interactions with the participants. It is not
the job of a researcher to try to investigate the accuracy of the narrative, but to find the truth within the story given. Sandelowski (1991) noted that narrative “is not how to know truth, but rather how experience is endowed with meaning” (p. 165).

Researchers also need to be aware of their own bias and positionality throughout the study design, data collection, and data analysis process (Connolly, 2007). This process of inquiry is truly “messy” and requires the researcher to analyze their “own narrative” after conducting interviews and collecting data (Connolly, 2007). Many times, these narratives are very personal to the participant, and the researcher may have to act in many different roles (such as friend, counselor, listener, etc.), yet many practitioners worry that this display of human emotion hinders the ability to analyze data effectively and stay objective. Although this becomes a fine line in regards to narrative inquiry, Connolly (2007) noted that it is not possible to stifle one’s humanity for the sake of the inquiry. Scholar practitioners need to understand that all research is messy and muddled at times, due to the complexity of the role as researcher. While this study utilized a qualitative research approach, there were certain paradigms and methodologies employed that helped in reducing observation bias.

**Interpretivist-Constructivist Paradigm**

While the positivist paradigm focuses on a “static view of the world” (Merriam, 1991, p. 48), the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm recognizes that, just like knowledge, objects, events, and experiences, people are continuously changing. According to Merriam (1991), researchers need to focus on the process of the study, not just the results. With this paradigm, a researcher becomes part of the case study and their observations and experiences become part of the story. The researcher takes part in this paradigm by recording observations, collecting data, speaking with participants, and interpreting the results. Butin (2010) described interpretivism as
“[a] reality that is socially constructed, such that it can be described and represented through diverse perspectives” (p. 59).

In the interpretivist paradigm, there is no “truth.” Because there are so many variables to consider when conducting this type of study, a researcher’s job is to truthfully and accurately “document perspective being investigated” (Butin, 2010, p.60). The focus of a researcher is to note and document how people experience different situations through their own observations. The goal of a researcher in this paradigm is to understand that there are “multiple, apprehendable, and equally valid realities” (Ponterotto, 2005, p.129).

Merriam (1991) noted that the paradigm is about the process of the study, not just the results. Speaking with participants about their experiences in this paradigm was essential to this study. The author stated that “the researcher as the primary instrument for both data collection and data analysis, shares in the world of the researched and then interprets what he or she experienced there” (Merriam, 1991, p. 49).

Within the problem of practice, this researcher arranged the investigation into an interprevitist research study by interviewing 9th grade students in high school exited from a language therapy program. The researcher interviewed students in the middle of the first semester for approximately 30 minutes. The researcher then followed up for subsequent interviews with the students every other week for a total of three interviews per participant. The researcher took analytic memos recording their own experiences throughout the interviewing process, noting any non-verbal cues made by participants.

**Methodology**

This study utilized a narrative research perspective to answer the questions:
• How do students who exit a language therapy program in middle school see themselves without daily support from an interventionist?

• How does that experience impact their self-reported since of self-concept?

This study used a narrative approach to collect and analyze the data. According to McAlpine (2016), narrative research looks at the experience of the storyteller (the participant). Although the story is vital to the research, many other areas must be considered, such as non-verbal cues, linguistics, and how the narrator makes meaning of her or his experiences. McAlpine (2016) noted that narrative research can be conducted using three distinct methods: sociocultural (cultural experiences may shape our understanding of experiences), naturalist (how did those experiences affect the participant), and literary (examining language used). Making sense of experiences through stories is vital for narrative research (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboku, 2013; Trahar, 2009). Scholars studying narrative methodology note that by listening to and analyzing stories, researchers are able to construct “narratives—written, oral, visual—focusing on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences, seeking to provide ‘insight that (befits) the complexity of human lives’” (Josselson, 2006, p. 4).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) asserted that it is important to look at all of the data as a “whole” (p. 7). Crites’ (1986) theory of the illusion of causality is thus important for narrative research because researchers working in a narrative methodology many times have sequential data. Just because the presentation of the data is sequential does not mean that one event caused or affected another. Polkinghorne (1988) also mentioned that narrative research does express cause and effect, but rather examines changes that have occurred from the beginning of the experience to the end of the experience. This method invites other researchers to look at the data
and experience it as the practitioner observed it. It also allows subsequent studies to be conducted based on questions that arise.

By looking backwards and retelling experiences, researchers can retrospectively gain insight into participant experiences. Sometimes this meaning emerges while the interview is taking place. According to Polkinghorne (1995), it is also important to note what participants choose to talk about in regards to the topic. Analyzing not only what is said, but also what is not said can be critical for this study. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) noted that narrative can be seen as the way a person views his or her own life experience. Although narrative research can help a researcher dig deep into the experiences and observations of the participants, a researcher must also take the time to examine her own biases and positionality throughout the entire process, from interviewing the participant to analyzing data (Trahar, 2009).

Research Site

The study site chosen was the district high school located in a small suburban town in north Texas. The district serves five different municipalities in the county, spanning roughly 40 miles. The district enrolled approximately 5,700 students in Grades Pre-K-12 for the 2016-2017 school year. The total population for the municipality was 17,500 according to the 2015 U.S. Census, and the residents had a median income of $63,045. Each elementary school in the district qualified for Title I status, and 45.19% of its students participated in the district’s free and reduced lunch program at the time of this study. The demographics for the students in the district included: 40.44% White, 34.46% Hispanic, and 21.26% Black. Less than 3% of students identified as American Indian/Alaskan, Asian, or two or more races. English Language Learners (ELLs) comprised 6.49% of district students, and 10.5% of the district’s students were in special education. According to the data for the 2016-2017 academic year, 424 students were at the time
of the study receiving protections through Section 504, and 289 of those students had dyslexia as their identified disability.

To protect the privacy of the participants and the school district, the pseudonym Edwards ISD was used throughout the study. The researcher referred to the high school as Edwards High School; she chose this district due to the professional relationship the researcher had with the district as an academic language therapist. Choosing this site allowed the researcher and the participants to schedule meetings and interviews on campus at a convenient time for the student. The district’s institutional review board (IRB) approved the study in February 2017, and Edwards ISD was very helpful in providing information to the researcher about the demographics of the district.

Edwards ISD had five elementary schools for students in Grades Pre-K-5, a sixth grade campus, a middle school, and one high school at the time of the study and ranked in the top 10% of the state according to K-12 Niche rankings (2016). Edwards ISD advertised itself as a District of Innovation, encouraging students to bring their own electronic devices to school as part of a blending learning model. Wi-Fi connection speed had been updated on every campus, and three schools were outfitted with movable furniture, allowing students to collaborate and giving teachers widespread opportunities to create multiple learning spaces within the classrooms.

Participants

The researcher chose six 9th grade students to participate in the interview process. Five of the six interviews elicited sufficient data to be included in the study. The participants were selected based on the following criteria: (a) students had to have to be registered for Grade 9 at Edwards High School for the 2017-2018 school year, (b) students must not have been enrolled in the district language science program for the 2017-2018 school year, (c) students had to have
been enrolled in the language science program at Edwards ISD for a minimum of two years prior to exit, and (d) student exit from the language science program must have occurred between May 2015-December 2016. All students fitting these criteria were recruited for the study.

Recruitment occurred according to this outline:

1. A letter was sent to the parents or guardians of each student who matched all of the criteria for the study (Appendix B). The letter consisted of information about the study and the researcher’s email address and telephone number. This allowed a parent or guardian to contact the researcher to ask any questions related to the study.

2. Once participants had been selected, the researcher held office hours to discuss the study with those parents or guardians who desired further information. At that time, the researcher provided additional information about the study (Appendix D) and an informed consent document for the parents to sign permitting their children or charges to participate in the study (Appendix D). Any parents or guardians who did not respond after two weeks from the initial letter, were emailed a reminder.

**Procedures**

After Northeastern University’s IRB process approved the study proposal, data collection began. The researcher used face-to-face interviews for data collection, allowing her to participate directly. As a scholar-practitioner in narrative research, the researcher becomes “part of the process” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5). Trahar (2009) noted that this practice becomes muddled at times because the researcher and the participant are collaborating throughout (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and sometimes interpretations can be blurred. To address this, researchers have noted that, although structured and semi-structured interviews or joint construction (Trahar, 2009) are the prime sources of data for narrative research, other collection
methods should triangulate the data, such as journal entries, interviews with other individuals about the participant, field notes, letters, and other forms of documentation that pertain to the research. The researcher triangulated the data using journal entries and field notes.

**Data Collection**

For this study, the researcher focused on collecting data from three separate 20-minute interviews with each participant spanning a week apart. Students received a pseudonym to protect confidentiality. The conversations took place on the Edwards High School campus after the school day. Student interviews were recorded with parent permission and the researcher took detailed notes while the students were being interviewed, noting their body language and tone.

**Data Analysis**

Just as other methods of qualitative research rely on a process for analyzing data, so does narrative inquiry. According to Creswell (2013), organizing documents is the first step to being able to analyze data. Once preliminary data including recordings were organized in folders in a locked filing cabinet and password encrypted on a computer, the researcher hired the transcription service Rev.com to process meticulously accurate, line–by-line transcriptions of all interviews. The company touts a turnaround of 12 hours on transcriptions and a rate of 99% accuracy. The researcher chose to confide in this company because it has a highly positive reputation of being the most equipped for transcribing interviews. Even though the company’s professional confidential standards regarding client information or documentation, the researcher only gave transcribers access to pseudonyms and additionally asked the company to sign a non-disclosure agreement to protect student confidentiality. By utilizing a transcription service, the researcher was confident that the transcription was completed accurately and in an efficient
amount of time. After the transcription was returned to the researcher in a Word format, she then compared written notes from the interview.

According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), “the sense of the whole is built from a rich data source with a focus on the concrete particularities of life that create powerful narrative tellings” (p. 5). The multiple interviews allowed the researcher to develop a holistic picture of each participant and their story. After reviewing each transcript and analyzing each story individually, the researcher subsequently began to piece all of the information together to look for themes that emerged from all of the data.

**Background.** The researcher identified themes from the data for this narrative analysis using a two-cycle coding method (Saldana, 2006). For this method, participants’ experiences were transcribed and in-vivo coding was utilized for analysis along with analytic memos. Charmaz (2006) stated that in-vivo coding "help[s] us to preserve participants' meanings of the views and in the coding itself” (p. 55). For this analysis, the researcher began by cataloging

*Figure 2. Example of in vivo coding during analysis phase.*
transcripts in an Excel document for easy access and organization. She then added all analytic memos to the document to ensure easy access to all information. Utilizing in-vivo coding, the researcher extracted short key phrases from the participants’ stories for coding cycle one. For coding cycle two, the researcher used a color-coded method to group similar ideas into groups.

