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# Possible Selves of Healthcare Students with Dyslexia: A Narrative Inquiry

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# RQ: What influences Occupational potential and possible selves in healthcare students with dyslexia?

- Three semi structured interviews per participant (past, present and future)
- Nine students (OT, PT, Ost.) M level, diagnosis of dyslexia. Age range: 24-46; 8/9 describe self as middle class, two parent families; 1/9 describe self as working class and single parent family; all born and brought up in England (North, South, East and West); some first in family university students; 1/8 male/female.
- Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000) - Plots and three dimensional structures (temporality, personal and social dimensions and place) (Clandinin, 2006).
- Analysis: Possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986); thesis chapters half play half analysis

# Influential Concepts



- Possible Selves – who we hope to or fear becoming in the future (Markus and Nurius, 1986).
- Roadmaps and countervailing selves (Oyserman, 2008)
- Self initiated actions leading to academic success and the influence of Affect on Possible Selves (Robinson, Davis and Meara, 2003)
- Perception and elaboration of Possible Selves (Stevenson and Clegg 2011)

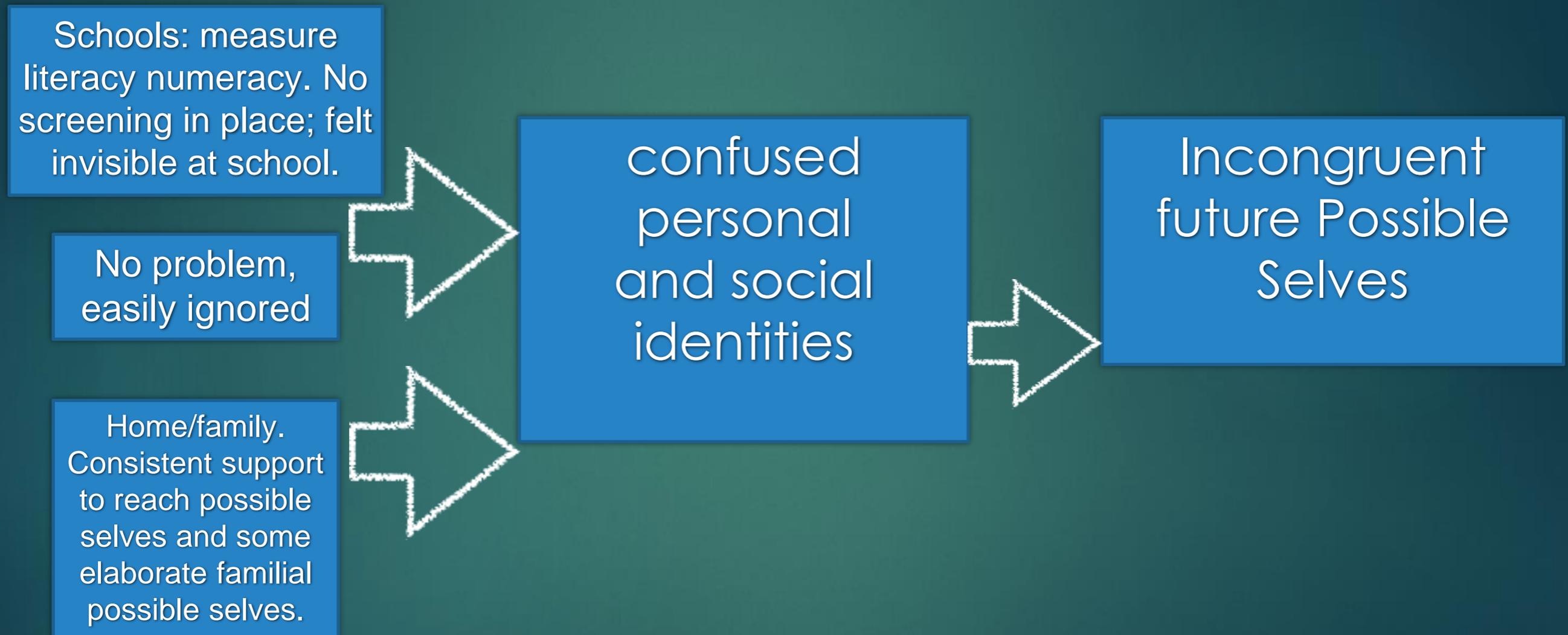
# Dyslexia:

