

**An Investigation into the Career Decisions of Teachers and their Views on Special Education, using a Life History Approach.**

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**Abstract.**

This research study considers the life histories of six teachers and one trainee teacher to explore the factors which might have influenced their career decisions, specifically factors which may lead them to work in specialist provisions. An autoethnographic approach was also employed in order to position the researcher within the context of the research.

This study does not generalise but seeks to identify themes across all phases of the participant’s lives which may in some way have influenced their career choices. The data suggests that although the life experiences of the participants have had influence, an example being contact with people identified as having special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), Initial Teacher Education (ITE), and subsequent Continuing Professional Development (CPD) do appear to have had an impact.

The thesis illustrates the participants’ regret at not having the opportunity to access effective and appropriate ITE and CPD in SEND, which would have been advantageous to their careers, and the study suggests that without a transformation of the structures which underpin ITE and CPD, many teachers may remain ignorant of the opportunities that working in a specialist provision can bring. The study also demonstrates the resilience of teachers in adapting and acquiring knowledge autonomously, in order to offer the most effective teaching and learning experiences to every individual in their care.

**Chapter 1**

**Introduction.**

**Context and background of study.**

From a professional perspective the driver behind my want, and need, to undertake this study has manifested itself through the teaching and leadership positions I have held, in mainstream schools, special schools and universities. Ironically I have never explored my own personal reasons for the life decisions I have made concerning my own career, or reflected on my training. However, across my many experiences of teaching, mentoring, supporting and training within educational establishments, I have begun to observe a ‘pattern’ amongst the many teachers and students I have come into contact with, in many different settings. I never directly communicated with the teachers and students about what I was observing, but it was disseminated in informal and formal settings, as part of general conversation. My observation, and the focus of this research, is the choices that teachers make in relation to a teaching career in mainstream or special education, and how some exhibit strong views as to why they make the choices they do.

It was of particular interest that many teachers, and initial teacher training students, held distinct views about special education, especially in special schools, and in many cases these views had never been challenged, and were influencing their career choices. It was this aspect which raised my curiosity and led me towards this research, especially as I too had once held many of these views, in the first ‘phase’ of my educational journey. I do appreciate that these views may not be held by others working in education, however my personal experience has led me to believe that this polarisation does exist, although I am open through this research to be challenged.

Whilst I fully appreciate that not all teachers hold particular views about special and mainstream education, and that my small sample will not be unable to give a view indicative of the whole profession, I do feel it worthwhile to explore these views, as an indicator of a small but important factor contributing to the career choices of teachers, specifically their views on teaching in a special school. It will also reflect my social constructivist perspective and socio-historical understanding of the world in which I am embedded.

Within the context of this research I will focus on the teaching of those pupils identified as having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), specifically in a special school environment. Pupils who attend a special school do so because it is believed their individual needs cannot be met in a mainstream school, as they are deemed to have ‘significantly greater difficulty than the majority of others of the same age’ (DfE:2015). These pupils, who a teacher in a special school may encounter, can have one or a combination of the following: a profound and multiple learning difficulty (e.g. cerebral palsy), a sensory impairment (e.g. sight/hearing), a debilitating illness or condition which significantly affects everyday life (e.g. epilepsy), impairment due to major trauma (e.g. road traffic accident victims), an emotional or behavioural problem (e.g. ADHD), a communication problem (e.g. autism), a specific syndrome which affects cognition (e.g. Downs Syndrome), a physical disability (e.g. paraplegia), an unspecific learning difficulty (e.g. Global developmental delay) or a degenerative condition (e.g. Friedreich’s Ataxia).

Throughout my career, and specifically while being involved in the mentoring of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) students involved in their Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) placement and training [this placement no longer exists but is explored in the Literature Review 2:9] I encountered many arguments and misconceptions relating to SEND, which I addressed in three books I co-wrote, aimed at supporting both ITT students, and newly qualified teachers (NQT) (Glazzard, Hughes, Netherwood, Neve and Stokoe 2010, 2015, Glazzard and Netherwood 2019). Whilst writing these it became clear that many of the misconceptions held, had their roots in life experiences, which in turn had led to career decisions being made. Therefore by exploring these life decisions through my research, the aim is to elucidate the social factors which underpin them, for example, past educational experiences. I myself support the social model of disability (Models of Disability are examined in the Literature Review 2:6), as it appears do all my research participants.

Bradshaw and Mundia (2005:572) state that teachers’ views on disability are ‘dependent on meeting and associating with people with disabilities in schools and the community’, whilst Forlin (2003:319) argues that ‘most trainee teachers have had only very limited direct contact with people with disabilities in the community’. This research will seek to suggest ways of challenging misconceptions and offer teachers a more realistic view of teaching within a special school, possibly through Initial Professional Development (IPD) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

However if ITT training and CPD still ‘fall short’ in SEND practice, then questions must be asked as to why this situation still exists, when in 1984 the Advisory Committee on the Supply and Education of Teachers (1984:3) stated that ‘If the education service is to do the best for pupils with SEN, there must now be structured progress towards improving the preparation of teachers’. Whilst nearly two decades later, Florin and Hopewell (2006:55) were arguing that ‘With the strong movement towards a changing paradigm regarding the education of students with disabilities, the training of teachers has to undergo a shift in focus away from preparation for what has previously been seen as the normal classroom’.

However in 2016 after a poll commissioned by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers into the crucial lack of support in the education of pupils identified as having SEND, a spokesperson for the Department for Education responded by stating that if teachers are to have an understanding of pupils identified as having SEND then ‘this training [of teachers in SEND] would in future be a key part of initial teacher training’. These views on training are discussed further in the Literature Review (2:9).

During initial attempts to ‘catalogue’ my own life I have come to realise that many of the events I encountered may have had a link to the legislation that was current at the time. Therefore my memory of my primary school days, when I have no recollection of any pupils identified with special needs, was probably due to the fact that many were hospitalised and that it wasn’t until 1970 that the Handicapped Children’s Act made education universal. I therefore intend to consider legislation across the time line of both my own and my participants’ stories, in order to ascertain if this aspect had any influence upon events in their lives (Literature Review 2:8).

**Aims and Objectives of the Study.**

When embarking on this research I did so with the following aims and objectives:

* To reflect on the lives of teachers and student teachers
* To gain an insight into their views and beliefs of special education
* To gain an insight into the career decisions of teachers
* To ascertain if personal experiences in social contexts affected subsequent life choices
* To employ a life history approach supported by an autoethnographic account
* To reflect on the educational experiences of two young adults identified as having SEND

**Two Sides of a Story.**

This story is mine, and it was only when I had completed it that I realised it had two sides. These two sides were, very simplistically, my non special needs life and my special needs life, which in the end brought me to this study. My non-special needs life focusses on my early life, my education, my initial teacher training and my first years of teaching. My special needs life focusses on subsequent years of teaching, my work in a university, and the many experiences that being involved in special needs education afforded to me.

Of course I have only lived one life, and many of the experiences I share in my story are interwoven between the two sides, sometimes existing simultaneously. I did not set out to ‘other’ my special needs side of the story, as being distinct to who I am, but this is how it seemed to want to flow out of me, and it made me realise that this could be the case of others with similar stories to tell. I do believe that personal and societal experiences have influenced both sides of my story, and brought me to where I am today, and that my views and beliefs could have been very different had I not become a teacher.

It is the first time I have ever written down my story as a whole, and I found the experience cathartic, freeing and really quite interesting! I believe it to be a good basis in order to move forward and research the lives of others who are connected by teaching, and hope it goes some way to illustrating how a story can form the basis for research. Two sides of a story can be read in full in the appendices (Appendix 3), and I would urge the reader to examine it in the context of the research.

**1:1 Introduction**

*‘My advice to other disabled people would be, concentrate on the things your disability doesn’t prevent you from doing well, and don’t regret the things it interferes with. Don’t be disabled in spirit as well as physically’. (Stephen Hawking 2011)*

We are all different, we are all the same. We all need food, water, shelter, warmth and hopefully love and acceptance. We have the right to be safe, to be educated, to access medical treatment, and to act freely as individuals within the framework of the law, although unfortunately, these ‘human rights’ are not always met. However, we are also all different for a myriad of reasons: ethnicity, sexuality, size, gender, ability, class, culture, age, religion, health, and political beliefs, being just an example, and this I believe begs the question, do we celebrate our similarities, or emphasise our differences? Indeed, do we as a society celebrate at all, or do we discriminate?

The aim of my research is to examine how teachers located in different social contexts perceive special education, specifically with relation to their career choices, and will be undertaken using a narrative life history approach. To facilitate this, six teachers and one initial teacher training student will be invited to share their life stories, and I will contribute my own autoethnographic narrative.

Life history has been chosen to produce the data required to address the research focus, and to examine if ‘personal, individual experiences and perceptions actually have their origins in social forces’ (Goodson and Sikes 2001:101). The autoethnographic approach will allow me to view my experiences analytically, and my aspiration is to produce an ‘aesthetic and evocatively thick description of personal and interpersonal experiences’ (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011:5).

I am aware that the ‘production of new knowledge is fundamentally dependent on past knowledge’ (O’Leary 2010:71), and have endeavoured to ground existing theory into my research, in conjunction with the data collected (Glaser and Strauss 2012:1). I aimed to elicit current views and ideas in relation to the career choices of teachers, and examine the impact of socially dominant notions on these decisions. This involved examining current teacher training and professional development, alongside the policies and practice found within the current education system.

In this introductory chapter I shall examine the rationale for undertaking the study, and will then take a controversial view on the aspect of the term ‘special’, and its use within this study. ‘Setting the scene’ examines both mainstream and special education in organisational terms, followed by the views and findings within relevant literature. An explanation of what I believe a special school to be follows, and the rationale behind the placing of pupils within this learning environment. This will be followed by the clarification of my positionality, leading to the reasons why a life history approach was chosen, and followed by an overview of the policy context related to teacher training and teacher careers. The final section will explain the structure of the study, in which the reader will be given the opportunity to consider if society does celebrate difference, or does in fact discriminate.

**1:2 What’s in a name?**

*‘Name – a message, promise or command’ (Collins English Dictionary 2001).*

Throughout this research I use the word ‘special’ many times, as an adjective to describe individuals, schools, settings, and circumstances, as well as using it within the context of the terminology associated with special educational needs. In the Literature Review I shall examine and discuss the definition, identification, and categorisation of special educational needs, as well as examining the literature which underpins the history of SEND, models of disability, the training of teachers in the field of special educational needs, and the role of special schools. Therefore to confirm my positionality within this research, is there a requirement for me to provide my own definition of special educational needs and disabilities?

After many unsuccessful attempts to do so, I began to realise that what I truly believed, was the fact that I did not consider yet another definition to be of use to me, to other researchers, but mostly to those individuals identified as having SEND. Nobody has ever asked me to define ‘able bodied’, so why define special? What function would yet another definition of reinforcing difference accomplish in the ‘battle’ for equality? As with many words, ‘special’ can be used to mean many things. When a parent tells their young child how special they are, they are not defining difference, but using it as an endearment of love and praise, and most of us hopefully feel special in some way throughout our lives.

However, if we are to use the word to define an aspect of need, then are we not all special? It is almost a certainty that there will be points in everyone’s life, when they will experience needs which need to be addressed, and which may be individual to one person, or to a group. These needs could manifest themselves in terms of; help, advice, support, reassurance, care, medical assistance, environments, adaptations, and of course education. They can be long or short term, isolated incidents or reoccurring needs, but does society demand that we label each incident as ‘special’? Is this the only way that support can be facilitated? Macbeth (2001:91) believes the term special educational needs is only an ‘administration category for targeting funds’, so could this be the reason we are required to use the term?

Shah (2007:431) claims that some individuals identified as having SEND passively accept social discrimination, and I personally believe that the terms used to ‘describe’ people considered to belong to this group, reinforces this discrimination. Why a special school? Why not just a school? Why the Paralympics? Why not the second phase of the games? Why a theatre group for disabled and able bodied children and young people? Why not a theatre group for young people? Why do we change terminology through history but still feel a label is necessary? By defining and labelling are we changing the views of society, or reinforcing the existing negative views which are historical in origin? Are we indeed disabling individuals, not by their impairments but by the disabling barriers of society, the allocation of the term ‘special’ being such a barrier?

The clarity of my own views, on the reasons for defining this group must now be clear to the reader. I am not trying to be perverse, nor am I trying to avoid constructing a personal definition, what I am doing, is challenging the value of defining special educational needs and disabilities, to those that matter most, the individuals considered to belong to this group.

I therefore turned to the two young adults who have been identified as having SEND, and who have given me such a privileged insight into their lives, which can be found later in the study, to ask their views. I asked them: what they thought the term ‘special educational needs and disabilities’ meant; if they agreed with the use of the term special; if they felt that their identified needs actually needed ‘defining’, and if so what definition would that be. I used terminology they were familiar with, and gave no prompts other than the original questions. Their responses were as follows:

*James - Special educational needs and disabilities means you need extra support and care. People seem to get confused between learning difficulties and learning disabilities. Everybody has difficulty learning something, it could be cooking or driving or even walking, but a disability means you can’t do it without extra help and support. A special need or disability can be seen or hidden, but I wish it didn’t come with a label. I know having a label gives me extra support and things like grants and funding, and I wouldn’t get the Personal Independent Payment if I didn’t have a ‘special label’. I’m proud to be special and it can make me feel strong, I’ve had to adapt, learn and grow with my disability, and feel inspired that I am one of a kind. I don’t want people to know me by my label though, I have a name, and although its hard and challenging I don’t think of myself as having a special need and disability even though I have got both. You need to be comfortable and confident when talking to others because sometimes they are scared or they ‘freak out’ because you are different, it depends what experience they have had of people like me. I think that special educational needs and disabilities means you have it tougher and need help, and sometimes be upset that you can’t do what others can do.*

*Rachael – You shouldn’t look at someone and say they are special, you should get to know them properly. I know some people look different like those with Downs Syndrome or those with cerebral palsy, but not all people do. I don’t look as though I’ve any needs, it’s only when you start talking to me that you realise I have. I see people as all the same but all different, and I wish everyone did. I don’t really mind the term special as its better than some of the names I’ve been called like ‘weird’, or even worse when I was bullied, but I would much rather be called by my name. When you tell people you have special needs some understand and stand by you, but some use it as an excuse to bully .To me having special needs and disabilities means being labelled.*

These responses do I believe, highlight some significant points regarding how James and Rachael experienced the definition as applied to themselves, with the following being the most significant; The term ‘special’ seems to have been accepted in part because they have grown up with it, feel it is better than other more derogatory terms, and can signify a positive connotation.