**First cycle coding.** With new resources available to researchers, scholar-practitioners now have the option to hand code or code themes found in their data by computer. This is personal preference, yet it is important for the researcher to choose a program that has all of the necessary components needed to effectively organize and analyze the information (Creswell & Maietta, 2002). For this research study, the researcher hand coded all of the data. Coding data is vital to developing themes, and through hand coding, the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of the data as well as to identify themes that are more subtle than those tracked by other coding methods, and which can often be missed in the software use. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) observed and noted codes that frequently are used in qualitative research such as setting, relationships, strategies, and perspectives of participants (Creswell, 2013 p. 244). Through the use of hand coding, the researcher was able to note these different forms of information to begin to piece the “story” together.

The researcher relied on in vivo coding as the first method of evaluation. At times, over-coding can become an issue, and Creswell (2013) cautioned researchers to use codes only as needed. After coding the interview transcript, this researcher proceeded to list all codes and to group them into smaller subsets. This helped develop themes for analysis. The researcher also used analytic memos before and after the interview process and during the coding phase of the research. Analytic memos allowed the researcher to compile her thoughts about the data and analyze what themes she was and was not seeing.
Second cycle coding. Once the researcher reduced the codes to five to seven subsets, she began to notice different themes emerging from all of the research collected. At this point, it was important to choose themes that helped answer the research question. Along with description, the interviews were fundamental in assisting the researcher in “build[ing] a portrait of individuals or events” (Creswell, 2013). Themes can also be laden with subthemes that give further insight into the phenomenon; they are commonly also layered as major and minor themes or as interrelated. In this study, these two ways to look at the data were dependent on the research question as well as the themes observed through data analysis.

Utilizing a Narrative Explanation

Since gathering data for narrative inquiry is not limited to one specific form, determining the importance of the evidence falls on the researcher. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) advocated for using the narrative as a story. Utilizing themes while setting the “story” involves taking an active look at the surroundings while collecting data, which may be difficult for new researchers since this information is usually “out of sight” (p. 8). Although this was ultimately how the researcher presented her findings, the data collection, importantly, required additional notes from the researcher to describe a vivid and complete picture. This information has been included in the analysis of codes and themes as well, although the researcher did not employ in vivo coding in that part of the process.

Narrative explanation usually results from narrative inquiry; however, the formats used may be different among researchers depending on what is studied. Additionally, Trahar (2009) observed that the type of analysis utilized results in different findings. For this study, the researcher utilized Polkinghorne’s (1995) method of narrative analysis, because it allowed for the use of not only interview transcripts as the sole source of data, but because it permitted the
inclusion of field observations (the researcher’s analytic memos). This created a triangulation of data for the analysis.

**Presentation of Findings**

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), once the researcher has developed themes for their research problem, scholar practitioners often utilize visuals to showcase results. This can be in the form of comparison/demographic tables, tree diagrams, and/or giving a layout of the setting described in the research (Creswell, 2013). Along with the visual representation, a narrative discussion of the findings is provided that may include descriptions of situations, themes that emerge, dialogue from participants, and tensions that may have arisen throughout the research process. For this study, the researcher chose to present findings using a narrative approach and to include visual representation of the themes and subthemes observed through the data. To stay true to the research, the researcher incorporated the participants’ own individual indicators such as dialogue, language, and dialect as well as meaningful and accurate quotes to help shape the story (Creswell, 2013).

Although the researcher spent a great deal of time looking for themes across all areas of data collection, Connolly (2007) pointed out that, due to the blurred descriptions of “researcher,” it is often helpful to add an autoethnographic section to the findings documenting the researchers own voice and experience throughout the study. This approach accompanies the findings for this study, and the researcher relied on analytic memos created throughout the data collection and analysis processes for the information. According to Trahan (2009), this process allows the author to not discount the participant’s story and/or voice, but be able to document assumptions and feelings related to the experience. It is the researcher, however, who ultimately decides what is important to the overall study. According to Connolly (2007):
[I]t is the researcher who inserts, edits out, or overlooks certain features of the narrative. It is being suggested, then, that reporting narratives should more commonly include a report of an autoethnographic nature where the researcher provides an account of his or her own voice, stance, assumptions, and analytic lens so that the reader is abundantly clear on whose story is whose” (p. 453).

Connolly (2007) also noted that “layering the narratives—that of narrator and that of listener or researcher” is one way the practitioner can add their autoethnographic “voice” to the study. This is a key section of this study’s presentation of findings, as well as notes from the interviews and researcher memos, all which combined to create this part of the narrative.

In addition to an autoethnographic report, the researcher, in Chapter 5, has tied findings back to the literature and has documented limitations noticed throughout the study. The researcher has additionally provided suggestions for further research and has validated the findings through triangulation and member checking.

**Potential Research Bias**

Because the researcher is an academic language therapist for dyslexic students in Texas, I believe that my bias could have gotten in the way of conducting a quality study if I had not known about the importance of being aware of positionality. Positionality can provide “sensitized backdrops,” (Jupp & Slattery, 2006, p. 201) which have the potential to interfere with accurate research and shift the study. As a scholar-practitioner, I am very sensitive to the issue of dyslexia education laws. Texas was the first state to adopt dyslexia laws and a state handbook, and I believe this protection for students is vital for their success.

I worked with my students each day when they were in the language science program in Edwards ISD and consider myself a knowledgeable teacher on the subject of dyslexia,
interventions, and 504 accommodations; however, I do not suffer from this disorder. This had the potential to be problematic during my study, because I do not know how it feels to be a student with dyslexia. According to Briscoe (2005), if the scholar-practitioner is not a member of the oppressed group, lack of personal connections to the research can misconstrue information and data (p. 24). I remained fully aware of this aspect of my “outsider” status, and was deliberately conscious to allow the authenticity of the voices of the participants’ narratives to take center stage always throughout the research data collection, analysis, and presentation process.

**Internal Validity and Reliability**

To ensure a successful and unbiased study, the researcher opted to work with dyslexic students not enrolled at the time of the study in the language science program at Edwards ISD to keep the relationships between teacher/scholar-practitioner and student separate to the degree possible. Briscoe (2005) warned that participants are sometimes unwilling to work with the researcher if trust is an issue. This researcher, however, discovered that former students were not only open to discussing experiences they had since their exit from the language therapy course, but were enthusiastic about telling their stories. Although the researcher had taught these students in the past, it was important to realize that the researcher had to reestablish and strengthen trust before beginning the interviews. It took time and prolonged engagement to reconnect with these students, and the researcher was always cognizant that it was vital to extract the experiences of the participants faithfully. As the former instructor, the researcher was deliberate in filtering out preconceived opinions and beliefs about the students perhaps acquired before interviewing. The researcher discussed these thoughts, concerns, or potential bias in the form of an analytic memo before meeting with each student, each time.
Member checking was used after the interview: the interviews were sent to each participant to ensure that their thoughts and answers were portrayed accurately. Students were also encouraged to write notes further explaining or clearing up any area of the script that was unclear or did not represent their thoughts accurately. Along with member checking, notes taken by the researcher were triangulated along with the member-checked transcripts and the initial audio of the student interview to ensure that all pieces of input emerged and are represented in a trustworthy manner. In addition to member checking, the researcher has provided rich, thick descriptions of each of the participants’ experiences in their own words to support the themes found during data collection.

External Validity and Limitations

Because all Texas public schools are required to provide structured literacy support with students with dyslexia, the research collected may apply to other students in high school who are no longer receiving services for dyslexia and after dismissal from the intervention. Although the research findings might provide an understanding of how students with dyslexia feel once exited from an intervention, these findings would be better suited in comparisons to districts utilizing the same dyslexia programs. Since there are multiple programs and interventions that have different methods of instruction, mastery criteria, and timelines for student completion, practitioners and scholars in the future may be wise to restrict comparisons to students receiving the same intervention strategies. Additionally, it is important to note that although this study has narrated the experiences of students with dyslexia that are no longer in a structured language therapy program, their experiences may not accurately represent other students around the United States who have been diagnosed with dyslexia. Since not all states have structured language therapy programs for students, the successes/struggles that the students detailed in this
study may have been influenced by the opportunity to receive intervention services through Texas law. To depict others experiences across the United States accurately, students studied would need to receive services similar to the Texas students. Although these findings may not accurately depict self-perception for students all across the United States, it is vital for the school district studied to understand how its students have been navigating high school without daily intervention support.
Chapter 4: Report of Research Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings related to the research question: How do students with a dyslexia diagnosis who exit a middle school language therapy program view their ability to navigate the social and academic demands of ninth grade without daily support? By utilizing narrative inquiry for this study, the researcher attempted to gain insight into the students’ daily lives throughout their first semester as high school students as they transitioned from involvement in the support program in middle school to greater autonomy.

![Diagram with text]

Students exhibit and utilize individual coping strategies to feel successful in their courses.

Students develop the capacity to access autonomous resources combining internal and external factors, sometimes ambiguously, to manage disability.

Students access and/or maintain structural problem-solving strategies (tangibly use something outside of them) to meet their needs in learning.

Figure 3. Emergent themes discovered through participant interviews.

Participant Profiles

This section presents profiles of each participant, providing important information about their experiences in and out of the dyslexia therapy program in Edwards ISD. This information
also includes a table delineating the age of each student, entry date into the dyslexia program in Edwards ISD, the program(s) used to remediate their dyslexia, as well as the date of exit from the dyslexia program. It is important to note that the student exit date refers only to the student’s exit from the dyslexia program. Students still received accommodations through Section 504 or special education based on their individual needs.