- Unique
- Reading (comprehension, decoding)
- Writing
- Processing skills (particularly speed)
- Memory (working, short term, long term)
- Organisation
- Numbers
- Maths
- Not linked to intelligence
- Invisible
- Easily misinterpreted

# Dyslexia: Influences on Possible Selves

- Many people may not reach their potential particularly within lower socio economic status groups (MacDonald, 2010; 2012).
- Between 20-51% of offenders have dyslexia (Macdonald, 2012).
- Labelling/ diagnosis is often avoided (Riddick, 2000).
- Society dominated by people who highly value literacy skills (Collinson, 2012).
- Learned helplessness (Kerr, 2001).
- Dyslexia Debate (Elliot, 2005; Elliot & Gregerenko, 2014).
- Biological explanation for Dyslexia (Christodoulou, et al. 2014).
- Strategies can help – neuroplasticity (Singleton, 2009; Heim, 2015).
- Many parents struggle to gain support for children in school. No routine screening for children with dyslexia (Rose, 2009; Lamb, 2009; Gove, 2011).
- Number of people with dyslexia in higher education: increasing (Olofsson, Taube and Ahl, 2015).

# Findings: Influence of Incongruent Social identities on perceived Possible Selves



Where PS feel congruent with social identity , relevant strategies are cued into context (Oyserman, 2008)



# Incongruent social and personal identities and perceptions of possible selves.

- Rebecca and Kelly: put with the naughty kids. How do PS's develop if you feel invisible?
- Jojo Abigail, Maria: Diagnosis as turning point towards congruent possible selves

# Rebecca



- *Diagnosed age 7*
- *Umm... felt (pause) different and (pause) felt that it took ages to do stuff; felt like I took forever to do stuff and felt a bit thick really.*
- *It's the part of me that's thick.*
- *I think they didn't care to be honest (school). I think they didn't notice me... they didn't see me.*

# Rebecca



- *Did you do A levels? Angela*
- *No, I went to do beauty therapy after that (GCSE's) and I think that was a mistake and I only did that because I thought I couldn't do anything else.*

*No concept of what she wanted to do or was able to do - no desirable possible selves to aim for at that point. ?Group based identities (Oyserman, 2008)*

# Kelly

◉ Diagnosed undergraduate degree final year



*Oh she's not going to get to university, she's not the cleverest child, (year six teacher)...*

*Luckily my mum and dad, they never told me that, they never said. My mum only told me that a year ago.*

*And I really struggled with my exams... Not quite as academic, quite low sets, second to bottom or something like that. Which meant I was in the classes with all the like naughty people as such, so my learning was a little bit disrupted really throughout school.*

*I think I got 10 overall ... GCSE's so I passed and did well but I was never encouraged to go to the colleges. Kelly*

*Going back to GCSE's and things like that I didn't go to do A levels as such. I went and did a cache diploma in child care. Kelly*

University: “not for people like me”  
(Oyserman, 2015)



Jojo, Abigail, Maria: diagnosis as a turning point  
towards congruent possible selves

# Jojo



Diagnosed undergraduate degree final year

*I couldn't meet the expectations of myself or others and that's what happened...I have worked very hard to try not to do that but it's very tempting because it's safe. **If you constantly say I'm brilliant and can do anything, you can always fail but if you tell yourself you're a bit s\*\*\* you can't fail because you're a bit s\*\*\*.***

# Jojo



*So in my undergrad I had written myself off as not being academic, I just thought 'oh right well this just obviously doesn't work for me'. I thought 'I'm just not very academic'. Umm I didn't doubt I was bright, I just didn't think I was bright in the way that fit the mould.*

*When I first got the diagnosis of dyslexia I was like nah that's not a possibility! Because I had friends who were dyslexic and I thought: nah!*