* The notion of labelling is a problem for both, the only positive aspect being monetary.
* They both accept difference in everybody, and do not believe it defines them.
* They are both pragmatic about their identification of having SEND, and apart from the incidence of bullying are positive about their status.
* The notion of SEND is more of a ‘concern’ to those defining as ‘able bodied’, and interactions between those who identify as having SEND, and those identifying as able bodied, can be difficult.

However these views are only those of James and Rachael and may not be indicative of the views held by other young people who have been identified as having SEND. James was adamant that we all have difficulties at some point in our lives, and that we all may need help and support, albeit not always in educational terms, and I would argue that alternative or extra provision need not be termed special. It is therefore my opinion that as long as society views those identified as having SEND as ‘different’ then a definition will be required. This does not mean that I agree with this, or that I believe those who compile the definitions are in a position to do so.

Research into a larger group of individuals who have been identified as having SEND, on their perception of a definition, would I believe be beneficial, especially if it was undertaken with those professionals whose responsibilities include constructing definitions, such as policy makers. However, even though I believe this view strengthens my positionality, as a researcher it is prudent that I contextualise my research by offering clarity of the term, and so do offer a personal definition in the next chapter (2:2).

**1:3 Setting the Scene.**

 *‘The point of education is that students learn ‘something’, they learn it for particular ‘reasons’, and they learn it from ‘someone’. (Biesta 2015:18)*

In England, in the present day, education is compulsory for all children aged 5 to 18 years, however, where this takes place, by whom, and to what ends is open to interpretation. Children can be home schooled, and Ruffolo (2009:298) believes that the ‘division between home and school is blurred as education transgresses all boundaries’, through the ‘malleability, mobility, and fluidity of knowledge, information, and communication’. Conversely they can attend a diverse number of establishments, some examples being; academies, free schools, faith schools, or authority run schools. The role of education according to Biesta (2015:18), is to ensure that children are ‘qualified’ to live in the modern world, and are ‘socialised’ into its culture, which renders education as a ‘predictable machine’, a closed system with no room for reflection or judgement, an argument supported by Freire (1970:58). In addition to this, is the ongoing discussion concerning the best educational placement for children identified as having SEND, with the role of special schools seen as opposing the inclusion agenda, and so upsetting cultural balance.

Apple (2014:126) who poses the question what is education for, offers the answer that schools are linked to the production of paid labour which is needed for the economy, whilst Durkheim (1956:10) believed that its function is for the transmission of cultural values within society. Freire (1972:59), Thomas and Loxley (2001:5), and Apple (ibid: 125) argue that whilst education transmits the attitudes and practices of society, it also mirrors the inequalities found within it, and I believe that those identified as having special educational needs or disabilities, suffer these inequalities that are prevalent in our society.

Courtney (2015:814) estimates that within mainstream education in England there are between seventy to ninety different types of school, and believes that what once was known as the ‘school system’ no longer exists, but that there are ‘local landscapes of schooling, with different patterns, emerging in different parts of the country’ (ibid 800). However, he argues that most parents consider; age, sex, faith, ability, aptitude, and ability to pay (ibid 807) when making a decision on school choice. The notion of the ‘Special School’ will be addressed later in the study, when the provision for children identified as having special educational needs and disabilities, in both mainstream and special schools will be examined.

Within a school environment it is recognised that children come from a diverse range of backgrounds, socially, environmentally and educationally, and that each child has their own ‘starting point’, from which the school aims for them to make progress and fulfil their potential. However for some children, for whatever reason, this progress does not mirror that of the majority of the peers. This can be a temporary problem which resolves over time, or a more permanent difficulty, but schools must respond by identifying and responding to address these issues. The SEND Code of Practice (2015) emphasises that ‘differentiated and personalised provision’ will meet the needs of most pupils, but that provision to help those experiencing difficulties must be underpinned by: ‘high quality teaching, high ambitions for pupils, the setting of challenging targets, the devising of clear systems for tracking progress, continuous review of pupil progress, and focus on positive personal, social and emotional development’.

Pupils who continue to experience difficulties will be supported by a graduated response of assess/plan/do/review, by the teacher, in conjunction with the school SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator), in the form of an Individual Education Plan (IEP). A decision to involve outside agencies may be considered (e.g. speech and language therapists, educational psychologist, behaviour support) who will contribute to the IEP, and will offer advice and guidance to the teaching staff.

If all avenues have been explored and the consensus of opinion is that the pupil is identified as having a recognised special educational need or disability, then an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) will be prepared. This will be carried out by the Local Authority and should: be clear, concise and accessible to pupils, parents and practitioners, be specific on educational, health, and care needs, be supportive of key transitions, and be portable, following the child when and if they change schools. Parents, can at this point, request a specific school for their child, and both the parent and the child can request a special school.

The previous paragraphs have outlined a very simplistic overview of the process, but it does serve to illuminate the path that many pupils take into special schools. The notion of inclusion, its definition and its effects on schools, teachers and pupils, will be discussed in a later section, as I now wish to focus on special schools. The number of types of school previously quoted by Courtney (2015:814) of between seventy and ninety, was exclusive of special schools, but did include pupil referral units. These are not special schools, but offer education to pupils unable to access mainstream education, due to exclusion, social, behavioural and mental health problems, pregnancy and long term illness, and unlike special schools they are intended as a short term solution, with re-integration back into a mainstream provision the priority.

Government guidelines (DfE: 2018) state that a special school should specialise in one of the following: ‘communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social, emotional and mental health, and sensory and physical needs’. However, a special school can, and does include more than one category, and can include all.

Some local authorities however categorise special schools by the degree of needs of their pupils, with schools for MLD (moderate learning difficulties), SLD (severe learning difficulties) and schools for complex needs, still referred to in some areas as PMLD (profound and multiple learning difficulties), and these categories can differ between local education authorities. Many authorities have now taken the decision to create special schools for all needs, by merging the above three categories, which usually cater for pupils across a wide age range, an example being 3 to 25 years. An overview of the ‘types’ of special schools will now be considered, in conjunction with the conditions in which they specialise.

The four ‘categories’ of special school as identified in Government guidelines.

Communication and Interaction.

These are schools for: the deaf/hearing impaired, the blind/visually impaired, and deaf/blind pupils. The pupils in these schools do not on the whole have any other difficulties, and are able to meet national expectations within the specifically modified environment. There are also schools/resource bases for pupils on the autistic spectrum (ASD), although children on the spectrum can, dependent on their needs and position on the spectrum, have their needs addressed in any setting including mainstream schools. For pupils high on the spectrum there is usually one to one support, in an area conducive to the individual needs e.g. a solitary space.

Cognition and Learning.

Schools for pupils with learning difficulties which cannot be addressed in a mainstream setting, who have a high level of difficulty acquiring basic skills. They very rarely require specific therapies, interventions or medication, and are not classed as having a specific difficulty. The school has small class sizes and a higher than average ratio of teaching staff and assistants.

Social, emotional and mental health.

These are schools for: pupils with attention deficit disorder (ADD)/Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and schools for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Some of these schools are residential but not all. They have a high staffing ratio and work very closely with social workers and psychologists.

Physical needs.

Schools for a wide and varied range of physical needs and disabilities including those arising from birth defects e.g. cerebral palsy, illness e.g. that affects the brain or nervous system such as meningitis, and injury which could affect the brain or spinal column. The majority of pupils will also have additional needs which affect learning, as those with purely a physical difficulty are usually able to access mainstream schools which are now adapted to meet the needs of all children.

Schools can also be categorised according to the severity of needs, along with community schools and resource bases, and are as follows:

Moderate learning difficulties.

Schools which cater for pupils with conditions such as; Global Developmental Delay, Dyspraxia, and speech and language delay, including children who have associated problems such as low self-esteem, low levels of concentration and underdeveloped social skills.

Severe learning difficulties.

Schools which cater for pupils with significant intellectual and cognitive impairments. They may also have mobility and coordination problems, and may need support with self-help skills and personal needs. There is a high staffing ratio, and usually medical and various therapy intervention.

Complex learning difficulties.

Schools which cater for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and severe and complex learning needs. They require a high degree of support for learning and personal needs, and have complex mobility and language problems, often associated with medical problems and defects, and situations arising from disadvantage or injuries. They have a high staffing ratio which usually includes a medical professional and occupational therapists or physiotherapists. As these pupils require a very sensory approach there are usually various sensory areas, with larger than average classrooms, sometimes to accommodate mobility aids.

All age all-inclusive community schools.

Schools which cater for pupils across the nursery, primary, secondary and post 16 phases of education (3-19 years), and some which offer educational opportunities up to the age of 25, in line with the recommendations of the 2014 Code of Practice for SEND. They draw their pupils from across the community and offer support and education for all types of special needs. Their staffing level is in line with the needs of the pupils, and often includes nurses, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and a behaviour management team, as well as teachers and teaching assistants. The physical environment can include a hydrotherapy pool, therapy rooms, soft play areas, and sensory areas.

Resource Bases and Units.

It is also worth noting that many mainstream schools offer ‘resource bases’ or ‘units’, which are often attached to the main school building, and offer support and learning on a par to that in a special school. This has the advantage of including pupils identified as SEND with their mainstream peers at certain points in the day.

Summary.

It is important to be aware that, with the exclusion of all-inclusive schools, not all children fit ‘neatly’ into one type of school, and that any one condition does not automatically place them in a particular setting. Examples of this are children with a visual impairment who also have a complex learning difficulty, or children with Downs Syndrome, some of whom function quite well in a mainstream classroom, while others need high levels of support for both learning and personal care. It could be argued that children, young people and adults, identified as having some form of SEND, experience a high degree of ‘categorisation and labelling’, which can result in ‘terminological separation and exclusion’ (Norwich 2014:65) and are often classed as one homogenous group.

I have purposefully omitted to assign certain categories of children to certain schools, as I feel that this process cannot be generalised especially for children who have more than one need. The arguments which surround the notion of categorisation and labelling will be addressed in a future chapter, as will the inclusion agenda, the role of special schools, and the policies which support special educational needs and disabilities.

**1:4 What is a Special School?**

*‘It’s special cos I go there’ – A 10 year old pupil in a special school responding to my question ‘Why is this a special school?’*

After the Education Act (1981) there was a ‘long term decline’ in special school placements (Norwich 2014:411), with the emphasis on pupils identified as having SEND being educated in a mainstream environment, an ideology which had emerged from the Salamanca Statement and Framework For Action On Special Needs Education (1994). The Labour government at the time adopted a neo-liberal approach which privileged parental choice, and provision diversity alongside a commitment to social inclusion. However the government had to coordinate the raising standards agenda alongside that of the inclusion agenda, and the ‘Achievement for All’ initiative which was designed to bring this about, was probably their best funded and most ambitious attempt to raise achievement for all pupils.

One aspect of this initiative was an increase in SEND input in initial teacher training, but as can be seen in the next chapter this was very short lived. In 2005, Warnock (Philosophy of Education Society: 10) came to the view that some pupils identified as having SEND were in fact better suited to special schools, and that inclusion was more about the pedagogy, rather than where education takes place, that it was not about ‘all children under one roof’. This led to a trend of increasing special school placements, a situation which still exists today, with my former school built and adapted for 150 pupils, now providing for 320 pupils, and another local special school having to demolish its hydrotherapy pool in order to build a new classroom to accommodate growing numbers.

This therefore is the position of special schools at the time of the research, and while the previous section concentrated on the types of special school that can be found in England at the present time, the notion of what makes a special school ‘special’ will now be examined. I have already briefly touched on specific aspects of different types of school, mostly the physical environment and staffing. I will now attempt to generically describe a special school in terms of:

* Physical environment
* Staffing
* Pedagogy
* Assessment
* Routine

This description may for some seem unnecessary, but as discussed in later chapters, one of the reasons why some teachers have avoided teaching in special schools, is because of their trepidation as to what special schools are actually like.

Physical Environment.

At first glance a special school is like any other, and in my opinion it should be, it shouldn’t cry out ‘special’, it should cry out ‘school’, as it is a teaching environment like any other, and should not perpetuate the negative connotation of the pupils being ‘second class citizens’ (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2017). Special schools by their nature offer greater therapeutic activities than can be found in a mainstream school, e.g. hydrotherapy, and as such provision must be made within the school building. However, classrooms mirror those found in any school, but usually with a greater number of resources, and with corridors and shared areas celebrating pupils’ work and achievements, while being fully accessible.

Staffing.

Special schools have higher than average staffing levels, dependent on the pupils they teach. The norm is one teacher per class, who can be a specialist trained for this post, although this is not necessary, and teaching assistants who play a vital role in all aspects of the pupils overall care and well-being, as well as helping to promote positive relationships for learning (Groom 2006:199). Therapeutic staff are often based in the school, or make regular visits, as do social workers and psychology staff.

Assessment.