Table 1

*Student Participant Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Entry date</th>
<th>Programs used</th>
<th>Exit date</th>
</tr>
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<td>5/5/2014</td>
<td>Take flight</td>
<td>5/2015</td>
</tr>
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<td>8/1/2011</td>
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<td>5/2015</td>
</tr>
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<td>1/25/2011</td>
<td>MTA; Take flight</td>
<td>12/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3/21/2012</td>
<td>MTA; Take flight</td>
<td>5/2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brinley</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Take flight</td>
<td>5/2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Genaa.** A ninth-grade student at Edwards High School, Genaa, 14, was enjoying school when interviewed, especially science and Spanish. At the time of the study, she was passing all of her classes and was attending tutoring regularly to improve her grades and to relearn confusing material. Genaa’s parents were a constant support in her life, and she expressed that she was very close to them. Genaa described being goal-oriented and said she was planning to become a cosmetologist and own a salon after high school. She was very aware that doing well in her education would allow her to succeed as an adult. Genaa had a positive attitude about school, as well as about her dyslexia diagnosis. She was also very aware that practicing her reading and spelling were key to her success in the classroom. Additionally, Genaa confidently stated that she believed that asking for help was also vital to her success in the classroom.
Makayla. Makayla, 15, was in 9th grade in Edwards ISD when she participated in this study. She had spent four years in the language science course, but she said she began in a different remediation curriculum (Multisensory Teaching Approach, MTA). When the district transitioned to the new curriculum, Take Flight, Makayla became one of the first students to receive the instruction. Makayla had bilateral hearing loss in both ears and used hearing aids, as well as a FM transmitter to amplify sound. In total, Makayla had undergone seven surgeries related to her hearing difficulties.

Makayla identified herself as a very lively and spirited student. She was confident in herself, but she did express throughout the interview that she thought sometimes people judged her due to her difficulties, and at times, this caused her to become ashamed or embarrassed. Although this potentially upset Makayla, she was also aware that, “everyone is different; [and all students] learn in a different way.” She said she wished that she were better at spelling. During the interview, she stated that she “should know how to spell.” Throughout the interview, she noted that she needed to be in the dyslexia therapy program due to her difficulty reading and spelling.

Makayla described herself as smart and said she understood that her brain processed knowledge different than students without dyslexia. She noted that she learned by completing tasks in a hands-on format and that she understood that her learning style was more conducive to this approach for processing information. Although Makayla thought she was a very positive student, she admitted struggling with stress and confusion about assignments. She affirmed that she was utilizing her accommodations regularly, including receiving a complete copy of notes from her instructors in class to help fill in gaps and attending content mastery to receive additional, targeted support. She expressed that she was used to setting high expectations for
herself and was an active student on campus. At the time of the interview, Makayla was very involved in the marching band, and she spent many afternoons at mandatory practices. She was also very straightforward when discussing her dyslexia and expressed contentment in school.

**Alayna.** A freshman at Edwards High School during the time of this study, Alayna, 14, received a diagnosis of dyslexia in 2010 and was in the language therapy program through Edwards ISD for five years. When the district transitioned to the new program in 2012, Alayna was in one of the initial students chosen to participate. When she completed the Take Flight program in May 2015, her parents, campus administration, and the dyslexia therapist chose to extend her time in the language therapy course for another semester beginning in fall 2015, due to her struggles with accuracy and rate while reading instructional level text. During this additional semester, Alayna worked on understanding the meanings of Greek and Latin root words, as well as mastering syllable division to improve her decoding skills. Alayna’s mother was enrolled as a doctoral candidate working on her thesis in Higher Education Leadership, and her father was employed as a firefighter with the local fire department. Alayna said she was receiving frequent support at home where she felt she could rely on her mother and father when she needed clarification or re-teaching.

Although Alayna mentioned that classes had been easy for her since she had begun high school, the more she opened up, the more the researcher was able to see that she was struggling in some areas of reading. Alayna explained that she put a lot of pressure on herself to mask that she still struggled with reading. Because Alayna did not want anyone to notice her reading difficulties, she outlined strategies she had created to specifically meet her needs. Alayna claimed she was a very competitive student and admitted she did not like to highlight any weaknesses — to the point where she would reread a sentence repeatedly to memorize it to read
aloud. She said she thought this over analyzing was causing her a great deal of stress. When she had no other option than to guess at an unfamiliar word, she said she would tend to give up and would not utilize strategies learned in the language therapy program. However, Alayna willingly helped others struggling, but only in areas where she had succeeded, such as math. Alayna tended to utilize her accommodations as a last resort (content mastery, extra time for assignments, copy of teacher’s notes), and she said she did not usually express her need for support. She said she thought this was largely due to her belief that she would not be able to utilize accommodations in the future. Additionally, Alayna did not want to share her dyslexia challenges with teachers; she said the teachers did not believe her when she asked for her accommodations or mentioned her dyslexia. She said she believed this was due to her ability to understand the material and to her strong grades in her courses. She stated that she often had to pull out her accommodation sheet to prove that she deserved to receive the support.

**Stephanie.** Stephanie, age 14, was a ninth-grader at Edwards High School in Edwards ISD when the interview occurred. She was identified as having dyslexia in 2012, and she received intervention for one year in elementary school with a previous therapist. In 6th grade, Stephanie began the new curriculum, Take Flight, adopted by the district in 2012. Stephanie began the program in the fall of 2013 and received instruction for two years. Due to completion of the curriculum and progress made, she exited from the program in May of 2015. Stephanie began taking Pre-Advanced Placement (AP) courses after her exit from the program and was thriving in an advanced classroom setting. When interviewed during fall semester of 2017, her averages in all classes were 90% and above.

Stephanie, a very active member of the journalism department at Edwards High School, studied journalism during her time in middle school. She said she loved to write, yet she was also
aware that she sometimes faced difficulty due to her disability. Stephanie revealed that she was very aware of her struggles, but she pushed herself to learn and grow each day. She said she tried hard in all classes and was utilizing resources – such as teacher support, previous learning from her dyslexia program, and peer support – when unclear about an assignment. She also said she liked to share her successes and struggles with close friends and staff members. Stephanie was a goal-oriented student; she expressed that she indeed would become discouraged if she did not reach a goal. Although she said she did become upset when she struggled, she also explained how she engaged in positive self-talk. She understood that learning was not automatic and spent each day working harder to reach closer to her aspiration of one day becoming a dyslexia therapist.

**Brinley.** Ninth grader Brinley, 14 years old, received her diagnosis of dyslexia at the end of her 4th grade year, and she began the Take Flight curriculum in the fall of 2013. After completing the program, Brinley exited in May 2015, yet she continued to receive accommodations through Section 504. Throughout the interviews, Brinley expressed that she was doing well in her classes because she had the support of the content mastery classroom through her Section 504 accommodations. Brinley noted that she sometimes had trouble grasping the difficult information in class, but “CM read[s] it and then they'll sum it up into their own words to make it a bit easier [for me to understand].”

Brinley sought one-on-one support; yet, in a traditional HS setting, this was not always possible, and she said she was not the type of student to seek out help in front of a large class. Instead, she explained, she would wait until she was able to go to the Content Mastery (CM) classroom, and then she requested and received the support she needed. Although Brinley stated that she did not regularly seek out support from teachers in front of a class or from other students
in class, she supported others in her class who had struggles similar to hers. She described strategies she would use to support her learning in the classroom when CM was not an option, such as utilizing different colored pens to help her organize her thoughts, making flashcards for difficult concepts, and using her Section 504 accommodations (utilizing the teacher’s copy of notes). She stated that she was regularly using her accommodations. Brinley spent a lot of time participating in self-talk. However, when she lacked understanding or was struggling, she said her self-talk sometimes became negative.

Findings in Relation to Research Question

The next section outlines the findings using thick, descriptive excerpts from the participant interviews. This description supports the data analysis and the themes derived from the coding process, to explore the research question: How do students with a dyslexia diagnosis who exit a middle school language therapy program view their ability to navigate the social and academic demands of ninth grade without daily support?

Theme 1: Students exhibit and utilize individual coping strategies to feel successful in their courses. Following their exit from the language therapy program in Edwards ISD, the students interviewed explained how they began to develop their own specific strategies to cope while no longer receiving daily support in the form of dyslexia intervention therapy. The students utilized many forms of emic strategies, and, under this theme, three subcategories recurred throughout the interviews: (a) Using knowledge of prior learning, (b) Taking ownership
of internal strengths, and (c) Awareness of struggle throughout transition.

**Figure 4.** Student themes related to utilizing individual coping strategies

**Using knowledge of prior learning.** Using knowledge of prior learning required students to access their past knowledge of decoding strategies to assist them in reading unknown words. Students chose which areas of the curriculum best suited their needs for that specific word, yet all students mentioned using different methods instruction. In addition, each student utilized aspects of the language therapy program in an autonomous format.

**Figure 5.** Use of knowledge in prior learning subthemes discovered
Decoding. Decoding is a strategy that was taught in the language therapy classroom to help students figure out unfamiliar words. According to Birsh (2011), decoding assists students in determining the pronunciation of a word by noting the positions of vowels and consonants (p. 703). Although Genaa exited from the language therapy program in December of 2015, she noticed that she was continuing to struggle with some of the more difficult and multisyllabic words in her classes. Genaa mentioned that she felt that some of the readings in her classes were challenging, but she utilized the coding methods she learned through the language therapy course to help her sound out the words. When asked if understanding new words came easy to her, Genaa replied that it was not as difficult, because “my teacher taught me how to break down words and syllables and be able to pronounce out words without even thinking that hard.” Additionally, Brinley also mentioned that other students from the dyslexia therapy program utilized the decoding strategies as well. She stated:

[When] we would meet after your class that next year, we would be in the same class and we'd be like, “hey remember that coding thing?” and then they would be like, "no, you forgot this thing" and we would just like, code.

Stephanie echoed the other students by stating:

I might not do it all the time, but some of the coding I will try to go back and do because I sometimes don't know how to say the word or I don't know how to read the word in the way. In that way that most people would, so I go back and code ... I go back and code to see what I could do.
Makayla and Alayna also mentioned using coding when trying to read difficult text. Alayna said she was surprised when her English teacher began coding in the classroom to help students understand unknown words, stating,

In one of the classes, we did coding and so I had the upper hand on it… They were coding words and the brackets that we do and the little things over the vowels… and I already knew [how to decode]. When asked about how she felt because she already knew how to do coding and the other students did not, she replied that she “would be able keep up” in the English class.

*Greek and Latin root study.* In addition to decoding strategies used, many of the students described using Greek and Latin root words to help identify the meanings of multisyllabic words that they were unable to decode. Stephanie mentioned that she also utilized root words and spoke of an example, remembering the meanings for in- and bio-.

It makes me a little happier that I was in the program and not struggling as much in reading. Now that I know exactly what I need to do to improve or if I need to spell a word, I'll revert back to, "Okay, I know this is like in the beginning and this is going to be the ending, because [of the root word meanings]. I can reference back to them if I ever need help. In biology, some things I just don't know. Some of the words will have, and then I'll remember, "Hey wasn't this in my Greek and Latin cards?" I'll go back and look at those and it would be there, then I would be able to research the word there.