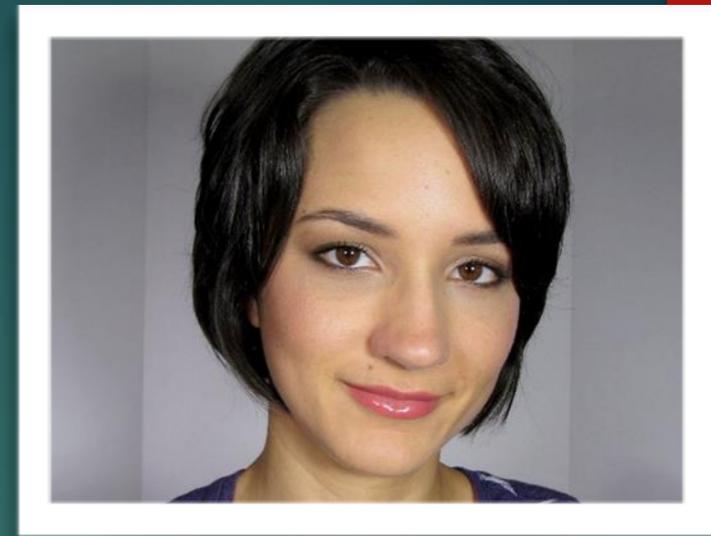
*The labels and the parameters of yourself kind of shift completely so ...it's only yourself that stops yourself because you're the one who puts those parameters and boundaries of how its going to be and how you're going to do things.*

*Then I got the diagnosis and I was like 'oh, well ok! So maybe that's not true and I could do more stuff?.'*

# New desirable possible selves

- Couldn't meet own and other sexectations
- Sabotaged own possible selves afraid of failure
- Slowly began to accet dyslexia
- Diagnosis allowed the development of new academic possible selves

# Abigail



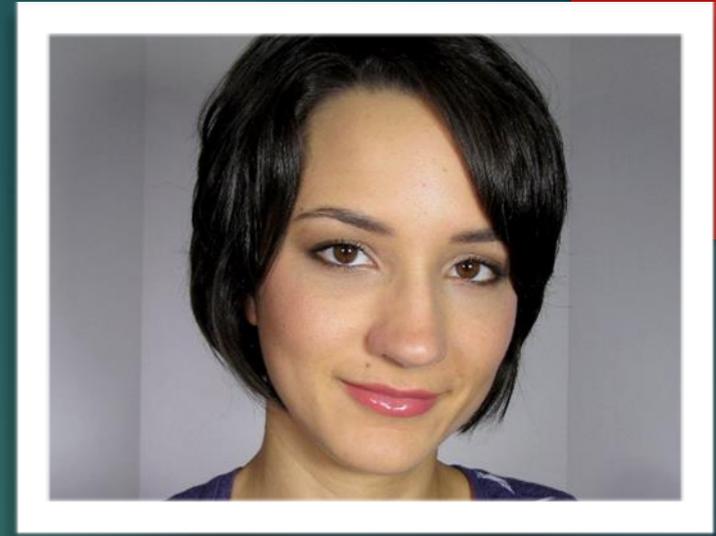
Diagnosed at sixth form college

*On the first day of reception I sat down with this girl and was like “I’ll read you a story” (laughs)”.*

*I would just pretend to be reading when actually I wasn’t and it took me a long time to read because **I was convinced I was really clever.** But I was pretending to read.*

*A teacher stood me up and said “**this is the worst speller in the world**” and asked me to spell... a 3 letter word ...‘ton’ and I put an ‘e’ on the end but I was panicking as soon as I stood up. I was really panicking. I was so upset (crying), I, (crying).*

# Abigail



*As I was growing up, remember we were talking about how my sisters, one was beauty, one was brains and I was brawn? I think secretly I thought, well I'm kind of pretty and I know I'm intelligent and I know I know my stuff but because I see things differently, people don't think I'm clever and when I got this diagnosed, it was like **'oh, that's why'**! Abigail*

Abigail's social and personal identities were incongruent but she always knew she was capable of achieving and moving towards her desired possible selves.