At the onset of this study pupils in certain special schools (usually those for severe or profound learning difficulties), were not only working well below the national average, but were also working below the levels of the National Curriculum. Therefore, assessment is carried out using P (performance) levels, a so called ‘best fit’ method which is more reliable over extended periods, rather than the short term (Martin 2006:74), and which covers the levels of development, lower than those captured by National Curriculum assessment targets. The levels from P1 to P8 are broken down into small achievable sections, and can be used with SEND pupils in Key Stages 1, 2, and 3, although some schools dependent on the needs of pupils use them across all age groups and key stages.

 P1/2 is generic across all areas of the curriculum and relates to aspects such as is the pupil passive or resistant, and what reaction if any, do they give to stimuli. This level is usually attributed to pupils with very complex needs. P3/4 assesses participation in an activity, and emerging communication. This communication is not necessarily speech, and could involve eye pointing to prompt cards, signing, and computer generated responses from specialist ICT equipment designed for the specific pupil. P5/6 assesses the use of simple tools, exploration of environments and activities, and an awareness of the written word. P7/8 assesses emerging literacy and numeracy, such as an interest in books and stories, mark making leading to letter formation, basic counting and colour recognition.

Pupils identified as having SEND do not necessarily learn in a linear fashion, and it is quite common for a pupil for example, to achieve P6 one day but only P5 the next. They may go on to achieve P6 again at some point, but this cannot be guaranteed to be consistent. Assessment is often by observation and the use of media and ICT, as many outcomes cannot be recorded by the pupil themselves. Some schools use assessment packages especially tailored to P levels, whilst other schools prefer to devise their own, in line with the pupils they teach. Assessment of pupils identified as SEND is certainly a challenge, and is often dependent on the close relationship and trust, that exists between staff and the pupils.

However in 2016, the Rochford Review (Standards and Testing Agency:6) which investigated the assessment of pupils working below National Curriculum levels, recommended that P levels should be abolished, and that a new approach to assessment needed to be devised that was generic across all schools. It was also recommended that pupils identified as having complex needs needed no particular assessment method but that their learning should ‘centre on a range of skills that enable pupils to engage in learning situations and in their growing ability to seek out direct learning opportunities autonomously’ (2016:6).

Pedagogy.

Pupils are taught in small groups or on a one to one basis, and overall, class sizes are small. Age appropriate National Curriculum guidelines are often adhered to, and teachers may have to differentiate each lesson for every individual pupil, with lessons often involving fluidity and movement (Youdell 2010:322). Dependent on the needs of the pupils, appropriate resources have to be developed for each lesson, learning spaces have to be negotiated, and staffing has to be appropriately deployed. Although detailed planning is essential, lessons do not always go to plan, and because pupils identified as having SEND do not always learn in a linear fashion, many learning objectives may have to be repeated.

A high level of differentiation is required, and the teacher must organise and inform the support staff in terms of pedagogy and resourcing for each individual lesson. A ‘bank’ of additional activities must also be prepared, as it is extremely hard to predict how a planned lesson will evolve. A high percentage of pupils in special schools are exempt from National Curriculum testing, but most schools offer the opportunity to gain qualifications in line with pupil progress. These can be basic literacy or numeracy qualifications, or more practical self-help qualifications associated with everyday living, such as preparing a meal, or being responsible for personal hygiene.

Routine.

Most pupils in non-residential special schools, travel to school by bus or taxi, provided by the local authority as set out in their statement. As well as the driver, each mode of transport has an escort, who often becomes the vital link between school and home. At the start of the day pupils are met at the bus drop off point by the support staff, who guide them by whatever method, to the classroom where the teacher is waiting. Registration, assembly, lessons following National Curriculum schemes of work, play times and lunch time follow a recognised timetable throughout the day, often with additional resources and input as standard. This may be; a session in the hydrotherapy pool, a one to one with the speech and language therapist, time out in the soft play area, a ‘chilling’ session in a sensory room, exercises in the physiotherapy room, a chat with the school counsellor, a rebound therapy session (specific movement and balance exercises using a trampoline), a weekly visit to an adapted house to learn independence skills, or a trip to the supermarket to practise numeracy skills.

The journey home mirrors the morning routine, and many schools offer after school activities. The pupils are able to access day and residential visits, take an active part in dramatic productions, be involved in fund raising activities, and other day to day activities common to any school.

The views relating to special education.

Thomas and Loxley (2001:10) argue that special education suffers from an ‘inferiority complex’ in relation to academic status, and that society has constructed a ‘world’ of special education, whereby difference is constructed and managed, and being ‘special’ is an identity in opposition to being ‘non-special’. It is also argued that there is a disproportionality in special education, with black boys being more likely to be identified as having special educational needs, than any other single group (O’Connor and Fernandez 2006, Trainor 2008, Hibel, Farkas, and Morgan 2010, Sullivan and Ball 2013), with O’Connor and Fernandez (2006:6) arguing that this can come about due to a ‘judgemental attitude’ of those who identify this group.

In 1971 Coard expressed the view that there was a ‘disproportionate number of West Indian pupils’ labelled as ‘educationally sub-normal’, in the British education system and that this was brought about due to the assessments carried out. He stated that a ‘black working class child who has different life experiences, finds greater difficulty answering many questions even if he is very intelligent’ (1971:15), and in 2013 the George Padmore Institute reviewed this work and concluded that this was still the case with the present day education system still ‘reproducing inequalities’ and ‘exerting forms of implicit discrimination’. The Institute also state that the ‘optimum relationship between education as a form of self-improvement or emancipation at an individual level’ is superseded by education as a tool for ‘improving society aimed at social stability and economic profit’.

Barton (2019) believes that some teachers have ‘entrenched attitudes’ to some ethnic groups, particularly Roma gypsies and Irish travellers, a view shared by Leavy (2005:159), who researched the views of pre-service teachers and found that of all ethnic groups, travellers were viewed less positively than other groups. Harding (2014:27) has the view that educational policy makers should address the needs of traveller children by offering them ‘non-written examinations’ which reflect their ‘different skill sets’ and make the curriculum ‘more applicable to real life’, a view very similar to that of Coard (1971:15).

An argument put forward by Freire (1970:10) speaks to an aspect of special education, even though it was directed at education as a whole. Freire believed that rather than encouraging and equipping pupils to ‘know and respond to the realities of their own world, they are kept submerged’, a position many pupils identified with SEND find themselves in, as they are ‘disabled’ not by their impairments but by the disabling barriers of society, where ‘normality has been naturalised in education’ (Arduin 2015:114).

Sociologists including Durkheim, Marx, and Bourdieu, believed that education was a means of socialising young people, in order for them to accept the dominant norms and values of society, and that the role of education was to prepare young people for the roles which were deemed socially appropriate for them. However, Gabriel (2013:174) has the view that the dominant norms and values of society are predominantly centred on a ‘non-special’ society, with policy, practice and pedagogy in education reflecting this position, whilst Thomas and Loxley (2001:125) argue for the voices of those within special education to be ‘recognised and respected’ within educational processes. The notion of power and how this relates to SEND education will be discussed further in a later chapter, when the notion of ‘othering’ will be examined.

The pedagogy within schools is also socially constructed, with the National Curriculum central to educating citizens to become certain kinds of individuals (Todd 2002:431), and is always part of ‘some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge’ (Apple 1996:22). Yates (2009:18) believed that a ‘different pedagogy’ should be available to institutions that have a particular duty of care, and that education should not only be addressed through knowledge and skills, but in terms of the pupils’ future, and what type of ‘worker’ they could become. This is extremely pertinent for pupils identified as having SEND, with employment a reality only for the very few, due to lack of workplace skills, and the views held by employers concerning what they believe those identified as having SEND can and should do (Michelson, Uldall, Mette, and Masden 2005:513-516). Pedagogy, along with assessment and policy, and the differences between special and mainstream education, will be revisited in more detail in a later chapter.

The ‘someone’ who Biesta (2015:18) argues delivers education to young people is by and large a teacher. Teachers can now chose various routes into the profession, and through effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) can progress and diversify. Teachers take many different career paths (Sindelar, Dewey, Rosenberg, Corbett, Denslow and Lotfinia 2012:26) for many different reasons, this being the pivotal aspect of this research, and it is with many other research studies (Gavish 2017, Clandinin, Long, Schaefer, Downey, Steeves, and Pinnegar 2015).

The research concerned with teachers pursuing careers in special education, often argues the case for societal influences affecting career decisions, and Zhang and Wang (2014:168) put forward the opinion that the only way to increase the number of special education teachers, is by ‘enhancing public disability awareness, and promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities into the larger society’. SEND in the context of teacher training, CPD, recruitment and retention of teachers and teacher identity will be explored in greater depth in a future chapter.

Summary.

As with any educational establishment, no two schools are alike, but this brief overview has offered a general insight into the generic make up of a special school. The next section will examine the placement of a pupil in a special school.

**1:5 Placement in a Special School.**

*‘I felt safe when they put me in a special school’ – a young person who self identifies as SEND who transferred from a mainstream school to a special school.*

 The previous two sections have focussed on the types of school found in the English education system, and the pupils whom they cater for, along with the process enacted in mainstream schools to identify special educational needs, and ascertain the most effective education placement for each individual. The generic structure of a special school in terms of: environment, staffing, pedagogy, assessment and routine, have also been considered, and the placement of a pupil in a special school will now be examined.

There is a certain amount of fluidity in the education system in this country, and a pupil placed in a particular type of school, need not necessarily remain there for their entire school life. It is apparent at a very early age that some pupils will be placed in a special school, for example those with profound and multiple learning and physical needs, and that they will remain in this type of school. However, Shah (2007:431) argues that this can shield pupils identified as having SEND from the realities of society, and so render them ‘eternal children’. For others, there is a period of their school years spent in the mainstream environment, before it is considered necessary to transfer them to a special school, with a high majority transferring when they move from the primary to secondary phase (Shaw 2017:298).

Some pupils, albeit not many, do transfer back to mainstream education after a period of time in a special school, and some, due to their needs transfer between specialist provision during their school career. For the pupils who it is considered will have their needs best met in a special school, the views of the parents/carers, and the pupils themselves, must be taken into consideration. However, for some parent/carers this is a very difficult decision, and many see a special school placement as a ‘badge of dishonour’ or a ‘last resort, (Ardiun 2015:116). In recent years many children who have been identified by teachers as ‘difficult’ to teach due to a variety of needs and behaviour, have become to be seen by default as ‘special’ (Thomas and Loxley 2001:22), or ‘troublesome’ and requiring ‘disciplinary management (Armstrong 2003:103) and some parents/carers worry about the effect this labelling may have on their child.

Some parents/carers are concerned about the social stigma of special education, the segregation and isolation of those identified as different (Armstrong 2003:16), and how those who attend special school are conceptualised and viewed (Lewis and Norwich 2005:5). Disability as ‘oppression’ is a view held by Shaw (2017:23) with Hollomotz (2012:477) identifying the oppression as social exclusion and restricted autonomy. However, placing a child identified as having SEND in a mainstream school can lead to rejection, bullying and victimisation (Fredrickson, Simmonds, Evans and Soulsby 2007:106), and derogatory treatment (Hollomotz 2012:488), unless the school takes positive and directed steps to address this. The inclusion agenda can also influence parents/carers, and many believe that any child can be educated in any school, and that a specific provision is not necessary, a view supported in part by Norwich (2007:298), who argues that ‘special schools should only exist if they are linked to a mainstream school’.

However, both Stevens (2005:17) and Shah (2007:427) agree, that the only way forward in ensuring the best place to educate children identified as having SEND, is to ensure that the true experts, the children themselves, have the opportunity to share their own lived experiences with policy makers, whilst Shaw (2007:25) debates whether able bodied theorists should make decisions about those who are disabled, including their education.

Research on listening to the voices of pupils identified as SEND (Griffiths 2007, Shah 2007, Prunty, Dupont, and McDaid 2012), has found that both advantages, and disadvantages can be found in both special and mainstream schools. Some pupils identified as having SEND in mainstream placements feel that they do not receive enough support (Prunty, Dupont and McDaid 2012:31), whilst the contrary can be found in special schools, where some pupils feel that their space is continually invaded by adults (Shah: 2007:436).

Some pupils identified as having SEND wish to be placed in a mainstream school, in order to form friendships with non-disabled peers, but found physical barriers deterred them (Griffiths 2007:85). However, many pupils are happy with their placements, especially in special schools, often due to the sense of community and belonging found within this type of school (Prunty, Dupont and McDaid 2012:33), but can often find leaving difficult due to finding change hard to cope with (Tilley 2013), and becoming anxious due to losing their ‘sense of belonging’ (Sagan 2015).

Research into parental satisfaction of educational provision for children identified as having SEND (Parsons, Lewis, Davison, Ellins and Robertson 2009:21) found that placement in a special school was a ‘postcode lottery’, and that parents were often limited to choice of where to place their child. However, they conclude that parental satisfaction with special school placements reflect a ‘good news story’, but add the caveat, that most parents who responded were predominantly white middle class, which does not represent the views of all groups. This view is echoed by O’Connor and Fernandez (2006:6) who argue that the white middle class child is situated as the ‘unmarked norm, against which the development of other children are evaluated’.

To conclude, it could be argued that the decision to place a child in a special school is a difficult one for parents/carers, and indeed for the children themselves. However, over the last 40 years there has been an increase in the number of pupils attending special schools (Shaw 2017:296), and as these numbers rise, and the government promise to allocate £6bn in funding for SEND education, the inclusion agenda must be examined to assess its success and suitability within the education system. This will be discussed in the next chapter, with the next section considering the reflexive approach to the research.