Genaa stated that when she struggled with a word in class, she began by looking for the Greek and Latin roots. She also described a story from her science class when she was able to identify the root cycle before anyone in her class. While explaining a lesson, the teacher asked the whole class what the root word cycle meant. Genaa remembered:
I was like just talking to myself out loud and she actually heard me and said, who said that? Because I was actually correct and nobody knew exactly what it was. And she said, correct! I don't know who said that”. And I said "I did". She [then] said "Correct," because she just screamed out of nowhere. Not actually screaming, but she was happy at the same time. [She said that no one in her classes] got that [correct] for seven periods today. It actually made me feel proud of myself and very happy at the same time. And very shocked because she scared me a little bit- because she just jumped. She wasn't expecting anyone to get that so far.

*Additional dyslexia program strategies.* The participants also mentioned additional strategies learned in the language therapy program that they continued to use to help support their decoding when they encountered unknown words. One strategy students with dyslexia learn is how to identify letters and words written in cursive. Makayla stated, “This is going to sound really weird, but you know the cursive that [we were taught]? With the B’s and D’s and stuff? I still use that to this day when I cannot figure out if it is a B or D.” Although Alayna said she did not like to read aloud in her class, she had developed a strategy to help her when her teacher required everyone to take turns reading in the text. She had taken the concept of rereading for accuracy and adapted it to her own specific needs in the classroom.

I kept reading that sentence I was reading, ‘cause I knew which one I was going to have to read. I made sure I knew what I was going to say. [I was] memorizing it. So if I got ahead of myself, I could already read it without having to [start over]… Whenever I read out loud, I get ahead of myself and [so I] try to read words before ... like I think of them before I'm supposed to read them. I read ahead, so I would not get ahead of myself, ‘cause I already knew what [sentences were] coming next.
On struggling with the passage, Alayna noted that sometimes she had to

…backtrack and go all the way back to the beginning of the sentence. [This is because] usually whenever people read aloud, I don't follow along with them, I just listen to what they're saying. If I just read it and then everybody is confused, then I have to backtrack anyways… I would backtrack, because I do not want to keep going and then everybody be like, "Um…" (confusion). Whenever somebody else reads something in the class, I just listen to them, I don't follow along on the paper. If I were to do that, and I know that they are not following along on their paper, then I get ahead of myself, then they do not know what's going on, then they're confused the rest of the time. Then, they think that I am the one that read bad. If I backtrack, and then read the sentence correctly the second time, then I don’t have to worry about being confused. Then, [the students] saying I am the one who messed up.

On whether or not Alayna thought this should make her upset, she stated:

Well, I don't think that would bother me, 'cause I don't think I would ever just keep going. I would stop and go back. Plus, then, if I don't stop, then I don't know what's going on in the [passage]. I do not know whether to just keep going from that word or start over, so I just start it over.

_Taking ownership of individual strengths._ An essential component to student success is the idea of positive talk and self-affirmation. Allowing students to take ownership of their internal strengths builds core confidence for students who may continue to struggle with some aspects of their learning. Positive talk was a recurring subcategory throughout the interviews, and all students spoke of reminding themselves that they were able to succeed without the dyslexia therapy course on multiple occasions, especially when they were struggling with their
reading. This was in part due to their inherent traits and preparation prior to the intervention; however, in this particular case, the instructor had modified the approach with enhancements directly related to the concept and practice of the youth taking ownership for the strengths they brought to the learning process.

For instance, Genaa used the phrase, “eligible to do this” many times throughout her interview. She explained that she used this specific wording, because this meant that the people that made the decision for her to exit the class (parents, teachers, dyslexia therapist, and school administration) believed that she could be successful without the daily support. She stated that, when she was stuck on a particular word, she would remind herself that, “[they decided that you were] eligible to be able to do this [without daily support]” as well as, “you’ve been in dyslexia for four years and I’m pretty sure you can be able to break down this simple word.” She also provided herself with little snippets of positive motivation when struggling. “Basically [it is] the same pep talk over and over again. Telling myself... you can push yourself to the limit.”

Echoing Genaa was Brinley who also felt that her progress made in the class before exit would support her without the need of daily intervention. She also mentioned a time when she was able to read a difficult sentence with ease. Alayna, meanwhile, added that she felt that reading had become “easy” for her and that was why she no longer needed the support of daily intervention. According to Alayna, “we were going over the same things over and over again. It was just spelling and then pronunciation, then how do you say it, and then we would just read a book. Doing the same thing every day.” Makayla compared herself to others when she struggled by stating, "Oh, it's normal. A lot of people don't know how to spell certain words."
**Awareness of struggle in transition.** Throughout the interviews, the participants expressed an understanding that dyslexia is not curable, but with intervention, they could continue to advance in their reading ability.

Makayla, for example, stated that although she still has trouble reading fluently at times, “she can laugh” at herself when she made a mistake. “Yeah. I do not care, honestly, it’s fine.” Makayla tells herself, "okay, I made a mistake, oh well. Move on." Makayla was also aware that after she exited from language therapy, classes would be more difficult. Makayla stated, “I was used to having that support.” Brinley was concerned about not being able to read multisyllabic words, and Alayna remembered feeling confused on the first day of class after her language therapy exit: “[They thought] I knew what I was doing, but I really didn’t.” Stephanie remembered questioning if she could succeed in advanced placement classes.

It was a lot of mixed feelings, because I was a little nervous because I didn't know [what it was like to not have the language therapy class]. The dyslexia classes really helped me. But when I got exited out, I realize[d] I could actually can have my [elective] classes back. Because it took away gym my sixth grade year and I really like sports. So it took away that class that I really liked. But now that I'm out of it, yes I get to have that [gym] class, but am I going to need extra help? Am I going to still need that? I later found out, now that I've reached up into my AP classes that I can do this without them. But when I got out of them I felt as if, if I can overcome dyslexia, well I don't overcome it, but it's still there, but I came where I don't need those classes anymore, but I can go into pre-AP.

One area that Stephanie continued to struggle with was Spanish, yet she was aware that she was having trouble and tried not to get discouraged. Stephanie said, “I already know that I
am going to… [struggle] with it, but I didn't think I would have this much because it's not a Pre-AP class.”

**Summary.** This theme and subsequent subcategories focused on individual coping strategies that the students utilized after transition from the dyslexia intervention program. In addition to applying strategies taught in the classroom, the students also developed *emic* strategies such as positive talk; they also acquired an understanding that struggles were going to occur after exit from the program, but that they would find ways to address them. This theme shows greater autonomy in their learning.

**Theme 2: Students access and/or maintain structural problem solving strategies (tangibly use something outside of them) to meet their needs in learning.**

The researcher noted throughout the interviews that the students continued to rely on additional problem-solving methods once exited from the language therapy program. While Stephanie and Genaa went to their parents for reading support, Brinley and Makayla expressed utilizing the CM for support due to the instructors’ vast knowledge of disability support and classroom material. In contrast, Alayna noted that she did not utilize outside support. While some of the students used their accommodations regularly (Makayla and Brinley), others relied less frequently on support (Alayna, Genaa, Stephanie); however, it was discovered that they all developed individual strategies for support in the classroom. From this theme of structural problem solving strategies, four subcategories emerged: (a) students utilized outside resources, (b) student accessed accommodations, (c) skills transference, and (d) giving and receiving peer support.
Figure 6. Outside problem-solving subthemes discovered.

**Accessing outside resources.** Although it was mentioned throughout the conversations that the students continued to struggle on their reading after exiting the language therapy program, each student was able to recall what resources they used when they found themselves having troubles with decoding. Decoding was a specific learning strategy used during the program to help students sound out unfamiliar words. Stephanie and Genaa expressed that, when they found decoding difficult, they would ask their parents for reading support. Yet, Makayla found it helpful to seek the support of the CM classroom. Brinley agreed with Makayla and added that the CM teachers have a vast knowledge of student learning disabilities and therefore are more equipped to help students struggling. Makayla revealed,

I'm really close to the CM teachers, like [last year] in middle school, I was really close to… one of the CM teachers. He was just amazing and a lot of times he would help me, because he would understand things, like he knew where I was at in my ability or, and he knew if I didn't understand something, I would of course say something, but then since I didn't have to say anything, he would just explain it more because I guess he knew by my face.

Stephanie, meanwhile, acknowledged that she utilized tutoring from teachers when she needed additional support, she did not make this known to the teacher during the class period in
which she was struggling, only at the beginning of the course. She noted that sometimes she thought her teachers did not remember she was dyslexic, stating:

I'm not really an easy person to point out [that I am] dyslexic, as I've been told multiple times by my teachers. They don't really think of looking at the 504 [plan] sometimes [to check for dyslexia identification and accommodations]. They sometimes can forget that I am a dyslexic, but I tell them at the beginning of the year, because I feel like if they know a little bit about me, they can know a little bit more about my struggles in the classroom. Also, I'm not a person to speak out in the classroom. If I struggle with something, I'll reach out to them in tutoring or something. I don't do it during class time because I get really embarrassed about it.

The researcher found that students utilized multiple outside resources after exiting the language therapy program. General education support included tutoring, teacher and peer coach support, questioning in class, as well as content mastery. Students also expressed utilizing their parents when they needed support, as well as outside sources, such as technology (Google), dictionary, and friends for assistance.
Figure 7. Supports utilized by students with dyslexia.

Utilizing Section 504/SPED accommodations. In addition to seeking outside support when struggling, many of the participants described using their accommodations through SPED or Section 504. In Texas, a dyslexic student’s accommodation plan, if SPED is not attending to their needs, is created through the federal program known as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The Department of Education (2015) prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities by state and local government entities, including in public schools; thus, even those schools that are not recipients of federal funding must comply with these provisions.

Although every student’s accommodations are tailored to their individual needs, many similarities were found in their plans. Makayla and Brinley both expressed that they regularly relied on the CM room for reading support. Brinley added that CM allowed her to check her work for errors and, when she did not understand a concept, the CM teachers were willing to help her understand the material. Brinley affirmed, “Yeah. There's like - it was like a worksheet and they sent me down to CM and that's when they can explain it to you and pull out the books
and show you where you either went wrong.” Makayla mentioned that even though she had to leave the general education classroom to receive support from CM, she did not mind going, because “I need to do what I need to do to help me.” Brinley also expressed that she was not embarrassed when she had to get up and go into the CM classroom “’cause there's like, a bunch of kids [who go to CM]. Whenever you sign in and you are looking for your name, it is like, a lot of kids. You are not the only [one in the] class who goes.” She added, “[CM] can explain [the assignment] to you, pull out the books, and show you where you went wrong.”