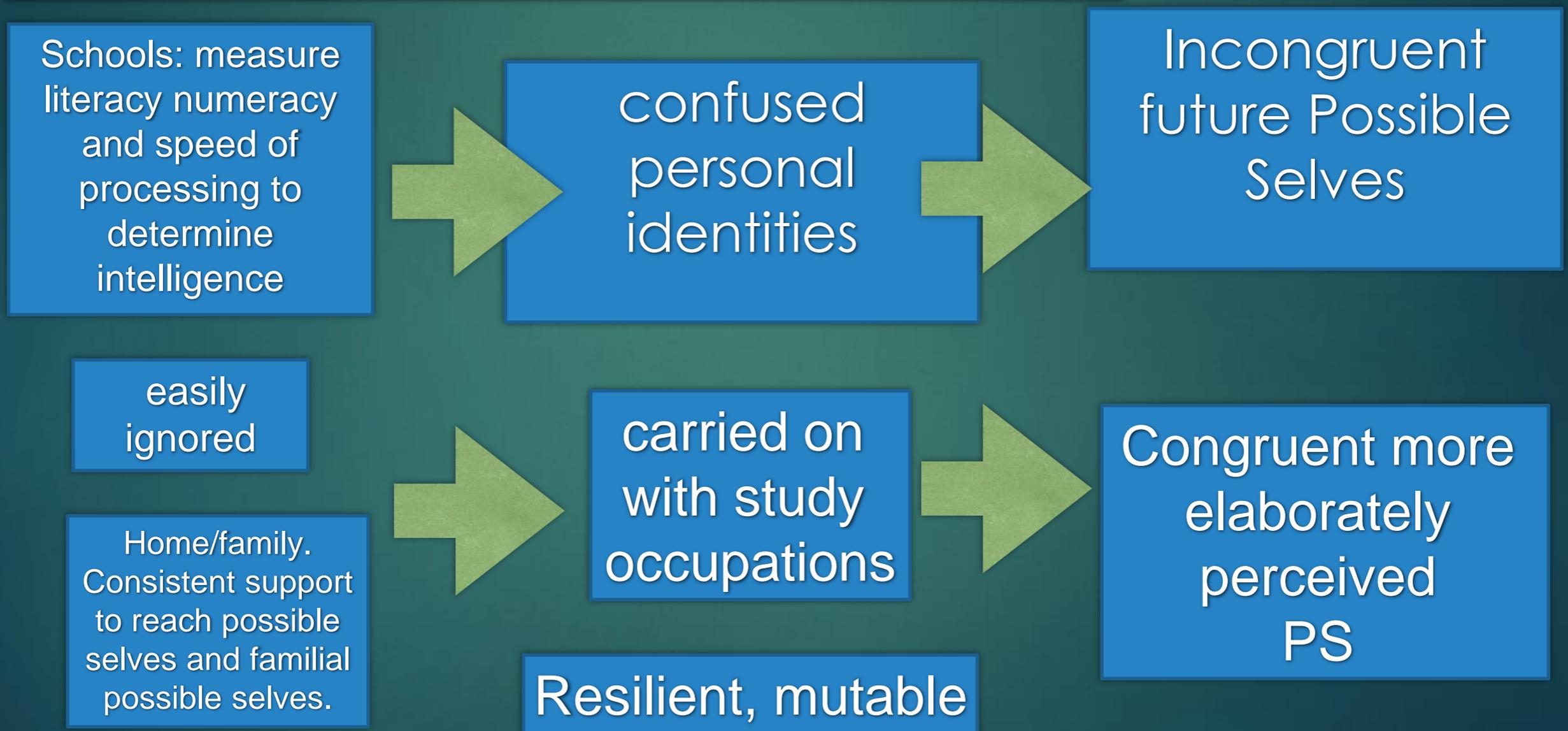
# Maria



- *Diagnosed between primary and secondary school*
- *I was bullied. The same people who bullied me for being too fat bullied me for being too thin and I was just like well I can't win can I? So I guess that drove me to think well **I'm not going to be like you I'm going to do something with my life.** It was to prove other people wrong...it wasn't the easiest childhood. I thought well **if I work really hard now I'll have a better future.***
- Balanced, plausible academically focused possible self which was balanced against countervailing past selves.
- Insight from an early age that the current self is mutable (Markus and Nurius, 1986) and that success in school is a basis for successful transition to adulthood (Oyserman et al. 2004)

# Social identities - Possible Selves

## Countervailing Social and Personal PS's



# Conclusion

- Possible selves are quite complex and depend on social (teachers, families) and personal factors such as resilience, mutability and determination.
- Despite difficulties with perceiving possible selves at secondary school all the students continued with study which provided self efficacy and motivation to develop new desired possible selves.
- There are many injustices that influence the possible selves of people with dyslexia and these continue.
- Future dyslexia/PS research ideas: gender, study occupations, occupations and identity, parents perspectives, offenders/ prisoners, school approaches.
- Questions...

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# Images

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