**1:6 Reflexive approach to the research.**

 *‘Reflexivity enhances the quality of research through its ability to extend our understandings of how our positions and interests as researchers affect all stages of the research process’ (Jootun, McGhee and Marland 2009:42).*

From the onset I have been open and honest about my values and beliefs concerning SEND and Special Schools, and believe that I have clearly defined and represented myself (Allen and Hancock 2016:129). It could be argued that many researchers choose to research their own fields of expertise and interest, and I feel fortunate that my participants shared to some extent, both interest, and a level of expertise through their own experiences. I am of the same opinion as Sikes (2004:37), who states that researchers sometimes have ‘privileged knowledge about their participants’, and could therefore have ‘potential power over them’. However, I feel that this situation did not occur, as the research focus fostered a shared knowledge between the researcher and the researched. However, Sikes (ibid 33), also argues that those who are researched, make their own interpretations of what’s going on, regardless of researchers intentions, a view supported by Adams (2008:188).

I believe I have been both reflexive and reflective in my research, and will ultimately be able to present my findings and interpretations with confidence (Sikes 2004:31), due in part to using a participatory approach, which encourages feedback from participants (Greenbank 2003:798). This approach also moves the relationship between myself the researcher, and the research participants, from ‘trust to trustworthiness’ (Attia and Edge 2017:41).

 Many arguments have been put forward concerning ‘value free’ research (Carr 2000, Greenbank 2003, Denzin and Lincoln 2004), and the consensus of opinion appears to conclude, that it is impossible to conduct research that is value neutral. Indeed Black (2013:763) states that research can only be made ‘value judgement’ free, not value free, and Greenbank (2003:794) argues that value neutrality is a value in itself, which has positivistic overtones and therefore indicates that within research, the researcher should be open and transparent regarding their values, whilst striving to minimise them as much as possible.

However, Black (2013:772) also argues that value judgements are an indispensable element of human life, and as such, it is very difficult not to let them influence research. Whilst I agree that research cannot be value free, as it is virtually impossible to avoid the ‘structural and cultural properties that frame reflexive deliberations’ (Dyke, Johnston, and Fuller 2012:847), I feel that I have avoided value judgements within my research. A method suggested to support this, which I endorse is to have an ‘ongoing conversation with myself’ (Berg 2009:198) in order to ensure that I continually looked both ‘inwards and outwards in respect of my positionality’ (Ahmed, Ahmed, Hundt and Blackburn 2011:468).

Nind and Todd (2014:2) put forward the notion that all research is troubled, but it is what we do with the ‘troubling bits’ that matter, and that this includes problems associated with reflexivity and positionality. I have attempted to address these aspects throughout the research process, by opening myself up as ‘one element of the phenomena to be investigated’ (Attia and Edge 2017:36), and finding a satisfactory way to ‘accommodate values’ within the research (Greenbank 2003:798). My overall aim however, is to be ‘purposeful in my decision making’ (Attia and Edge 2017:42), be ‘unremitting in self-reflection concerning how I position myself’ (Hemelsoet 2014:231), and accept that I cannot avoid having an ‘impact’ on the research process (Ahmed, Ahmed, Hundt, and Blackburn 2011:468), because as Sikes (2005:90) reminds us, ‘stories tell us as much about their authors as they do about their subjects’.

My positionality.

I am a white, female, English, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied, upper working class individual, with extensive life experiences which have shaped my values and beliefs. However, I do not believe that I am prejudiced in any way in terms of; colour/ethnicity, gender, culture, sexuality, religion, disability or class, and am optimistic that this will be evident throughout my research, although I do appreciate the difficulties of being entirely prejudice free. I do hold passionate views about education, specifically the education of pupils considered to have special educational needs and disabilities, and do find the views of some individuals/groups regarding these areas, to be both negative and untenable, in a so called ‘civilised’ western society.

However, these are my views, my beliefs, and I do not to expect others to agree with them. I do not judge people based on the judgements they make, or the values they hold, and will collect my participants’ stories with a completely open mind, and with interest. I will review literature, policies, legislation, and the views of others, with the same transparency, and will accept what I find. I have strived to ‘accommodate the values of my participants’ within the research (Greenbank 2003:798), and fully appreciate that social values may have shaped the research, and that it may expand, evolve and shift as I ‘wrestle’ with the social issues (Allen and Hancock 2016:122).

However if I am to be truly transparent, then the following must be taken into consideration: my family tree indicates I am descended from an Irish Catholic family and a Welsh Methodist family, I have an ancestor who was once incarcerated in Wakefield prison for larceny, I am able bodied apart from needing two new knees, and was brought up to believe I was upper class! I have benefited greatly from cognitive behaviour therapy, and as such need to be aware of the ‘ghost of positivism’ (Greenbank 2003:798) influencing my research.

**1:7 Policy Context around Teacher Training and Teacher Careers.**

 *The quality of an education system depends on the quality of its teachers, but the quality of teachers cannot exceed the quality of the policies that shape their work environment in school and that guide their selection, recruitment and development. (OECD 2018:20)*

This section examines current and past policies in relation to teacher training and teacher careers. My own teaching career, and that of three of my participants commenced at the time of the 1988 Education Reform Act, which Alexiadou (2002:72) believed was the ‘most radical educational reform in the 20th century’, and which ‘spawned a great debate’ relating to educational legislation (Dale and Ozga 1993:66). The main focus of this act in relation to teaching was the introduction of the National Curriculum, and National Standardised Testing for pupils at 7, 11, 14, and 16 years. My own early education had been influenced by the Plowden Report (DoE:1967) which had supported child centred education through teacher and curriculum autonomy, which was in direct contrast to the education system in which I was going to be working as a teacher.

As a consequence, my autoethnography portrays my personal struggle with the education of pupils identified as having SEND in a standards driven regime, this being a factor in my decision to embark on a career in a special school. Consecutive policies which came into being during my mainstream career did little to allay my concerns, with the Excellence in Schools Act (DfEE: 1997) stating that past policies had ‘benefited the many not the few’ and that schools generally were ‘not good at identifying and pushing the modest or poor performers, or those with special needs’ (p.25). At least two of my participants also became disillusioned with testing and being held accountable for raising standards, and believed that specialist provision would offer them more autonomy and freedom.

It is also with regret that I now realise I paid little attention to policies concerned with SEND during my mainstream career as we were encouraged to ‘let the SENCO deal with that sort of thing’ in our hectic schedule to raise standards. My own personal move to a special school coincided with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (DfES: 2001), and along with subsequent SEND policies, these became integral in my role as a teacher of SEND pupils.

More recent policies include the SEND Code of Practice (2015) which is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2 (2:8), and sets out the provision of SEND education in England and Wales, and gives schools and teachers a framework by which to ensure that the needs of pupils identified as having SEND are met. This however is only a framework, and it is the responsibility of schools to ensure that the recommendations are embedded in school policy and practice. This can bring about inconsistencies which can result in teachers from different schools experiencing different emphasis relating to SEND, with the possibility of influencing their views and beliefs including those relating to a career in specialist provision.

My own experience of this policy as a special school practioner was its ambiguity, and its failure to offer more guidance and standardisation. The introduction of EHC plans, whilst an excellent concept did not always manifest themselves as an effective tool, differing between schools and authorities. The greatest emphasis of the plans was usually education, often due to problems with inter-disciplinary communication, and this also seems to have been the case in mainstream provision.

The policy also considered post-16 education, with an emphasis on individuals identified as having SEND being prepared to enter the workforce. The special school where I taught was excellent in this area even before the introduction of the policy, and has continued to be so, but what the policy makers failed to recognise was the difficulty in finding suitable placements for these young people. This continues to be problematic, and highlights an aspect of the policy which once again was good in theory but not in practice.

Other recent policies include the Teaching and School Leadership policy (DfES: 2015) which set out four main objectives. These were: to improve standards, to improve initial teacher training, to improve continuing professional development, and to make in the words of the policy ‘the profession of teaching more attractive’. It was suggested that a move towards school led training would enhance ITT, and that evidence would be provided to teachers about ‘what works’ in order to enhance CPD. Whilst these objectives are valid, it will remain to be seen how, and if they are implemented, or could it be argued that this is more rhetoric which appears to abound within educational policy, that uses throwaway terminology such as ‘attractive’, and promises what most believe has actually been promised before.

The government White Paper Educational Excellence Everywhere (2015) proposed further enhancement of ITT and reiterated the need for more school based training. It also suggested ‘new quality criteria’ to be available to ITT providers to enhance training and support, and stated that there should be a reform of the content of ITT, to include ‘greater focus on the needs of pupils from different groups’. This has relevance to the study participant who is still training, but who reports that there is still no apparent focus around the teaching of ‘difference’, including SEND which could adversely affect future career decisions.

In 2018, after an initial consultation in 2017, the Strengthening Qualified Teacher Status and Improving Career Progression for Teachers came into force and offered three main objectives. These were: to extend NQT induction to 2 years, to introduce an Early Career Framework, and to introduce Mentor Standards for use by mentors within schools. In 2019 the Early Career Framework was launched which was designed to ‘build on and complement ITT’. It states that in the past new teachers have ‘not enjoyed the support they need to thrive’ and that the first years of teaching are where the ‘learning curve is the greatest’.

The framework offers ‘standards’ which are not to be used as an assessment tool, but set out the suggested areas that a newly qualified teacher should address. In relation to teaching pupils identified as having SEND, two standards address the following: 5:2 Seek to understand pupil differences, and 5:7 To be aware that pupils with special educational needs or disabilities are likely to require additional or adapted support. However in the latest Annual Survey of Newly Qualified Teachers (2018-2019) it was found that in a scoring system of 1 – 10, with 10 indicating a high satisfaction rate of ITT training, and 1 a poor satisfaction, 40% of participants scored ‘Assessing progress of SEND pupils’ at 6 or below, and 53% gave the same low score to ‘Ability to teach SEND pupils.

In 2019 the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy focused on endeavouring to make the profession of teaching more attractive, as proposed in the 2015 policy, and stated the policy intentions as: to reform bursaries, to roll out the ‘Discover Teaching’ initiative, which aims to offer ‘authentic teaching experiences’ to those considering the profession, and introducing a ‘one-stop’ application process for all ITT courses, irrespective on the type and location. These policy positions in relation to the training, recruitment, and retention of teachers at the time of writing, reflect a positive and much needed change, and it remains to be seen how these will affect some of the points raised in this research study, appertaining to the three aspects above.

**1:8 Structure of the thesis.**

Following this introduction, I will undertake a review of the literature associated with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities as a contextual setting for the research focus. How the term is defined and identified will be discussed, with a specific focus on the role of the media within this process, and examine the terminology and categorisation of those identified as having SEND. The history of SEND education will then be considered, leading to current policy and legislation, including the levers and drivers which are attributed to these. Different models of disability will then be considered, with emphasis on how these models can have an impact on SEND education. Inclusion, relating to all aspects of education will be then be deliberated, in order to assess whether inclusion is a reality, or a ‘linguistic adjustment to present a politically correct façade to a changing world’ (Clark, Dyson and Millward 1998:131). Teacher’s experiences of working in SEND settings and contexts will then be discussed, followed by an overview of teachers career decisions related to their views, beliefs and values in SEND. The review will conclude by reflecting on teacher training and continuing professional development in the context of SEND, and the recruitment and retention of teachers, specifically within special schools.

The next chapter relating to methodology, will examine the reasons why life history was chosen, examine the critiques of this approach, and discuss the ethical considerations associated with it. The concept of autoethnography will be discussed, along with its role within the research, which will lead to a precis of the stories of two young adults who self-identify as having SEND.

The following chapter will relate to the presentation of findings, the process of the research and will introduce the research participants followed by their stories which have been categorised into themes relating to different life phases. The chapter concerning analysis of data will once again use the related themes in order to identify life experiences that reoccur across the lives of the participants, and includes the theory I perceive to be grounded in the stories and experiences.

The thesis will conclude by revisiting the initial objectives, and summarising the findings in line with these objectives. The initial views, the research process, ethics and reflexivity, methodology and literature will all be considered, leading to the research findings. The implications for policy and practice and the contribution to knowledge, along with the opportunities for further research will be followed by the implications for the future in special education. The limitations of the study will then be considered, concluding with an overall summary of the thesis.

**Chapter 2.**

 **Literature Review.**

2:1 Introduction.

The aim of the literature review is to provide a context for discussing teacher careers in special education, and to achieve this the following will be included in this chapter. Initially the literature appertaining to special educational needs, and subsequently the role of special schools will be reviewed and discussed, followed by the challenge of defining Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This will then lead to a discussion on the process within education, which recognises pupils who are identified as having SEND.

An investigation into the historical changes of the educational provision for children identified as having SEND, will consider policies and legislation over time. This leads to the terminology used to describe individuals identified as having SEND, including the negative connotations of labelling and categorisation. Inclusion as a concept will then be discussed in terms of how it is defined and how it translates into practice for pupils identified as having SEND, followed by an exploration of the models of disability. The role of the media as a lens in which to view societal views relating to SEND will be considered, leading to current legislation which will consider the levers and drivers of SEND education.

Teacher identity, initial teacher training and continuing professional development of SEND teachers in both mainstream and special schools will be considered, alongside legislation and policy formation. This will be followed by teacher’s experiences of working in SEND contexts and settings, and the career decisions of teachers related to their views, beliefs and values in SEND. Recruitment and retention of SEND teachers, within the present problematic climate of the recruitment and retention of teachers across all spheres of education, will also be examined. Consideration will also be given to how the identification, placement and status of individuals identified as having SEND are socially constructed, which supports the view that individuals are not disabled by impairments but by the disabling barriers of society.

2:2 Definition and Identification – What do we mean by Special Educational Needs and Disabilities?