Although Alayna, Stephanie, and Genaa had CM as an accommodation on their individual 504 plans, they rarely visited. Alayna stated that she did not want to receive extra help, because she believed that CM gave her too much support. Alayna was confident that she did not “need any help anymore.” She expressed her anxiety about State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and stated that she was aware that she would not get any teacher support on the exam. Because of this, she explained that she was trying to become self-dependent and not utilize any support, including the CM classroom.

Alayna elaborated regarding her experiences with STAAR, describing how she thought about the future when she would not have assistance, which made her work independently without requesting help:

They're just gonna give me hints and the STAAR test isn't gonna be able to give me hints. Like whenever they're like, well that's just this and this and this ... Or like the slope intercepted this, this and this and this, but the STAAR test isn't gonna do that. I don't wanna get that extra help because then I'm not gonna have it on the STAAR Test and then I won't be able to do it [on my own].”
Alayna had also been questioned in the past about her need for accommodations from teachers, due to her pre-AP classification and good grades. She noted that she sometimes had to prove that she was dyslexic. “I don't tell them [the teachers] anything [about the dyslexia diagnosis]. Most of my teachers don’t even really know until I ask for a copy of the notes. Then, they're like, ‘You don't get one.’” She then had to explain that she had to verify her 504 status by showing the teachers “the printed paper of my accommodations.” When asked why she thought the teachers did not believe her 504 status, she stated, “Cause I get such good grades, and then I don't really ever ask for help, 'cause I already know what I'm doing.”

Receiving a copy of notes from the teacher in exchange for effort is another accommodation frequently used by students with dyslexia. Makayla regularly utilized a copy of the teacher’s notes to “fill in gaps” and Brinley received notes in math. When asked if she felt if she needed the teacher’s notes in order to be successful, Brinley quipped that she sometimes did not write down all of the notes because the teacher did not explicitly state that it was important information; if she got a copy of the teacher’s notes, then she had all of the information she needed. Genaa mentioned that she sometimes asked for notes, but had trouble in the past with teachers understanding what she actually needed. She explained:

I told her ... Could you make it shorter for me? She said, "I basically did”… Then I said, "Where?" And she said, "On the side, did you write your notes?" I said "I did, but I don't understand." We [were] basically going back and forth over it. After a while, I actually taught myself how to use notes, and I went to my dad a little bit.

Stephanie, similarly, expressed confidence in her abilities as a student, yet she claimed that she sometimes struggled in the class while writing down information. Because of her struggles, she occasionally relied on her accommodations to support her learning.
Sometimes I do use my dyslexia as a little crutch, like when we're taking notes. If I can't get the notes and stuff, I do use my accommodations to get notes back to me. Or, let's say the extra time on STAAR tests and stuff, it gives me a sense of relief.

Although Stephanie was not regularly going to CM, she expressed that she still kept the accommodation as a viable resource because she did not want to lose that support long term. She explained:

I think I still need it because... Sometimes, I just don't understand things and I just need that little extra help to get me to where I can understand it. Maybe because I want to have that extra feeling that I could use it [accommodations]. Maybe I just want to have something to fall back on just to make sure that I am understanding… the material and if I don't, I can go back and retrace my steps and use CM as a little crutch. Even though I don't really like using it, my dyslexia as a crutch.

She then added,

If I didn't have [the ability to go to CM]…, I think I would feel a little less confident because I wouldn't have someone to help me with my needs if I needed that help and if I really, really needed that help at the one point in time. I think I would feel a little less confident, a little less not as sure of myself. Because there's other ... I remember one time in my other tough class the teacher, after the class was over, people would be like, "Why are you able to get these things read to you? Why is this and why is that?" I didn't really like to ask to read those questions. I'd only use that every now and then so I don't have to deal with the pressure of those questions.
Although accommodations are added to student’s individual Section 504 plans to “level the playing field,” according to student interviews, not all of the students utilized their accommodations or needed support in the same areas of the general education classroom.

**Skills transference.** Although the participants all utilized support from outside sources as well as their individual 504 accommodations to support their learning, they also created methods to help them organize and understand difficult information in the classroom. Many of the students interviewed utilized systems of color; coding important information, such as Brinley, Stephanie, and Genaa. Alayna, meanwhile, used her phone to take pictures of her notes, and Makayla skipped lines when taking notes in the classroom. Makayla described how she incorporated the teacher’s lecture into her own note taking system, which reflected her capacity to take full ownership of both her abilities and the skills practiced during the intervention, a combination that provided a highly effective strategy of negotiating autonomous learning. “I would skip a line, I don’t put like commas or dashes… it confuses me sometimes…I don’t think it's neat to have everything in a straight line.” Other examples included Stephanie who connected her information in quotes together and then summarized the teacher’s lecture in her own words. Stephanie added that she noticed that she needed to write “in color[ed] pens because I won't understand what I'm trying to say. I tried writing from just what they said. On the side and stuff. It didn't work for me. I had to put it in my own words.”

**Giving and receiving peer support.** It was revealed throughout the data collection and analysis that feeling useful to others and meeting their needs not only was important to these students, but it helped them progress. For example, Alayna mentioned the satisfaction she received when she supported other students in her math classroom when they were struggling. “I [sometimes] help Oliver. He doesn’t get math, but I get it, ‘cause I like math. He doesn’t get it,
so I help him.” Alayna also expressed that when she assisted Oliver, she felt more confident about herself. Similar to Alayna, Brinley also experienced success when she helped other students. “Sometimes I'll just give [the other student] my notes.” She stated that her friend asked to borrow her notes because her notes were “full of words” as well as color coded neatly to help differentiate different concepts learned.

Stephanie noted that she had also been supportive to students in her class by showing those who struggled how she utilized Greek and Latin roots she learned throughout her language therapy course to aid in vocabulary and comprehension.

I had them and I was showing him that these are ... The Latin and Greek and how they can represent the English language. Once I started doing that, they asked me, "where did you get these and how did you know this?" I told them was dyslexic and I took this class to help me and I think these would help you [because] it helps me a lot.

In addition to giving peer support, Stephanie had also been the recipient of peer support. She stated that a friend helped her when she struggled. “I go to her and she helps me … understand little things, and she has dyslexia as well, and it helps me understand.”

Makayla mentioned that she had been told that she would provide good support for students at the high school who were struggling in the classroom. “Somebody told me that I should be a peer coach, which, a peer coach is somebody that like helps them, because I have a way with helping people understand the knowledge.”

**Summary.** These five participants revealed that even though they were no longer in a daily dyslexia therapy program, they continued to have some difficulties in the classroom. This theme revealed that students often sought external resources when struggling. They were able to
learn these external strategies from the course, or out of necessity, but regardless, overall, these strategies allowed the students greater autonomy in their learning.

**Theme 3: Students develop the capacity to access autonomous resources combining internal and external factors, sometimes ambiguously, to manage disability.** Throughout the interviews, the researcher noticed that not every student tackled their struggles with dyslexia in the same way. Some of the students (Brinley and Makayla) utilized CM regularly while Stephanie and Genaa went less frequently. Alayna, meanwhile, refused to go to CM, due to her belief that she needed to learn to be successful without others helping her. While all of the participants utilized various strategies to cope with the exit from the language therapy program, and they incorporate different problem solving strategies when faced with a difficult assignment, all students began to shift their thinking from relying heavily on the support systems to taking ownership for their own autonomous and transformational learning style. This concept began to take shape in three sub categories: (a) *Independent learning is possible despite having a reading difficulty;* (b) *Autonomous confidence can be developed through a series of successes,* and (c) *Positive ownership over the dynamics of difference emerges.*
Figure 8: Autonomy crated by external and internal factors

**Independent learning.** Throughout their time since exiting the language therapy program, many of the participants found that independent learning was possible. This was evidenced by the participants’ views on why they no longer needed the language therapy program as daily support. Makayla noted during the interview that she believed that she was no longer in the class, because “I did so well... I still had it [dyslexia], but I didn’t really need the class anymore.” Additionally, she noted that she “already knew some of that stuff and I guess it was just feeling like it was time to maybe go on.” Although she no longer had a daily class for dyslexia intervention, she understood that she might still need some support in the future. One
thing she said she tried to remember when she got discouraged was that “everybody's different and you'll learn a different way. So, like, one thing might not work for the other, but it works for that one person.”

Stephanie and Alayna had experienced success in Pre-AP classes, without the need of a specific class for their dyslexia, and Genaa felt successful when she understood a concept before the other students. Although Brinley was more confident when she was no longer in the class, she was aware that she would likely have to continue working on her strategies to succeed. She stated, “Even though I am semi good at it [reading]. I still need to work at it.” Stephanie agreed with Brinley, stating that she still needing to continue working on her skills, but that she knew she could grow without the class. She reflected:

I've always been told that dyslexics are really smart and I believe that's true. I don't believe that, just because you have a learning disability [does not mean] that you can't excel in all your classes like everybody else can...I never really wanted to quit at anything. That was something that I've never wanted to do...If I'm dedicated to it and I want to do it, I'm going to end up doing it either way... I'm like, I know I don't want to push myself too hard, but I do want to push myself to a limit where I know ... 'cause I feel more accomplished if I do it and...if I didn't struggle at it, then I'll try something harder. But, if I'm struggling on it in the beginning, then I know I learned from it and I know I can succeed from it.

**Autonomous confidence.** Additionally, student strengths and successes in other areas of education gave the participants’ confidence. While Alayna expressed that she was good in math, she did communicate that, when left to work on her own, she sometimes needed additional time to process the information. “Whenever the teacher does it with us, I'm really good, but when we
have to do it by ourselves, it takes a minute to process.” Although she said she thought she sometimes needed that extra processing time, she still believed she was doing well in the course and found it satisfying to get the answer correct more rapidly than her other non-dyslexic peers in the class. She stated that, “whenever [the teacher] is doing stuff on the board, I'm able to read it or say the answer out before anybody else.”

During the interview, Stephanie stated that even though she continued to struggle with decoding unfamiliar words and spelling, she still loved to write and participate in the journalism department.