 *‘I’m not disabled, I’m differently abled’ – A 14 year old pupil in a special school.*

Whilst those identified as having a special need or disability may have their own definition of their personal circumstances, it is the ‘official’ definition of SEND which regulates the education system. The Special Needs and Disability Policy (2015) which was subsequently followed by the SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 (2015), defines SEND as follows:

 *‘A young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her’ and if they have ‘significantly greater difficulties in learning than the majority of others of the same age’ (p16).*

It also identifies pupils identified as having SEND as having one or more of the following difficulties; ‘communication and interaction, cognition and learning, social, mental and emotional health, sensory and/or physical needs’ (p18). The aims of the 2015 policy were to ensure that children identified as having SEND had the same opportunities as everyone else by improving support, ensuring that all schools including academies and free schools adhered to the policy, and that young people identified as having SEND were prepared for adult life outside the education system.

However, after nationwide protests which took place on 30th May 2019 concerning the crisis in SEND funding, the Children and Families Minister, Nadhim Zahawi issued a statement in which the government indicated they would be ‘revising the SEND Code of Practice to improve ways to identify and meet special educational needs’. It will be of interest to foresee these ‘revisions’ and how they are translated into practice, if funding is forthcoming, and if the ‘discourse of diagnosis’ as a ‘dominant structural issue in schools’ (Oskasdottir, Guojonsdottir, and Tidwell 2019:48) is challenged.

For individuals wishing to seek a definition of the term ‘Special Educational Needs’, their first port of call for accessing information tends to be the internet. However an internet search does little to clarify the concept, with definitions ranging from ‘People with special needs are people who need special help or extra care’ (Collins Dictionary 2017) to ‘Religion is not a special need’ (Kidzaware 2017). It is the view of Mauro (2017) that a definition is difficult to construct as the term special needs is an ‘umbrella term for a staggering array of diagnosis’ that could include a spectrum of difficulties ranging from ‘profound cognitive impairment to food allergies’ and usually indicates what a child identified as having SEND cannot do rather than what they can.

Research carried out with secondary PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) students into what they understood by the term ‘special educational needs’ (Pearson 2005:20) identified the top three responses as being; dyslexia, behaviour, and learning difficulties, with some students actually using ‘offensive’ labels to describe those identified as having SEND. It was also found that most students linked their perceptions of SEND to their past experiences, often reflecting a medical segregated model.

There are many proposed definitions, but a lack of a consensus leading to an accepted overall definition, with Currie and Khan (2012:3) describing a special need as ‘an environmentally contextualised health related limitation in a child’s existing or emergent capacity to perform developmentally appropriate activities and participate if desired in society’, but do add that it is remarkably difficult to point to a ‘consensus of a definition’. This view is also supported by Vehmas (2010:88) who argues that the concept of special needs ‘has never been defined satisfactorily’, and is often used as a ‘euphemism for the terms deviant and disabled’, with Wilson (2002:89) offering the view that many who use the term, do so with the impression that everyone already knows what a special need is, as a definition is ‘conspicuous in its absence’.

 Both Wilson and Vehmas believe the term is a value judgement, which can vary across societies, and centres on defining what are the necessary skills and abilities needed in a society, e.g. the ability to read and write, and how we label individuals who are unable, for whatever reason, to attain them, once again centring on what an individual defined as having SEND, cannot do, rather than what they can.

Studies which have examined the terminology used to define SEND include Fredrickson and Cline (2009:5) who consider the fact that as ‘society becomes more heterogeneous, terms to describe diversity, including special needs change’, but that ‘fruitless debates between theorists and practitioners who adopt incompatible terminology, cannot engage in meaningful dialogue which could result in an agreed definition’. This argument is also the focus of other studies including Norwich and Warnock (2010:2) who define special needs as, ‘needs requiring provision which is additional to, and different from, provision on average available from a mainstream school’, but criticise the fact that the term special needs is often used to refer to children with very different conditions and needs, as if they were all the same. They also argue the usefulness of the term in relation to identifying and describing a child’s difficulties, whilst Runswick-Cole and Hodge (2009:201) believes the term has come to ‘sustain and construct exclusionary practices within education’, and that the terms special and need should be replaced by ‘educational rights’.

Considering definitions which take the view that disability is socially constructed include Beveridge (1999:2) who views the concept of special needs as being ‘socially constructed, and influenced by the child’s progress and political and economic concerns’. OCED (2000) and Rotatori (2014) have the view that any definition has its roots in resource allocation, which it could be argued is a purely economic interpretation.

Norwich (2013:43) reports that the Warnock Report (DES:1978) was interpreted by many as ‘abandoning categories and definitions’, when in reality disability specific categories and definitions were replaced with the general category of special needs, making it abundantly clear that there is no one view of what is meant by the term, as previously discussed. The views offered, relating to seeking a consensus of definition of SEND mirror my own, as I strived to produce a personal definition, and it is my personal view that a definition which reflects a positive outcome for individuals identified as having SEND should be sought in order to diminish the process of othering.

How we define the term ‘special’ very much depends on the context within which it is used, but within the term ‘Special Educational Needs’ the emphasis is very much on distinguishing between those who are encompassed by this term, and the ‘others’, the ‘normal’ ones. Ideally, the term should be used in a generic manner, taking into account the fact that ‘everyone has needs that can develop and change over time, and that these needs may require support’ (Garguilo 2012:1).

Wall (2011:1) believes that these needs do not require the term ‘special’ to be applied, as it is just ‘part of being human’, and this is supported by Altenbaugh (2006:716) who argues that the ‘others’, those without the SEND label are actually only ‘temporarily non-disabled’, and so applying the term becomes meaningless. Whilst Runswick-Cole (2011:115) puts forward the view that we live in an ‘ableist’ society, and as such there is a necessity to ‘hunt down and name disability in order to maintain ableism’.

The vulnerability and stigmatisation of those identified as having SEND are considered by Magnusson (2016:157) who states that special education is an ‘artefact of the inability of education as a whole, to adapt to the diversity of needs among its clients’. The Warnock Report (1978) informed us of the fact that 20% of pupils at any one time have special needs, with 2% requiring support over and above what a mainstream school could usually provide without additional resources and trained staff. Ellis and Todd (2014:205) believe that pupils identified as having SEND are only one of the vulnerable groups that teachers now encounter within the classroom, an argument supported by Dyson and Gallannaugh (2008:42) who identify others such as ethnic groups, which can include Irish travellers and Roma gypsies, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Locke (1994:38) supports the view that most pupils identified as having SEND have the same hopes and expectations as any child, but as Powell (2006:578) argues, this can be thwarted by ‘stigmatisation and discrimination’, brought about by the different educational opportunities legitimately offered to those with or without the SEND label. The term ‘special’ is sometimes used as a solution to rectify this anomaly (Rix, Sheehy, Fletcher-Campbell, Crisp and Harper 2013:383), an argument supported by Parekh and Brown (2019:111) who believe that the special education system is ‘vulnerable to, and complicit in racial, class and disability segregation’.

Understanding special education is, according to Armstrong (2003:8) dependent on how the ‘social practices that construct it are interpreted in one way rather than another’, and questions why we believe that children’s needs exist independently from their social contexts. It is argued that special education is the ‘construction and management of difference’ (Thomas and Loxley 2001:76) and that to be called special is to be given a new identity within the educational system, and indeed society as a whole. How special educational needs and disabilities are recognised and defined by a society can be attributed to a myriad of reasons, many of which will be identified and discussed later in the study in relation to the life experiences of the participants.

However, this study would not exist if there was not a group termed as special needs, and as such I will offer a working definition, albeit against my personal views and beliefs which I discussed in the previous chapter (1:2). I would offer the definition as*;*

 *Individuals or groups requiring provision in a form beneficial to their personal circumstances in order for them to fulfil their potential within society.*

I would also argue that this definition could be attributed to any individual, who for whatever reason falls into the category of ‘difference’, e.g. minority groups as discussed in the previous chapter.

There is a view that pupils identified as being gifted and talented have a special need with Bloom (2014:14) stating that ‘high intelligence is a special need’ and that gifted and talented pupils should have the same individual attention as those identified as having SEND. This view is supported by Palak, Kirenko, Gindrich, Kazanowski and Pielecki (2009:39) whose research with trainee special needs teachers concluded that the most efficient teachers of talented and gifted pupils were those trained to teach pupils identified as having SEND. The justification for this view was that these teachers were more proficient at identifying needs, they had a wider knowledge base, they were able to differentiate and use different methods, and they displayed a readiness to teach those that were different.

Research has highlighted the fact that teachers of the gifted and talented do not fully understand the related terminology of this group, a situation which is common to special needs teachers (Thomas and Loxley 2001:76, Norwich 2014:65, Karten 2017:2017:2), and it has also been found that just as with the teachers of those identified as having special needs, the teachers of the gifted and talented have an aversion to labelling their pupils (Casey and Koshy 2013:51, Reis and McCoach 2002:14), However, Parekh and Brown (2019:130) found that the gifted and talented were ‘disproportionately overrepresented by white wealthy students’ a situation not commonly found in special education. In terms of this study those pupils identified as gifted and talented will not be included, albeit they could be classed as an ‘elite special education’ group (Dyson 2008:60).

To conclude, I will quote a young adult, speaking on social media on World Autism Awareness day (2/4/19), who has been identified as having a number of needs including autism. It highlights the fact that all needs are different, and so to define a ‘group’ is almost impossible, as discussed in the section relating to definition.

 *‘There are a lot of misconceptions about autism, people have a strange belief we are all uniform. I have met a lot of autistic people in my life and not one of them has identical traits to me or anyone else I’ve known. People just assume that we are all like Dustin Hoffman in Rain Man’.*

Could it be argued that now is the time to replace ‘definition’ with ‘understanding’, and by doing so eradicate blanket definitions, and appreciate individuals for who and what they are, not just in terms of differences? Teachers are tasked with making decisions about their pupils on a daily basis across many aspects, with the identification and definition of needs being one. The majority of teachers employ resourcefulness in order to undertake this vital role, and it could be argued that their emphasis is on understanding the pupils not defining them, and that applying definitions to certain groups and individuals is purely a statutory obligation which has to be undertaken. The next section will consider the historical aspects of special education.

2:3 Changes over time in SEND education.

*‘Modern day special educational provision is a result of its own history – a history that was shaped by the dominant societal values, beliefs and ideologies of the time’. (Hodkinson and Vickerman 2009:55.)*

Special Education as a concept is a ‘product of modernity’ (Armstrong 2003:8), and before the Industrial Revolution did not exist, nor needed to exist as children identified as having SEND were looked after by their families or the church, with very early specialist provision being ‘protective places for the children of the wealthy’ (Hodkinson and Vickerman 2009: 55). However, those individuals classed as disabled, ill, handicapped or insane, did receive care, but this care was often judged harsh or inhuman by the ‘moral standards’ of today (Armstrong ibid 56). This brief timeline of the emergence of SEND education in the UK, whilst not able to cover the multiplicity of the major changes which have had an impact on special needs provision, does serve to offer an overview.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Date |  |
| Late 1700’s to Early 1800’sIndustrial Revolution. | Rapid industrialisation required an able workforce. Those unable to work due to disability, ill health etc. became a burden on society, ‘social misfits’, who were confined to ‘institutions’ run by charitable groups more than often attached to religious groups.  |
| 1760 | Opening of the first school for children with visual impairments. |
| 1851 | Opening of the first Church school for children with physical impairments.  |
| 1870 | The ‘Forster Act’ – the introduction of the Elementary Education Act, which promised ‘education for all’.  |
| 1874 | The London School Board open a class attached to a state school for children with hearing impairments. |
| 1893 | The ‘Blind and Deaf Children’s Act’ provides education in England and Wales for children with sensory impairments. |
| 1899 | The ‘Defective and Epileptic Children’s Act’ require school boards to provide education for children who have disabilities and needs other than sensory impairments. |
| 1921 | Education Act which constitutes 5 categories for the assessment of handicapped children.  |
| 1944 | The ‘Butler Education Act’ requires all local education authorities to meet the ‘needs’ of handicapped children. |
| 1945 | The ‘Handicapped Pupils and School Health Service’ establish 11 categories for the assessment of handicapped children. |
| 1978 | The ‘Warnock Report’ introduces the term ‘Special Educational Needs’.  |
| 1981 | Introduction of the ‘Statement of Special Educational Needs’, and the beginning of a more inclusive approach to the placement of children with Special Educational Needs.  |
| 2001 | The ‘Code of Practice’ for Special Educational Needs introduced. |
| 2014 | The ‘Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities’ was introduced to support children and young people from birth to 25 years, involving multi-disciplinary agencies.  |

This table is not an exhaustive overview of all the changes in SEND education, but does serve to highlight some of the significant points, which will now be discussed. Although the above table begins at the time of the Industrial Revolution, historical conceptions of disability pre-date this, and the literature of Ancient Rome and Greece, illustrate how negative conceptions of people with impairments were perpetuated (Borsay:2005). Indeed in the Bible (Leviticus Chapter1 verses 17-20) there is a call for people with visual and physical impairments to be excluded from offering bread in the temple.

 In Medieval times the severely handicapped were cared for by religious communities, with ‘insanity’ and ‘idiocy’ being art of everyday life (Foucault 1967). The 15th century saw the disabled and the poor becoming the object of treatment and management, but also saw two distinct groups evolving - the ‘deserving’ and the ‘undeserving’ (Armstrong 2003:10, Silvers 1995:31), a distinction which it could be argued, still exists today.

The Industrial Revolution relied heavily on an ‘able’ workforce, and those unable to join this workforce due to a special need or disability became ‘social’ misfits, with a rapid growth of charitable organisations created by the wealthier individuals in society to provide aid for these people. Armstrong (2002:438) states that the history of special needs is viewed in terms of the ‘benefits it brought to developing industrial society’, with children with needs and disabilities being categorised by a deficit model. This is highlighted by Read and Walmsley (2006:456) who refer to a school report of 1870 which describe these children as ‘unclad, filthy, exhausted, and disabled’, although this description could possibly have been attributed to many of the poorer children of the time.

The few ‘special schools’ that did exist in the 18th century were charitable, with most run by various church denominations, and rather than caring, the ethos became that of segregating and ‘sheltering’ children with SEND, with emphasis on subjects such as ‘weaving, spinning and basket making’ (Hodkinson and Vickerman 2009:57). There was also an emphasis on the ‘manual rather than the academic’, being for the ‘good of the child’ (Read and Walmsley 2006:460), whilst Humphries and Gordon (1992:454) discuss the fact that in the early 19th century it was assumed that physical disability denoted intellectual impairment, and that it was often associated with the shame and stigma of pauperism, (Corbett 1996:12). It could be argued that these assumptions are still held in the 21st century (O’Connor and Fernandez 2006, Polat 2011), which unfortunately can affect the views of present day society, and ultimately teachers, who may have concerns relating to special education, which precludes them from considering it as a career.

 However, there was one positive aspect that emerged in the 18th century, and that was the close cooperation that evolved between medical and educational authorities in the setting up and running of ‘open air’ schools for children with tuberculosis, a model which saw the children usually confined to bed, but brought outdoors in most weathers in the hope that this would go some way towards a ‘cure’.

The asylum also became pivotal at this point in history, as a ‘solution’ to the placement of children identified as having SEND, as it colluded with the predominant ideology that ‘disabled children, particularly disabled children with learning difficulties, are of less value than non-disabled children’ (Armstrong 2003:23). It was primarily a way of ‘managing’ these children, rather than educating them with the emphasis on ‘control, discipline, training, religion, and productivity’ (Armstrong 2002:440).

 In 1899 school boards employed medical officers to carry out intelligence tests on the ‘feeble minded’. A score of 100 or above rendered a child as ‘normal’ a score of 75 to 50 indicated they were ‘morons’, a score of 50 to 25 indicated they were ‘imbiciles’, and a score below 25 led to the label ‘idiot’, and it was agreed by a Royal Commission that ‘imbiciles’ and ‘morons’ should not remain in asylums but could enter formal schooling.

The 1899 Act formalised the segregation of children identified as having SEND, with a rapid expansion of segregated special schools coming into being, based on the belief that children identified as having SEND were ‘different’, and could be ‘categorised according to their difficulties’ (Hodkinson and Vickerman 2009:61). However it could be argued that not very much has changed over the last 100 years in the placement of children identified as having SEND, and that segregation is still the norm, encapsulating positive and negative connotation. The Education Act of 1921 witnessed the beginnings of the recognition and provision of children with behavioural difficulties, albeit the fact that these were classed as a ‘mental handicap’, and the emphasis on recognition was the domain of the medical profession.

By 1944 the ‘Butler’ Education Act stated that local authorities must secure provision for pupils who ‘suffer’ from any disability of mind and body, and 11 categories of ‘handicap’ were identified. These were: ‘blind, partially sighted, deaf, partially deaf, delicate, diabetic, educationally sub-normal, epileptic, maladjusted, physically handicapped and children with speech defects’. These categories reinforced the medical model of disability and focused on ‘pathology rather than normality, sickness rather than well-being’ (Norwich and Lewis 2007:45). This act also witnessed the expansion of the identification of children with special needs, with 15,173 children being recognised as being educationally subnormal in 1950, rising to 66,838 in 1976, due according to Armstrong (2003:80), ‘the optimism of the post war period bringing about greater tolerance for difference’.

The Warnock Report completed in 1978 put forward 225 recommendations, the major conclusions being as follows:

 *Categories of handicap to be replaced by a continuum of special needs, these needs to be judged by multi professionals and recorded, and descriptions of special educational needs to be undertaken by employing new terminology e.g. visual difficulties rather than blind or partially sighted.*

However, the overriding message was that a child with special needs should be educated in a mainstream school through a continuum of integrated provision. The Act also estimated that as many as 20% of children during their time at school could experience a special educational need, which would necessitate additional educational provision, and that 2% of all children would have an educational need so severe that they would require a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

The 1981 Education Act translated many of these recommendations into legislation, but without a lead from central government it was local education authorities who were charged with translating policy into practice. This resulted in a fragmented system with the inclusion of pupils identified as having SEND in mainstream provision, varying greatly from school to school, with access to mainstream education on the ‘schools terms and not the child’s’ (Hodkinson and Vickerman 2009:71), and with a reliance on teachers to make the system succeed.

This act did however introduce the notion of a ‘Statement of Special Educational Needs’, which was a legal document compiled by teachers and other professionals working with the child, which set out the child’s needs, and the provision required to meet these needs. This provision however could vary between education authorities in different areas, often due to economic restrictions which resulted in the shortage of professionals such as Educational Psychologists.

Economic restrictions also effect the compilation and execution of Education and Health Care plans (EHC plans), with Tickle (2017) stating that this undertaking is an ‘expensive line on a head teacher’s spreadsheet’. At the present time schools must meet the first £6000 of any extra support, with many schools finding this economically difficult due to present education cuts.

The Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (2001) strengthened the rights of children identified as having SEND to be educated in a mainstream school, and this could only be challenged if the placement was incompatible with the wishes of the parents, or the placement would affect the efficient education of other children. However, the ‘Salamanca Statement’ which brought inclusion to the fore, and was a result of the World Conference in Special Education in 1994, which took place in Salamanca, Spain, and was attended by 25 international organisations and 92 governments. It called for inclusion to become the norm, and stated that schools should assist pupils identified as having SEND to be ‘economically active, and to provide them with the skills needed in everyday life’, in order that they be able to ‘respond to the social and communication demands of adult life’.

The notion of inclusion, which will be discussed in greater depth later in the study, continues to dominate the SEND agenda, and Armstrong (2003:120) supports the view that ‘educational equality and inclusion have continued to take centre stage’ even when educational policy has moved in a ‘very different direction’. The argument that inclusive education also holds challenges for teachers and pupils is supported by Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009:88), and will also be revisited in the discussion relating to teacher training and continuing professional development, as will the views of Kauffman (2014:78) who states that if inclusion means educating all children with disabilities in general education, ‘then we have lost the very concept of special education’.

The SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015) was created after the Green paper ‘Support and Aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability’ (2011), and was formulated after the government had supposedly sought the views of all those with an interest in SEND. In reality no children or young people identified as having SEND were consulted, and Robertson (2012:79) claimed that the paper raised the ‘questionable assertion’ that the current SEND system was ‘dysfunctional in every way’. The notion of the term SEND being inconsistently used within the code was supported by Ellis and Todd (2012:61 ) and Norwich (2014:420), with other terms such as ‘talented’ being used without any definition.

The code gave an assurance that the SEND system would become more ‘effective, transparent and accountable’, and that children identified as having SEND needed integrated services that were coordinated across education, health and social care. This notion was of course promised in ‘Every Child Matters’ (HMSO:2003), and supports the view of Norwich (2014:421 ) who believes that new policies relating to SEND, do not build on what is already known, and that collaborative and inter connected provision is only found in ‘small pockets’ (Rix, Sheehy, Fletcher-Campbell, Crisp and Harper 2013:388).

 It would seem therefore that in the field of SEND we may have to accept that policy formation is a ‘continuous cycle, production and reproduction’ (Gale 1999:399) and that a move towards policy makers working directly with SEND researchers (Armstrong 2014:739), practioners, and those living with SEND is the ‘only true way forward’, whilst appreciating that policies do not enter a ‘social vacuum’, and enter ‘existing patterns of inequality’ (Ball 1993:15).

To conclude, it could be argued that individuals with disabilities and differences have been largely ‘ignored and are underrepresented’ (Armstrong 2007:552), in the context of educational history, due to them being ‘dis-passive members of society’ (Altenbaugh 2006:715). Indeed the history of SEND education is mainly written by the ‘professional voice’ (Armstrong 2007:563, Armstrong 2003:20), with the voices of individuals identified as having SEND suffering ‘the silences in history’ (Armstrong 2002:440), whilst Farrell (2001:3) believes that ‘only those who live on another planet’ could have failed to notice the more recent changes to policy and practice in SEND education, but asks the question ‘Have things really got better?

Mostert and Crockett (2000:133) and Dyson (2001:25) maintain that historically, ineffective interventions in SEND persist with ‘cyclical regularity’, and SEND education is ‘littered with failed attempts to educate children identified as having SEND’, due to the fact that ‘battles’ won in the past have to be re-fought today. This view is discussed by Kauffman (2014:66) who agrees that some issues in special education are perpetual, and argues that we don’t have to make the ‘same mistakes over and over’, and that special education has ‘needlessly and sometimes unwittingly gouged itself’, and now seems to ‘threaten its own life’ (ibid 86), which is not a context in which to attract teachers.

Indeed many take a pessimistic view of the development of SEND education over time, arguing that if changes are ‘inherently flawed and fated to disappear, why make changes at all’ (Dyson 2001:28). It is also argued that the whole concept of SEND has been conceptualised in less enlightened times through ‘superstitions, myths and beliefs’ (Kenworthy and Whittaker 2000:211), along with the ‘remnants of tradition’ (Munyi 2012), with the notion that any progress made has ensued from ongoing struggles (Dyson 2001:24), rather than ‘peaceful intent’. This situation reflects a very negative view of SEND education, one which could deter prospective teachers from entering the profession, and if ITT and CPD do offer SEND input, it is crucial that views such as these are balanced.

 Research carried out by Shah, Wallis, Conor, and Kiszely (2015:267) explored the notion of bringing disability history alive in schools, as today’s children are tomorrow’s policy makers. They believe that throughout history non-disabled children have been ‘exposed to different cultural scripts’, that represent those with a disability as the ‘others’, the ‘abnormal,’ and that these views need to be challenged. This illustrates the effects of the turbulent history of SEND education over the years, which has left its legacy, and which will be explored through other aspects in the study. A discussion relating to the terminology and the categorisation used in the field of SEND education, and within society now follows.

2:4 The Terminology and Categorisation of SEND

 *‘The language of special needs has to change and become subverted by those who have been oppressed by it’ – Corbett (1996:5)*

The terminology and categorisation associated with individuals identified as having SEND often results in the assigning of a label, which usually reflects the condition rather than the individual. This label can carry a stigma which could negatively affect that individual within society, and it is vital that children are treated as individuals even if they ‘share’ a label (Karten 2017:2). It is unfortunate that over the years negative terms have been assigned to those identified as having SEND, with hate crime against disabled children reported as rising.

This fact is supported by MENCAP (2017) who state that children identified as having special needs are twice as likely to be bullied than those without identified needs, and that the majority of the bullying was ‘name calling’ and ‘derogatory remarks’, delivered both face to face and by social media. The Home Office commented that this rise was due to a better reporting system and more victims coming forward, but the fact remains that negative terminology is still prevalent in today’s society, and in 2018 it was reported that the highest rate of disability hate crime in the UK was West Yorkshire, the area where 90% of this research has taken place.

Ellis and Todd (2012:60) argue that terminology associated with SEND is open to interpretation, and that even the 2015 Code of Practice reflects a negative medical model of SEND. Norwich (2014:420) argues that there are ongoing inconsistencies with both the term and concept of SEND, an argument supported by Terzi (2005) and Frederickson and Cline (2002). An absence of agreement on what constitutes ‘special education’ is, it could be argued, a pivotal stumbling block in discourses relating to this area, with the deficit model being heavily drawn upon.

 Powell (2006:579) identifies special educational needs as ‘institutionalised cultural value judgements’ made about behaviour, intellectual functioning and health, that manifest themselves as ‘human differences that require support’. He goes on to argue that SEND categories ‘imply deviance from social norms’ (ibid 580) and that the ‘segregation of those identified as having SEND is part of the policies and praxis’ in most western countries (ibid 584), with the risk of segregation a factor which can also influence teachers, who believe that they too may be classed as ‘different’ if they choose a special school career.

The ‘language of special needs has always been composed of ‘words and images that foster fear, mistrust, loathing and hostility’ (Corbett 1996:3), and this is apparent in the section which considers the history of SEND education. Indeed in the 1970s special schools were expressed in terms such as ‘dumping ground, sin-bin, shitty work, and baby minding’ (ibid: 9). It is also unfortunate that some terms to describe SEND are taken from negative terminology, with ‘handicapped’ evolving from ‘cap in hand’ signifying poverty and fragility (todayifoundit.com 2018), and invalid from ‘in valid’, associated with not being valid in society, and is derived from the Latin for ‘not strong’ (disabledfemenists.com 2018). Looking to the future in her 1996 text, Corbett believed that the ‘politically correct’ language associated with special needs in 1996, would appear insensitive and inappropriate by 2010. However it could be argued that in the present day this language prevails, and has proliferated and become more insensitive and inappropriate.

Terminology associated with labelling is a cause for concern discussed by many including Vehmas (2010:92) who puts forward the idea that the ‘language of special needs’ should be abolished, while Lauchlan and Boyle (2007:40) state that those identified as having SEND have the same problems ‘whether or not they are labelled’. Mukuria and Bakken (2009:104) philosophically agree that the peers of individuals identified as having SEND notice ‘differences’, whether or not the individuals are labelled, and come to the consensus that if labels are to be assigned to individuals identified as having SEND, then they should be assigned ‘professionally, cautiously and with common sense’, a notion supported by Mouzakitis (2010:4027) who believes that if labels are used, they should support those who have been labelled, to understand themselves and raise their self-esteem.

Metzger, Simpson and Bakken (2010:27) argue that assigning a label can bring about a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy which can lead to social stigma’, and that as misidentification is a shortcoming of special needs education, some can carry the label and associated stigma needlessly, with Lauchlan and Boyle (2007:38) arguing that a label is difficult to escape. This is supported by Taylor, Hume and Welsh (2010:192) whose research led them to believe that the negative connotation of a label leads to low self-esteem, which in turn leads to inadequacy and frustration, often resulting in the development of behavioural difficulties, so compounding the original need.