I've always had a passion for journalism or writing to express myself or to tell people stories… When I was little, I would tell stories about my Mom and how she…was like me ‘cause she has dyslexia. Or, I would tell stories about my Dad and how he grew up. I’ve always loved telling stories.

When asked if she initially struggled in her journalism courses, she stated:

It was really hard. I mean cause there [were] like literally no dyslexics in my class... They could spell like words that I really never heard before. When I was sitting next to this one kid, (he was in eighth grade) he would tell me, "Oh, you need to put this word in front of this word instead of this."

Ownership of the dynamics of difference. Understanding that others struggle, yet perhaps in different ways, is important in general for students with dyslexia. For the participants in this study, this created a sense of empathy toward other struggling students and often helped a student understand that they were not alone in their difficulties. Brinley mentioned “there’s like, a bunch of kids [who have trouble].” She also stated that many kids have trouble reading, not just students with dyslexia.
Another area of ownership was the participants’ use of the word dyslexia. In the past, schools have often been hesitant to use the word dyslexia when describing students with reading difficulties. With the adoption of the Research Excellence and Advancements for Dyslexia Act (READ Act) (H.R. 3033) (2016), the term dyslexia was allowed to be used in all educational settings. Understanding the characteristics of dyslexia, and how to support students struggling with the disability, is essential to removing the stigma that the word implies. Makayla agreed by stating, “I have dyslexia… It’s harder for me to read things without it sounding weird to other people [sometimes].” Brinley added, “I started getting more comfortable with it- saying I do have dyslexia.” Genaa confidently recommended that future students talk to teachers and friends about dyslexia and expel the myths associated with the difference:

My Spanish teacher, when she's talking out loud to the class and she's [explaining to the other students who] see that we have different tests than they do, she'd say " [Their test may look different, because] they have a different issue than y'all do." I'm like, "You can say the word dyslexia."

When asked what she wanted other students to know about the dyslexia difference, Stephanie stated:

Success… [to me means]… always getting better, never holding yourself back… My goals are going to be different from someone else's. Some of the goals might be, let's say I get a 60 on the last test [but they make a] 75. That's their success. My success is if I get an 80 on a test, I want to get at least a 95.

**Summary.** This theme revealed that the participants began to shift their thinking from relying on outside support to a more autonomous learning style. Independent learning, autonomous confidence, and ownership of difference created a shift for the students. This shift
resulted from positive as well as negative interactions with peers and teachers, and, either way, it allowed the students to take responsibility for and ownership of their differences.

**Conclusion**

This chapter analyzed findings related to the research question: How do students with a dyslexia diagnosis who exit a middle school language therapy program view their ability to navigate the social and academic demands of ninth grade without daily support? The evidence revealed that once students exited the language therapy classroom, they began to apply skills and strategies that they learned during the course with much greater autonomy. Although many of the participants interviewed shared similar stories and strategies used, this list is not exhaustive. Overtime, the students began to develop the ability to access both internal and external factors that in turn allowed them to exhibit more autonomy in their learning process and their interactions with teachers and peers at school.

This chapter began by presenting the profiles of five students exited from a language therapy program, using a narrative research format. This study sought to understand student experiences in high school after they had exited a dyslexia therapy program and moved into a dynamic of greater independence and autonomy in learning in mainstream classes. Through the careful analysis of transcribed interviews, field notes, and analytic memos, three distinct themes emerged from the findings; (a) *Students exhibit and utilize individual coping strategies*; (b) *Students access and/or maintain structural problem-solving strategies*; (c) *Students develop the capacity to access autonomous resources combining internal and external factors, sometimes ambiguously, to manage disability*. Rich, thick descriptions of the participant’s experiences supported the themes. The next chapter will interpret the findings, draw conclusions from the
themes in relation to the theoretical framework and literature, provide implications for theory as well as practice, and give recommendations for future research studies.
Chapter 5: Discussion of the Research Findings

The purpose of this narrative study was to investigate the experiences of students with dyslexia recently exited from a multisensory language therapy program. The following research question guided the study: How do students with a dyslexia diagnosis who exit a middle school language therapy program view their ability to navigate the social and academic demands of ninth grade without daily support?

The findings from this study may help to inform practice for students with dyslexia who have been exited from a language therapy program. This study also contributes to literature and practice on students with dyslexia who no longer receive intervention, allowing scholars and practitioners to take a deeper look at student self-perception once students with dyslexia are no longer in a remediation program.

Revisiting the Study: Problem of Practice

Due to the lack of cohesive laws to support dyslexic students in the United States, a deficiency of research concerning students who have been in programs to remediate for dyslexia exists. Most of the literature gears towards justifications for having programs for students with dyslexia, and in-depth studies of students exiting from these programs and their self-perception during and after transition have generally been lacking. This is because not all states carry the same laws for students with dyslexia. Some of these states do not have any remediation programs for students. This has resulted in a lack of information about student perception once remediation is successful or completed, and students begin to embark on their academic pursuits without daily support from an interventionist. Through student accounts, this study explored how students entering high school who were no longer in a language therapy program for the
remediation of dyslexia viewed their experiences and how their experiences had shaped their outlook on their own abilities, or their self-concept.

**Findings**

This section presents conclusions made by the researcher after the data analysis process was completed. The findings for this study highlight three distinct conclusions found by interviewing in depth four 9th grade students with dyslexia no longer enrolled in a dyslexia therapy program that had permitted them to receive daily support. Based on the information gathered through analysis, the researcher made three primary conclusions which are discussed below. The prominent themes along with their sub themes are depicted in Figure 9.
### Emergent themes and subthemes related to 9th grade students with dyslexia previously exited from a language therapy program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| Students exhibit and utilize individual coping strategies (accessing internal reserves) | *Using knowledge of prior learning*  
Taking ownership of individual strengths  
Awareness of struggle in transition |
| Students access and/or maintain structural problem solving strategies (tangibly use something outside of them) | Accessing outside resources  
Utilizing 504/SPED accommodations  
Skills transference  
Giving and receiving student support |
| Students develop the capacity to access autonomous resources combining internal and external factors, sometimes ambiguously | Independent learning is possible with a disability  
Autonomous confidence  
Ownership of dynamics of difference |

*Figure 9.* Emergent themes and subthemes related to 9th grade students with dyslexia previously exited from a language therapy program.

Students exhibit and utilize individual coping strategies to feel successful in their courses. The first theme that emerged contained subthemes in the form of strategies that the students had learned previously in their Language Science course. Along with applying these classroom strategies, the students also began to develop emic strategies, such as positive talk. By
utilizing these strategies “on their own,” the students developed and showed autonomy in their learning.

The study revealed that, after taking the course, the students did carry a variety of the skills learned in the program into other courses. Many of the students noted that they utilized decoding methods, for example, when tasked with an unfamiliar word. More often than decoding, the students relied on their prior knowledge of morphology (Greek and Latin word root study) to understand the meanings of unfamiliar multisyllabic words. Students also noted that they used strategies such as rereading and “tricks” such as remembering the cursive for the letters “b” and “d” to notice the difference.

Along with utilizing strategies learned, students began to develop and use emic strategies to help them cope with their struggles. One area of similarity; positive talk, was found in many of the participant interviews. While struggling with reading, the participants noted that they utilized self-affirmation in the midst of difficulty. They stated many times that they focused on the fact that others believed that they could read without daily support, and that motivated them to stay motivated and not give up, which represents combining emic with etic strategies.

The last emic strategy discovered between participants was the awareness of struggle throughout transition. The participants understood that exit from the program did not mean that they would not continue to unnecessarily struggle in their classes, but that they possessed the strategies and tools internalized to support them in their learning. Many of the participants spoke of struggles they were still having in their high school classes, but they emphasized how they had more autonomously learned to cope when faced with difficulty. Although each student responded differently when faced with struggles, all of the participants noted that they were
aware that dyslexia cannot be “cured,” and that they would have to continue utilizing their strategies throughout their high school careers and beyond.

Although the students expressed an understanding that struggle after Language Therapy was to be expected, they were able to utilize methods taught in the remediation program to support their learning outside of the support classroom. By utilizing strategies learned in class; such as decoding and morphology, along with reaching out to other students for help that were chosen by the individual student; the students began to develop other internally motivated strategies of coping to support their needs. These included using positive talk and positive self-affirmation, along with the understanding and acceptance that their struggles did not “go away” with remediation.

**Students access and/or maintain structural problem solving strategies (tangibly use something outside of them) to meet their needs in learning.** Throughout the interviews, students emphasized their ability to problem solve when struggling. Although the students mentioned using these methods in class, they consistently and actively sought other forms of support when needed. Some methods of support included accessing outside support (such as the content mastery classroom) for one-on-one support, utilizing their individual accommodations through Section 504 or SPED, skills transference (color-coding methods for organization), as well as giving or receiving peer support. Although these methods were not explicitly taught in the Language Therapy classroom as “methods of coping,” students actively sought ways to use them to help them succeed in the classroom. Figure 10 displays the relationship between the main strategy and specific forms of problem solving.
Students develop the capacity to access autonomous resources combining internal and external factors, sometimes ambiguously, to manage disability. During the process of transition from receiving daily support, students began to transform from requiring explicit support to employing a more autonomous method. Utilizing their internal and external resources, students began to understand that learning and success was possible although they had dyslexia. Coupled with successes in and out of the classroom, students began to shift their understanding to conceptualize that their dyslexia did not mean “disability.” Once they discovered this, students began to take ownership of their difference and unabashedly utilize the strategies that allowed them success.

Figure 10. Strategies utilized by participants in relation to problem-solving strategies
In summary, this study explored the experiences of five 9th grade participants no longer receiving language therapy support. Similar themes between the participants assisted the researcher in discovering that students were utilizing strategies learned and created for success. The four conclusions made by the researcher included greater autonomy for students and which supported them in their learning once daily support was removed and in many cases, no longer needed.

**Findings in Relation to the Literature**

Students exhibit and utilize individual coping strategies to feel successful in their courses. Consistent with research by Birsh (2011), students with dyslexia who partake in multisensory intervention programs actually undergo a neurological reorganization of the brain related to phonic interventions; these, when re-enacted, can lead them to practice many of the same skills as typical readers. This became evident through analysis of the data coded from the interviews when the students utilized strategies and tools learned in the language therapy program in the general education classroom, once daily support had been removed. Specifically, for example, two of the students utilized prior knowledge – decoding unknown multisyllabic works by using Greek and Latin Root Word Study, which became their individual coping strategy, as found in Theme 1, to succeed in autonomous learning.