Connor and Stalker (2007:30) examine the notion that there is no adequate language of SEND, which not only enables those who attribute the labels to come to a consensus of understanding, but also allows those identified as having SEND to discuss their own needs with both their peers and those who have not been assigned the label. Taylor, Hume and Welsh (2010:195) expand this notion and believe that many children identified as having SEND do not have the skills to verbalise or understand the label they have been assigned, which can lead to further difficulties.

The difficulties of reaching a consensus of opinion of a definition as previously discussed is argued by Pirrie and Head (2007:1) who believe that all children are special in some way, whilst Mouzakitis (2010:4030) suggests the use of the term ‘child deserving special care’, as he believes that this does not carry a negative connotation, however this could be misinterpreted as being condescending, and could demoralise teachers if they were viewed as carers. Lauchlan and Boyle (2007:38) argue that there is no one single definition accepted by everyone, or even by a majority of people, once again reiterating the on-going argument, with Metzger, Simpson and Bakker (2010:20) stating that those individuals not involved with SEND education were shocked to find that there was not a consensus of opinion amongst professionals on the identification and terminology of SEND.

Confusion of terms is discussed by Keil, Miller and Cobb (2006:171) who believe labels are a concept of remediation rather than empowerment, and that there is confusion between the terms used. Norwich (2014:61) puts forward the theory of a ‘dilemma of difference’, in other words whether to recognise and respond, or whether not to recognise and respond to difference. He believes that the dilemma of difference in respect of disability is dependent on three aspects, these being: identification – whether to identify children as having a disability/difficulty relevant to education, or not, Curriculum – whether to provide a common curriculum to all children, or not, and placement – to what extent children with more severe disabilities/difficulties will learn in ordinary or general school or classes, or not. These dilemmas can be identified in inclusive practices which are explored in the next section.

2:5 Inclusion

 *‘Inclusion – desirable in principle, challenging in practice’ (Shaw 2017:305).*

In 1978 the integrated system of inclusion was legitimised by Warnock, followed by the Salamanca Agreement (1994), and the 1981 Education Act. At this time the term inclusion became government rhetoric, and gained status in schools, and across the media, with the New Labour government of 1997 viewing it as a political process in their bid for equality. However Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009:75) believe that this government were confused as to the definition of inclusion, whilst Sikes, Lawson and Parker (2007:365) perceive it to be ‘hazily defined by government publications’ leading to Thomas (2009:10) remarking that children identified as having SEND were being used as ‘political footballs’ at this time.

The most recent Code of Practice (2015) promised ‘inclusion for all’ but the Global Disability Summit (2018) believe that many governments consider investment in inclusive education ‘costly’, and it could be argued that we are still a long way from a fully inclusive education system, with the ‘goal being to prepare teachers and leaders to work with diverse groups of students and to plan teaching and pedagogy that will ensure quality education for all’ (Oskasdottir, Guojonsdottir, and Tidwell 2019:53) .

The term inclusion is similar to the term special educational needs and disabilities, when it comes to seeking a definition which is clear, concise, and can be used to offer a definitive starting point for the development of inclusive practice. Arduin (2015:115) regards inclusion and special education, as an ‘island’ separated from mainstream education, with ‘normality being naturalised’ in education, a situation which does little to attract teachers to special education.

 Florian (2014:293) puts forward the argument that inclusion is ‘contextual’ and takes on different forms in different places, and that the lack of a clear definition can result in inclusive education ‘promising more than it delivers’. Lewis and Norwich (2005: xi) state that ‘inclusive education is about more than integration’, and is more about ‘developing an education system which is equity driven, and where diversity is welcomed’, with Glazzard (2013:186) believing that ‘inclusion for the purpose of equity and social justice demands a proactive response at political rather than pedagogical level’. However Slee (2011:153) has the view that ‘in many renditions of inclusive education strong indicators reveal an inauthentic engagement with the aspirations for social reconstruction’ which were at the heart of the original inclusive project.

The discussions relating to the pursuit of a definition for those identified as having SEND, is mirrored in the search for concise definition of inclusion with Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009:76) stating that there is a ‘plethora’ of definitions, but that inclusion is a concept beyond a single definition. Hodkinson (2011:182) argues that inclusion is not a ‘summative measurable entity’, and defines it as an ‘unequal, complex, ideological construct’ which legitimises the process of the ‘subordination of vulnerable groups’.

 Whilst pupils identified as having SEND are subject to increasing intervention and segregation in order to ‘normalise’ them (Dunne 2009:44), Armstrong (2005:147) has the view that ‘inclusion is a normative concept, colonised under the banner of academic opportunity and high standards for all’ and serves to ‘normalise the values of individual responsibility for individual achievement’, albeit an unattainable concept without the knowledge and support of teachers.

Inclusion for many is concerned with where a child is educated rather than how, and Runswick-Cole (2011:113) states that although inclusive education is ‘conceptualised as being more about where a child is educated, it should be concerned with education for all’, in order that an inclusive approach can benefit wider society. Hodkinson (2011:181) who identifies this as ‘locational inclusion’, believes that the focus should not be on where education takes place, but on the pedagogy and curriculum. , and Christle (2018:809) argues that the focus should be on learning outcomes, not with, where, or with whom, pupils identified as having SEND learn, with Slee (2011: 160) believing that the ‘attempts to fabricate inclusive education by grafting special education onto the regular school have produced little more than a bifurcated system of sponsored and marginal pupils.

It is unfortunate that two of the government’s agendas, the inclusion agenda and the standards agenda, have made ‘uneasy bedfellows’ (Runswick-Cole 2011:116), with accountability and the raising of standards not compatible with the inclusion of pupils, who may disrupt the status quo. Runswick-Cole states that children identified as SEND must ‘fit in and not disrupt the education of the majority’, whilst Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009:83) express the view that systems of accountability are the ‘most serious challenge’ that inclusive education has faced.

 In terms of policy formation, Fulcher (1989:3) believes that ‘policies fail’ because ‘the system of education fails to meet all students needs’, whilst Slee (2011:100) states the policies are not ‘detached, neutral or benign’ but are ‘constituents of, and agents for, ways of understanding, maintaining, or changing our world’, and that inclusion needs to be ‘de-coupled’ from special education, in order to motivate general education reform and policy formulation.

The outcome of the tension between these two agendas, is often the exclusion of pupils identified as having SEND, which prompted this statement from the House of Commons;

*‘An unfortunate and unintended consequence of the Government’s strong focus on school standards has led to school environments and practices that have resulted in disadvantaged children being disproportionately excluded’. (House of Commons, Education Committee 2018).*

This concept of removing pupils from school rolls including those identified as having SEND, has been assigned the term ‘off rolling’, which OFTED (2019:12) state should ‘not be allowed within schools’, and a government backed review has stated that schools will be required to remain accountable for any pupils they exclude, and will be required to publish their results. It is hoped that this will reduce the number of excluded as ‘exclusion from school should never mean exclusion from education’ (Timpson: 2019).

The Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (2018) offer several reasons why inclusion should take place, examples being: to value some people more than others is unethical, thinking that inclusion only concerns SEND is misleading, perceiving inclusive education as a separate issue from inclusion in society is illogical, and segregated schooling for those with disabilities violates the basic human right of the right to education without discrimination. However Reindal (2016:5) states that there is ‘no consensus as to how inclusive practices should be converted to pedagogical action’, and Thomas and Loxley (2001:124) believe that specialised and definitively effective pedagogies will ‘seemingly forever elude us’, whilst in reality teachers across a myriad of schools are striving to deliver effective pedagogies due to their inherent resourcefulness.

Reindal (2016:4) shares the view that the ‘fulcrum’ for developing inclusive practice is to ensure that teachers with appropriate training teach children identified as having SEND, and not teaching assistants as is often the case, and Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009:87) support this view, stating that for a school to become more inclusive, the teachers’ needs should be supported, which is an argument that is fully expanded upon as the study advances. This is a recommendation supported by the Rochford Review (2016:11) in respect of the assessment of pupils identified as having SEND, which states that, ‘ITT and CPD for staff in educational settings should reflect the need for teachers to have a greater understanding of assessing pupils working below National Curriculum levels’.

Armstrong (2003:121) has the belief that special schools, and the concept of special educational needs as a whole is a ‘convenient tool for legitimising discrimination, racism and the lack of opportunities in general for young people’ and that the concept of special schools is seen as a tool to ‘manage’ children who have been excluded for troublesome behaviour, a very narrow and naïve view when one considers the breadth of needs found within a special school, and one which could deter prospective teachers, as behaviour is often wrongly viewed as the overarching ‘need’ found in special schools.

Armstrong also states that special education has become a convenient mechanism for ‘legitimating the discriminatory management of social problems’, whilst Runswick-Cole (2009:201) argues that the ‘term SEN has come to sustain and construct exclusionary practices’. Hodkinson (2011:181) believes that the term inclusion is often automatically linked to SEND, but should be as equally assigned to gender, sex, race, ethnicity, culture and social class, a view supported by Thomas and Loxley (2001:117), which has previously been discussed in terms of minority groups such as Travellers, Roma Gypsies, and West Indian pupils.

For many professionals including teachers, and for parents and children, inclusion holds many challenges with Sikes, Lawson and Parker (2007:357) believing that some professionals who claim to be inclusive do not share understandings of the concept ‘between, within, and across individuals, groups and larger collectives’. Whilst Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009:89) believe inclusion can only become a reality by ‘listening to children and their families, and by ensuring that inclusion is by choice not by compulsion’.

However, alongside inclusion we must also understand how for some children and their parents, special schools are the best educational option, and there is evidence that special schools do have a ‘positive impact’ for many (Shaw 2017:295), with the Rochford Review (2016:11) stating ‘equality is not always about inclusion, sometimes equality is about altering the approach according to the needs of the pupils’. These needs are often defined through models which are discussed in the following section.

2:6 Models of Disability.

*‘Models are not real life’ (Brett 2002:827).*

Smart (2004:25) expresses the following as ‘functions of models of disability’:

* to provide a definition of disability
* are based on perceived needs
* guide formulation and implementation of policy
* are not value neutral
* determine which academic disciplines study and learn about people with disabilities
* shape the self-identity of people with disabilities
* can cause prejudice and discrimination

Various views have been offered concerning models of disability, with Llewellyn and Hogan (2000:157) stating that a model represents a ‘particular type of theory, which seeks to explain phenomena by reference to an abstract system and mechanism, and can be used to aid research and clinical purpose’. Dewsbury, Clarke, Randall, Rouncefield and Sommerville (2004:148), see models as a ‘gloss’ for a range of theoretical and methodological commitments, whilst Brett (2002:827) expresses the view that a ‘well-constructed model should provide useful insights fora number of users in a particular culture, society, or field of knowledge’. However Llewellyn and Hogan (2005:159) disagree with this view and argue that there is a ‘danger of over-generalisation’ associated with models, and that fruitless debate about them detract from the real focus, this being the needs of the individual, with the term model ‘misleading’ when used to clarify disabilities.

When reference is made to a model of special educational needs and disabilities, this usually relates either to the medical model, or the social model. However after exploring these two most frequently used models, other models will be considered.

Medical Model

Educational provision for children identified as having SEND has a strong historical link with the medical profession, and so formed a significant link with the identification, placement and often ‘treatment’ of these children. According to Clark, Dyson, and Millward (1998:49) this model is ‘highly focused on pathology, not normalcy, on sickness not well-being, and the presentation of the problem rather than the individual’. This model also attracts criticism in terms of the manner in which practitioners have conducted themselves, with an ‘ambivalence felt towards medical professionals’ (Carlson 2010:5).

However, Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009:20) argue that this model is criticised because it fails to view disability holistically and relies heavily on professional judgements which in turn leads to the lives of disabled people being controlled by professionals, and not by themselves. Retief and Rantoa (2018:3) argue that the medical model treats SEND as a ‘problem’ to be ‘solved’, or as a ‘disease’, whilst Brett (2002:827) believes that negative medical procedures may be legitimised and used to ‘treat’ individuals identified as SEND under the auspices of ‘positive intervention strategies’. This model also often medicalises the whole family, which was often the case in a time when families kept loved ones ‘locked away’ due to their differences, as this could have a stigmatising effect on all the family.

Llewellyn and Hogan (2000:157) believe that the medical model ‘views all disability as the result of some physiological impairment due to damage or disease, and is a condition in need of ‘treatment’, whilst Johnstone (2001:17) believes that when this model is applied to SEND it becomes nothing more than a ‘mechanistic’ process whereby children’s symptoms are identified or diagnosed and then ‘treated’ with a ‘specialised segregated’ system of education. This negativity is echoed by Corbett and Norwich (2005:4) who argue that this model leads professionals to focus on what a child cannot do, rather than what they can, which is an enduring aspect found within the literature pertaining to SEND, with special education ‘preserving an understanding of disability in accord with the medical model’ (Reindal 2008:135).

Social Model.

This model of conceptualising disability became prominent in the 1970’s due to the actions of disabled people’s organisations, and was according to Beckett and Campbell (2015:271) the ‘big idea’ of the Disabled People’s Movement. It promotes the idea that ‘disabled people are not disabled by impairments, but by the disabling barriers of society’ (Oliver 2013:1024), and that the social environment ‘restricts their movements, and their ability to communicate’ (Brainhe 2007).

Thomas (2004:570) reminds us that the social model is not an explanation, definition, or theoretical overview of disability, but does give rise to the conceptual difficulties of what disability is, and this is supported by Beckett and Campbell (2015:276) state that this model is not a theory, due to it emerging from the resistance of disability activists, rather than from the academy. However, I am in agreement with Sikes (2005:91) who considers the field of special education as one ‘full of controversy and disagreement’ with various debates around the social construction of SEND an ongoing dilemma.