As a part of his positive dyslexia approach, Nicolson (2015) noted that students with dyslexia should be able to recognize, as well as utilize, their own individual strengths to confront and overcome difficulties. In this study, the students indeed were able to develop this positive dyslexia approach by creatively mobilizing individual strengths -- inherent as well as those learned during the remediation program -- as they faced new challenges during the transition to the environment where assistance had been lessened or removed entirely.
Stephanie’s process clearly illustrates this. She spoke about her struggles and successes when she began writing for the journalism department at the high school, reflecting on a time when she previously had begun to doubt herself and her abilities when she struggled, before language therapy and even after time in the program. Particularly difficult for her then – and in the new setting still – was spelling. In the new environment, an older student told her that using a dictionary to spell words was acceptable in the class; indeed, while many of the students may have been good spellers, they, too, had to utilize outside support at times. This brought Stephanie to re-enact positive talk used previously; it allowed her to regain control of her attitude towards her disability and focus on how she could use the new tools around her to become successful, instead of letting fear and the lack of constant support demobilize her.

Students access and/or maintain structural problem solving strategies (tangibly use something outside of them) to meet their needs in learning. According to the literature, (Ames & Archer, 1988; Kleitman & Gibson, 2011; Nicolson, 2015) a positive classroom environment is imperative for student learning and understanding. This theme emerged in the data related to Genaa. When Genaa was given support in the classroom (Spanish class) she flourished, yet when she had to justify her needs for assistance (notetaking support) to her instructor, and did not receive it, she then looked for outside support (CM and parents) to clarify what had been missed. This revealed that this particular classroom was not a fully positive environment for Genaa, yet she utilized her knowledge of what she needed to be successful (strategies learned from the dyslexia therapy program) and began to advocate for herself, thus taking a part in her own learning process when an aspect of the class environment became troublesome to her.

In addition, the literature supports a method of strategic and repetitive instruction and practice coupled with guidance from the instructor to support students in their development.
towards becoming autonomous learners (Klassen, 2010). Genaa noted that she had learned the skills needed to be successful without daily support in the language therapy classroom. For her, this included academic skills, as well as coping skills, to address her emotional needs – particularly confidence -- associated with the disability. This dynamic was present in other participant interviews, particularly Alayna-rereading passages for fluent reading when faced with the task of reading aloud; and Makayla actively seeking outside support other than CM when struggling on a concept she found unfamiliar. This finding is consistent with the literature in Chapter 2 noting that intervention programs for dyslexia should focus on the academic, as well as emotional aspects of the disability (S. E. Shaywitz, 2003).

Although Genaa was able to advocate for herself, her experience coincided with assertions in the literature that many teachers do not understand what the dyslexia disability encompasses and how to support students managing it in the classroom (Bos et al., 2001; Lyon et al., 2003; Uhry & Clark, 2004, Yurdakal & Kirmizi, 2015). Thus, having programs like the language therapy initiative explored in this study becomes even more crucial given that students must navigate these transitions exhibiting a capacity to learn with autonomy. This is true not only when support systems are commonly discontinued, but when faculty in the new and integrated setting are often ill-prepared to assist these students directly and individually (Lipson et al., 2011; Otaiba et al., 2009). This links back to the literature explored in Chapter 2 describing the inconsistent and relatively scarce legal structures supporting mandatory programs and initiatives for this population (Youman & Mather, 2015). Without defined and clear regulations along with research-based multisensory intervention (Birsh, 2006, 2011; Moats 2014), dyslexic students will continue to be under or inaccurately identified for intervention programs and may experience negative self-concept and struggle with self-confidence, which, as the literature clearly outlines,
brings less than favorable academic results (Gibson & Kendall, 2010; Glazzard, 2010; Humphrey & Mullins, 2002; Klassen, 2010).

**Students develop the capacity to access autonomous resources combining internal and external factors, sometimes ambiguously, to manage disability.** The results of this study revealed that the students were able to utilize both skills from the course, as well as individual problem-solving strategies they created, to cope with difficulties arising because of their disability. They skillfully accessed internal and external reserves to negotiate learning challenges – some new, some old -- more autonomously in the new environment, letting go of daily support interventions. Consistent with the literature, students who exited the dyslexia therapy program in Edwards ISD understood no “cure” existed for their dyslexia and that they would continue to struggle in reading (Birsh, 2011). The students who participated in this study received scientifically-based interventions to address their struggles prior to high school, and thus they began to conceptualize the complexity of their diagnosis and understand that their struggles would continue. They did, however, have enough academic muscle memory and coping skills establish to not allow this major transition to diminish their ability to do well in their courses without daily support. This emerged from in the interviews conducted for this study, from multiple participants.

Literature exploring the experiences of students exiting a dyslexia therapy program prior to high school and the effect of this on their self-worth is limited. However, this study on this topic shares characteristics with a study by Gibson and Kendall (2010), who found that students who did not receive proper intervention (due to the lack of identification) experienced low self-concept (Glazzard, 2010; Humphrey & Mullins, 2002). The current study sharply contrasts with the experiences of the participants reported in Gipson and Kendall’s study who expressed
feelings of failure, confusion, and low self-esteem, due to both incomplete diagnosis and an approach to the definition of disability (IDA) that was extremely negative and reinforced helplessness rather than empowerment behaviors. The data in the current study noted that, although at times the students interviewed felt limited in some abilities in regards to their learning, they also understood that these difficulties did not negate their strengths (such as Alayna in math) or hinder what they could achieve (Stephanie in journalism). Focusing on their strengths reinforced their self-concept and helped them to recognize their capabilities, empowering them to seek solutions to problems; they thus actively managed their own learning process, even to the extent of helping others – dyslexic and typical readers alike. Nicolson (2015) noted that the overabundance of negativity in a dyslexia diagnosis frequently inhibits students’ positive outlook on the future, a trend evident from the data collected by Gibson and Kendall (2010).

According to the literature, the IDA definition contains eight negatives when defining dyslexia; including disability, difficulties, poor, deficit, consequences, problems, reduced reading experience, impede. Data from this study showed that, in large part due to the empowerment model of the intervention approach, the participants with dyslexia utilizing the language therapy program in Edwards ISD were willing to talk about their difficulties and struggles, moving out of negativity and shame around their diagnosis. This allowed them to transform their attitudes significantly about dyslexia; it ceased to be exclusively a handicap or a barrier, and they instead conceptualized it as a set of characteristics that gave them a different way of looking at information (Nicholson, 2015). Fully illustrative of this mindset is a statement made by Genaa, in a tone of voice that was both confident and bordering in a positive way on flippant:
Sometimes they say [that we have] this issue and I'm like, "You can say the word dyslexia". Like I'm not scared. Like they think dyslexia is like a thing that would probably offend us or whatever. I'm like "You can say the word..."

**Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory (SDT) grounded this study theoretically. Through the development of the theory’s three distinct subsets – autonomy, competence, and relatedness—Ryan and Deci (2000) found that individuals are more likely to experience motivation when these are simultaneously fulfilled. Although these three subsets are not similar in idea, Ryan and Deci (2000) noted that each of these subsets requires development for self-determination to thrive. Although these three areas are of importance, the authors noted that the importance of each area may fluctuate given the individual’s value of importance of each subset.

**Autonomy.** Ryan and Deci (2000) found that autonomy was critical to developing self-determination in individuals. Traditional schooling can directly diminish autonomy; indeed, it is important to understand that allowing students to have “control” over aspects of their learning is key to developing this subset asset. This was poignantly true with the students who participated in this study. Stephanie reflected:

I walked up there and my teacher's just sitting there smiling. I didn't know why she was smiling at the time. All year she was trying to help me get better, build my confidence up in reading, not second guess myself when I know I shouldn't... She always reminded me, always go with your gut feeling and always try to ... don't let people ... just because I was in a class that was lower than me, doesn't mean I don't care. It just means that I need a little extra help in that one little part.
By allowing Stephanie the ability to “go with her gut,” her English teacher permitted Stephanie to succeed without giving constant support. Stephanie reflected that this “…made me feel a lot more confident in my reading and a lot more confident in my skills.” Ryan and Deci (2000) noted that autonomy is not void of all outside support, but allows the individual to receive guidance from others while still allowing for autonomy in learning.

**Competence.** Throughout the interviews, the participants noted how it was important for them to be connected to others (with and without dyslexia) to improve their confidence. Whether Alayna utilized competence when assisting a student who was struggling in math or Stephanie displayed her expansive knowledge of root words to support her friend in journalism class, having the students assist others was essential to them developing this subset. When the students used their knowledge to support others, they began to understand that they were not the only students who struggled, and when the other students showed success, the participants’ self-concept was elevated. By experiencing the success of others, the participants began to feel confident in their own abilities, and internal motivation began to flourish.

**Relatedness.** Ryan and Deci (2000) found that relatedness (being able to relate to others around you) is also fundamental to self-determination development. For this subset, individuals in the study mentioned that they were aware that other students struggle, and while they would likely continue to struggle once exited from learning therapy support and beyond, they understood that other students were struggling as well. Makayla, for example, stated that she was aware that CM helped many different students, not just students with dyslexia:

Because they like deal with different types of people. Like they do with like people who have, like dyslexic people, or they just have different disabilities where it's like good in
one subject than they are in another. Like…they see like a whole different group of people.

Genaa used comparisons to others with dyslexia to give herself positive pep talks when struggling. Relating to successful dyslexics helped her feel that although she still struggled, success was eminent.

Because like my mom and dad says that you're not the only one that has it, it's like famous people out there that has it, there are like billionaires out there that has it and they face it and fix it and they cannot have that problem.

Stephanie, Makayla, and Genaa also mentioned that lasting friendships with students in previous dyslexia courses allowed them to connect with others who understand what it was like to struggle in reading.

**Reflections on the Methodological Approach**

The use of narrative methodology resulted in understanding the experiences of 9th grade students no longer enrolled in a dyslexia intervention program. By utilizing this methodology, the researcher was able to deeply look into the experiences of these students and extract the data from their stories to find meaning and similarities in their experiences told first hand from those who lived it. Narrative methodology allowed the researcher to use a reliable strategy of inquiry to investigate deeply into participant stories and accounts and create meaning from those experiences. According to McAlpine (2016), “through the construction and recounting of narratives, individuals form and re-form who they have been, are presently and hope to become” (p. 33). In addition, narrative methodology allowed the participants an active voice to describe their experiences.
This qualitative method allowed the researcher to see what impact these experiences had on the participants, and how they made sense of them towards greater empowerment. By looking into the lives of these five students with dyslexia, the researcher was able to create meaning from the stories told. Without the use of first-hand accounts for this study, the researcher would have had difficulty understanding how the students’ experiences shaped their own individual understanding of their dyslexia difficulties and how they managed daily with their struggle.

**Implications for Practice**

This study contains results that allow for clearer understanding of student experiences with dyslexia told from the perspective of five 9th grade students previously exited from a dyslexia intervention program in Texas. The implications for practice from this study are numerous and directives for support span from the level of the individual students on a daily basis to creating and implementing laws and regulations for students across the United States with efficacy, uniformity, and consistency. It is important to note, that along with the research based program used to provide intervention for the students, the language therapist also utilized methods of positive dyslexia (Nicolson, 2015) to support students struggling with self-concept. These methods, along with intensive intervention may have contributed to the students’ positive outlook in regards to their dyslexia diagnosis and self.

**Teachers and support staff on campus.** Beginning on the front lines with teachers and staff is essential when working with students with dyslexia. Directly informing those who work closely with these students on a daily basis about specific needs and struggles allows students to have a practitioner who is knowledgeable and understanding in regards to their challenges with reading. Informing the teachers about the ideals of and approaches to cultivating positive
dyslexia (Nicolson, 2015) could also allow teachers to be equipped with empowering ways to support students struggling and/or hesitant to participate in class.

Having this knowledge in the general classroom could eliminate the need for students to seek out individualized supports in alternative settings on campus, such as CM. Educating the practitioners in Texas, given the strength of the legal structure, could allow students to feel more comfortable advocating for themselves in a general setting classroom when teachers’ awareness and skill set is enhanced through dyslexia-specific training and beyond as adults, in the policy world. In addition, informal monthly meetings for students with teachers, as well as encouraging students to journal their thoughts and experiences daily, and then share with the teacher while in the meeting, could allow students to express feelings of low self-concept and/or ask questions about unclear teaching information that the students may not feel comfortable expressing in the general classroom setting.

Furthermore, preparing teachers extensively enough so they will feel at ease allowing students access to their 504 or SPED accommodations could empower teachers and students alike. By understanding their supports, students can pick and choose what accommodations best fit the task at hand. For example, a student who knows they can go to CM for reading support on tests may choose to have the accommodation in class. Instead of leaving the general classroom for outside support, the student may choose to have the teacher read on an “if needed” basis. Understanding accommodations may also help develop more autonomy in student learning. By allowing students to attend their accommodations meeting and help choose the support that is needed, students may begin feel more competent about their abilities, therefore promoting positive self-determination.
Cognizance of the dyslexia difference and dispelling the myths around the disability may allow non-dyslexics to begin to understand the struggles that students with dyslexia face each day with reading and spelling. By hosting dyslexia awareness nights for the entire school, promoting a school wide dyslexia awareness month (usually held in October nationally), inviting parents to a dyslexia parent night, and allowing successful speakers into the classrooms to talk about their struggles with dyslexia will begin to erase misconceptions and inconsistencies in beliefs about the difficulty. Also, utilizing purposeful partnering with students with and without learning differences could allow students to give and receive support needed, which would allow students with dyslexia to relate to other students and feel competent in their abilities while helping partners who may struggle. Moreover showcasing prominent figures known to have had learning difficulties in class and beyond may help the non-dyslexic peers of dyslexic students and the general population to begin to see the disorder not as a handicap, but as a difference that can be supported through recognition and remediation. Dyslexic students will then learn to model from a young age how they can manage their challenges and even turn them into assets, as this study revealed, to be successful, insightful, empathic, and productive members of society.

**District level.** In addition, themes that emerged from this study may influence other districts in Texas to reevaluate their dyslexia intervention programs to see that students are prepared when exiting the course. Employing highly knowledgeable instructors trained in dyslexia intervention is vital for a strong dyslexia intervention program. These instructors need to be versed in the newest research and strategies to support students with dyslexia. Many of the programs utilized for dyslexia offer explicit and systematic research based intervention, but do not leave much space for autonomy for students to explore within the programs. Once students have completed the programs, it is imperative for them to have the skills to exercise autonomy to
help support their self-determination when no longer receiving daily support. Employing instructors knowledgeable about utilizing a program with fidelity, but who can simultaneously help students develop the additional skills they need to be successful on their own is essential.

Educational service centers for regions. The findings from this study may also influence educational service centers in creating meaningful teacher development and trainings in regards to students with dyslexia. Offering professional development in the areas of dyslexia characteristics, identifying struggling readers in the general education classroom, designing strategies to support students in a language therapy program, and tailoring professional development trainings to teachers with students who have previously completed language therapy intervention could widely influence the general education population about the learning experiences of students with dyslexia.

State legislation. Although laws and regulations for dyslexia identification and remediation have existed in Texas since 1985, other states are just beginning to look at Texas as the example to follow when creating their own legislation for students with dyslexia. Unfortunately, not all states require intervention for students with dyslexia, and some of the states have still not addressed this issue in any form. The findings from this study could influence additional legislative measures throughout the country to create regulation and procedures, from identification of students with dyslexia to support after they have completed a language therapy program, particularly because this study highlights how essential the program and continuous interventions were in facilitating these students capacity to succeed autonomously in the high school environment.

Federal legislative implications. Due to the inconsistency of laws and regulations for students with dyslexia at the federal level, many students fail to receive the correct, if any,
interventions to address their struggles. Although the (READ Act) (H.R. 3033) (2016), did allot money for dyslexia research, as of March 2018 when this study was completed, there were still no federal laws securing students with dyslexia the interventions needed. These findings could help to influence federal legislators to reevaluate their position on students with learning disabilities and include dyslexia as its own category within the branches of Special Education Services. This would allow funding for intervention programs in all schools to support students with dyslexia.

The practical implications of this study are numerous and create an inverted pyramid from those directly working with students daily to the federal level where laws can bring change for all students with dyslexia. Beginning on the front lines by educating those working with students with dyslexia on a daily basis will create more knowledge about dyslexia and may allow transformation within the district, state, and federal level. Figure 11 explains the hierarchy of support.
Figure 11. Inverted pyramid showcasing implications for practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

Awareness gleamed from this study invites further research to be explored. The opportunity for insight into students with dyslexia is vast and may promote change within multiple facets of dyslexic research and praxis. Particularly important would be an examination of the development or lack thereof of student self-concept for dyslexic students transitioning into high school who have not benefited from middle school language therapy programs and interventions. Additionally, this study was relatively limited both in participant sample size and because it explored the effects of only one therapy program. Studies exploring a diversity of
programs could help determine which components of autonomy during the transition into high school are strengthened by different methods. Thus, a comparative study of various science-based models of intervention for this age group would yield more comprehensive data analysis and insights.

Another understudied component is the differential effect of earlier intervention programs – for example, those that only provide support in elementary school, or those that extend from elementary school through middle school. This type of study could also effectively inform the parameters of legislative models adopted. For these studies, qualitative research could provide deeper understandings of and knowledge about students’ first hand experiences. By utilizing this methodology, the researchers could delve into stories and develop meaning through the participants lived experiences. According to Carless and Douglas (2017), “recounting moments of personal experience in story form (detailing what happened, where, when, to whom, what were the consequences) is important not so much to reveal the objective details of events but to understand the individual’s subjective responses to those events” (p. 307). Narrative methodology allows the researcher to take stories and extract meaning from each individual participant’s lens.

Methodologically, adding to narrative analysis with other methodological approaches, such as case studies, would permit an examination of the structural components that comprise effective program implementation at the school and district levels. This would also have practical implications for legislative and program design. Finally, understanding the experiences of teachers working with dyslexic students is essential; thus, studies that probe both their perceptions of these students’ learning processes and development of autonomy, and their experiences in professional development and training directed at working with this population,
would be valuable. Additional frameworks and methodology are recommended so further research can add multiple perspectives to the literature regarding students with dyslexia. Furthermore, additional studies could explore other aspects of SDT from the view of additional mini-theories such as the goal contents theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) on how students with dyslexia view personal goals.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this narrative study indicated that the dyslexia therapy program under analysis was successful at providing a foundation of tools and knowledge for students to rely on following the removal or reduction of language therapy. The tools and knowledge learned during therapy allowed students to utilize these methods and develop individual coping strategies to succeed in autonomous learning. Importantly, these strategies developed the students’ capacity to succeed as autonomous learners as evidenced by their strong and active self-concept. They thus developed emic strategies such as positive talk and self-affirmation to move them through challenging moments and to overcome barriers independently. Not only were these strategies crucial for the success of the students with dyslexia, but the methods trickled down to other students struggling, even those who were not identified as having the disability. While each participant utilized various tools and strategies, all pulled from prior experiences and learning acquired previously in the language therapy program.

Having learned from their own struggles and the process enacted to overcome them, several of the dyslexic students interviewed for this study actively reached out with their self-acknowledged tools and skills to help non-dyslexic peers. This reveals both empathy and a movement towards them perceiving struggles with dyslexia not necessarily as deficiencies, but simply as differences – other students struggled, too, and the dyslexic students could actually
assist them and extend what they had learned precisely because of their difference. While these struggling students were not dyslexic, the participants found that they could identify with their struggles, and they found meaning in and connection to their peers because of them. This began to shift the students thinking of dyslexia from conceptualizing it as a “handicap,” to accepting it as a particular challenge – which indeed everyone faced in some form – they could confront with autonomous strategies and tools when encountering new and unique difficulties.

Implementation of programs aimed to help students with dyslexia that tackle not only academic shortcomings, but also acknowledge and support their needs for emotional guidance, would allow for more positive studies related to students with dyslexia and their abilities rather than remaining in the categorization of these struggles as “disabilities.” In the past, a dyslexia diagnosis was almost exclusively considered to be a limitation (due to incorrect and misguided information to those responsible with the students’ daily learning and exploration.) Yet, with new information and results from studies regarding programs designed to support students, research is needing to shift from focusing on dyslexic student struggles and low self-concept to showcasing dyslexic students as confident, self-advocating, autonomous learners. This study revealed that dyslexic learners can be equipped with the knowledge of coping methods and the creativity to address their struggles, as well as information about their difference, which, combined, allow them to succeed and reach their individual goals and be useful empathically to others.
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