However it is argued (Gallagher, Connor, and Ferri 2014; Anastasiou and Kauffman 2011) that difference in terms of impairment is due to ‘natural variation’, whereas disability is the ‘socially constructed responses to someone seen to have such differences’, and this is supported by Thomas (2014:12) who states that disability is the ‘social imposition of avoidable restrictions on the life, activities, aspirations, and psycho-emotional well-being of people categorised as impaired, by those deemed normal’.

Anastasiou and Kauffman (2011:372) also express the view that disability is defined by ‘arbitrary decisions of those empowered to designate them, thus disability labels are determined by public policy and professionals’. They also believe that the social model ‘denies the role of biology’, and that ‘despite the sins of the medical industry’ medical professionals can be ‘allies not enemies’ in the ‘existential and political struggle for a better life’. They also argue that any biological factors that are acknowledged are actually ‘socialised biological factors’.

Gallagher, Connor and Ferri (2014:1125) believe that the social model ‘reframes the very concept of disability’, and that from the moment of birth human beings are ‘continually subjected to culturally potent rules, practices, regulations, and cultural beliefs’ in order to gauge whether they fit the ‘mould of normal’. Adopting the social model within education requires that we ‘deflect’ the focus from ‘deficit-within-student’ to the ‘(in)capability of the schooling context ‘to be supportive of a range of learning difficulties’ (Naraian and Schlessinger 2017:82), and as stated above, ignoring the biological factors.

A critique of the social model by Baglieri, Valle, Connor, and Gallagher (2011:271) highlights the fact that those individuals described as having moderate or severe difficulties, seem so different from those considered ‘nondisabled’ that thinking that difference is socially constructed ‘strikes one as nonsense’, with Oliver (3013:1025) decrying the fact that disability has become ‘one unitary group’. The social model is seen by Beckett and Campbell (2015:271) as an ‘oppositional device’ which positions disability as oppression and therefore is unjust, and actually ‘produces’ two types of person, ‘disabled’ and ‘nondisabled’.

Both Oliver (2013:1026) and Beckett and Campbell (2015:277) have the view that the social model has ‘lost its way’ and needs to be ‘re-invigorated’, an example being the Government Office for Disability Issues exhibiting an ‘impoverished’ version of the social model (Beckett and Campbell 2015:277), which ultimately endeavours to reduce the risk of ‘dependency’ of those identified as disabled. Oliver also argues that the original critics of this model e.g. major disability charities and professional organisations, now adopt this model as central to their operations, and often act as though they ‘invented it’.

On a positive note the social model can be a ‘tool to improve people’s lives’ (Oliver 2013:1035), and a ‘powerful political tool for change’ (Koca-Atabey 2013:1030), although in direct contrast it is argued that it can construct an ‘antirealistic view of living’ (Anastasiou and Kauffman 2011:373), and can actually be ‘profoundly anti-social’ (Naraian and Schlessinger 2017:90). However Thomas (2014:12) sees the social model as an ‘excellent basis for political movement’ but an ‘inadequate grounding’ for social theory.

Supporters of the social model include Llewellyn and Hogan (2000:164) who believe that this model puts disability back into the ‘collective responsibility of society as a whole’, whilst Goodley (2001:208) argues that disability remains a social problem to be ‘eradicated by social change’. In some cases the social model has become an ‘explanation’ of disability (Thomas 2004:572), whilst Dewsbury, Clarke, Randall, Rouncefield and Sommerville (2004:150) believe there is a sociological desire to give ‘explanatory accounts of social constructs’, disability being one of them, which reinforces the concept of the social model.

The social model in terms of inclusion is discussed by Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009:24) who express the view that the notion of the full application of the social model would see segregated systems of education replaced by fully inclusive schools for all, where it would have to be ensured that all ‘stereotypical and discriminating’ attitudes that society holds in relation to disability and impairments, would be broken down. This view however would need the realisation of a shift in the attitudes of society, and teachers receiving a very different training package than the one they are currently offered, a discussion which will be further discussed in the study. However Connors and Stalker (2007:24) believe that the experience of disabled children is often rooted in ‘impairment, difference, material barriers and the behaviour shown towards them’, and some of the realities of inclusion within the present day educational system will be discussed in the next section.

Other models of disability are as follows:

* Identity Model – closely related to the social or affirmation model, is socially constructed but claims a positive identity for disability (Brewer, Brueggmann, Hetrick, and Yergeau 2012:5).
* Moral/Religious Model – probably the oldest model of disability which believes that disability is a punishment from God for sins committed by the individual (Pardeck and Murphy 2012:2).
* Human Rights Model – some researchers believe that this model and the social model are virtually synonymous, but Degener (2017:43) believes that this model emphasises ‘human dignity and encompasses human, civil, and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights’. It offers room for minority and cultural identification and aims to improve life situations.
* Cultural Model – Focuses on a range of cultural factors. Does not aim to define SEND but rather how it ‘operates in the context of specific cultures’ (Snyder and Mitchell 2006:3).
* Economic Model – Focuses on the ‘disabling’ effects on capabilities which can affect employment and subsequently involvement in the labour market (Armstrong, Noble and Rosenbaum 2006:151).
* Charity Model (sometimes referred to as the Personal Tragedy Model) – Views SEND individuals as ‘suffering, tragic victims’ who are dependent on others (Duyan 2007:71).
* Affirmative Model – Learnt stereotypical attitudes are the problem not the impairment, and disabled people cantake positive control of their own bodies (Hodkinson and Vickerman 2009:27).

In addition, Reindal (2008: 135) offers the ‘Relational-Social Model’ where ‘additionality and inclusivity are not split as a basis for SEND, and the issue of oppression is not obliterated from the understanding’. He believes that pupils’ needs should be identified without ‘contributing to the negative effects which have manifested themselves through the classification, categorisation and labelling within education’, and that personal and social effects of ‘reduced function should be recognised without having to slide into an individual approach’, a view which supports the previous arguments relating to definition and labelling. The role of the media will now be explored as a lens in which society views SEND, in respect of some of the issues previously discussed.

2:7 The role of the Media

*‘Does media mirror society or influence it?’ – Mehraj, Bhat, and Mehraj (2014).*

The role of the media has been included within this study, as one of the lenses through which society views SEND, and how its influence may affect the views and perceptions of those who access it. For some individuals, today’s media rich society offers the only insight into the lives of individuals identified as having SEND, and as such may shape beliefs. It could therefore be argued that an individual who is considering, or has embarked on a career in teaching, may use this platform to shape their initial understandings of those identified as having SEND, an understanding which may be flawed, especially if it is not challenged. I therefore would argue that this section is pertinent in relation to the aims of the study.

In today’s media rich society, it could be argued that the experiences gleaned from the ‘relentless exposure to television, radio, films, the printed word, and the arts’ (www.limerickwriter.com), play a part in influencing public perceptions of society. As it is estimated that the average adult watches 25+ hours of television a week, with further time spent reading magazines and newspapers, listening to the radio, visiting the cinema, and engaging with social media (Mehraj, Bhat, and Mehraj, 2014: 57), it would seem inevitable that the media has a ‘profound impact on societies and their culture’ (Biswas 2016).

Mehraj, Bhat and Mehraj (2014:58) believe that the media has the power to change behaviour and beliefs, whilst Thompson (2007: 87) states that many individuals relate to a favourite media character, and actually change their behaviour to be like them. Biswas (2016) argues that the media helps to provide a ‘strong message to the world about what is right, and what is wrong’, and that this can have both a positive, and negative impact on the lives and minds of people, and it is dependent on the mind-set of these people, as to which view they perceive.

Whilst the majority of individuals access media to be entertained, as opposed to analysing it, or assessing it to ascertain if it reinforces or resists the dominant discourse of society (Thompson 2007:87), media can be seen to reproduce the traditional norms and values of society, and create ‘stereotypes of dominant/weak folk in society’ (Mehraj, Bhat and Mehraj 2014:60). Therefore, if we are to agree with the opinion of Schwartz and Lufiyya (2009: 28) who believe that our society has treated, and continues to treat people with disabilities, in a ‘manner unequal to the non-disabled’, is it also the case that the media reinforces this inequality? Thompson (2007: 64) asks who in the media is not having their voices heard, and I will now examine the role of disability and individuals with special educational needs in the media, to ascertain if this applies to this group.

Zhang and Haller (2013: 320) believe that the ‘mass media has a great influence on society’s perceptions of people with disabilities’, and that they are often misrepresented with negative stereotypes, and that these negative images have the power to add to the oppression already suffered by disabled people. The view of Hogarth (2010:19) reinforces this negativity attributed to disabled individuals, and believes that the media often portrays them as having something ‘wrong’, something ‘not normal’.

Divya and Narayan (2006: 13) argue that people with disabilities are stigmatised because their bodies do not adhere to the norm, and that ‘physical appearance has increased in importance’ in the media, with the ‘pretty people’, the ‘least disabled looking’ predominantly appearing in the media, especially in advertising. In fact in their research of the media, in relation to advertising, they found that only 0.73% of the media they researched, portrayed any form of visually recognisable disability or special need.

It therefore comes as no surprise, that when disabled individuals are used in advertising it becomes newsworthy, as was the case of an 11 year old boy with Downs Syndrome, who was chosen as a model for a high street fashion chain. Hodkinson and Vickerman (2009: 45) argue that individuals identified as having SEND are often portrayed as the ‘powerless and pathetic victim’, and in some cases this is a ‘socially manufactured representation’ perpetrated by the media, who need to accept the ‘truths’ of disability (Renwick, Schormans and Shore 2014: 22), rather than a ‘perceived realism’ (Zhang and Haller 2013: 323).

An example of this ‘perceived realism’ being the representation of a wheelchair user, in the comedy TV programme ‘Little Britain’. The character portrayed who is seemingly a wheelchair user is able to get up and move freely when not being observed, a subtle representation that maybe not all wheelchair users are genuine, and are indeed seem by some as benefit frauds.

News reporting often misses important and diverse stories related to disabled people, because of its ‘persistence in stereotypical portrayals’ (Zhang and Haller 2013:330), and often tends to be sensationalistic, with the following headlines found over a period of 6 weeks, in May and June 2018, illustrating how official language has been ‘translated into lurid journalese’ (Sikes 2005:90): ‘wheelchair users forced into road’, ‘actor’s son removed from theatre for making noises’, ‘disabled athlete wets herself on train’, ‘high profile disabled athlete denied access to train’, ‘disabled boy sues theme park over toilet’, and ‘housebound women has to crowdfund to obtain suitable wheelchair’.

In research carried out by Briant, Watson and Philo (2013:876) they found that many newspaper readers believed that a ‘typical’ story about individuals identified as having SEND was one relating to benefit fraud (an influence of Little Britain?), but that stories of individuals identified as having SEND ‘illustrating triumph over adversity’ were becoming less prevalent.

 When a disabled person does make the news in a positive light, much tends to be made about the disability, rather than the achievement. Lee Ridley (aka ‘lost voice guy’) won the TV talent competition ‘Britain’s Got Talent’ in June 2018, and although he is the first comedian to win in the show’s history, he also has cerebral palsy and communicates by assisted technology, an aspect which seems to have grabbed the headlines. Mik Scarlett, an existing television presenter, inclusion trainer and wheelchair user, states that the media have always believed that the public can’t cope with disability, turning everything into a ‘tragedy model’, whereas a real watershed moment would be the media accepting that the public are actually fine with disability.

Lee Ridley himself, hopes his win will reduce some of the stigma related to disability, which was found by Zhang and Haller (2013: 322) who believed that individuals learnt and formulated attitudes, values and beliefs from the mass media, often negatively in the case of disability. Entertainment media is beginning to make inroads into the portrayal of individuals identified as having special needs and disabilities, in film, television and music. Cameron (2009: 392) believes that modern song lyrics are beginning to ‘confront domination and oppression experienced by disabled people’, and that some lyrics can ‘detail it [disability], describe it, hold it up to the light, and laugh at it’. He also believes that the ‘oppressed’ can make use of popular culture, and use its resources to make voices heard (ibid 382).

 In the film industry, Erby (2011: 169) argues that historically the disabled served a particular purpose, and whereas ‘normal’ bodies were used to advance the plot, ‘disabled bodies’ often functioned as a metaphor for the inability to do so. Safran (1998:477) believes that the film industry must acknowledge the influence of media imagery and use it to its best advantage, and at the 2019 Tony awards which took place in the U.S. the first wheelchair user in the history of the ceremony received an award. Ali Stroker in her acceptance speech marked her achievement by declaring that;

 *‘This award is for every kid who is watching tonight who has a disability, a limitation, a challenge, who has been watching to see themselves represented in this arena. You are.*

Favazza, Ostrosky, Lori, Yu, and Chryso (2017: 650), state that 15% of the world’s population have a disability, with children with disabilities among the ‘world’s most stigmatised and excluded population, because of limited understanding and knowledge about persons with disabilities, and associated negative attitudes’. They believe that the lack of representation in print and visual media, within the curriculum materials used, in formative years in early childhood environments, contributes to this limited understanding, and they believe that young children need ‘exposure to human difference’ (ibid 651).

Hodkinson (2012:252) highlights the ‘lack of representation of disabled people in electronic media in the primary school’, and concludes that although this type of media can offer a global perspective, it has limited representations of disabled people, and those it does have, are dis-contextualised within a medical deficit model. However in recent times, programmes targeted at young people (CBeebies, Nick Jr, and Nickelodeon) have included more young people and adults identified as having disabilities and special needs.

In adult drama there has also been a slight increase in the number of disabled actors, although a young disabled actor, Mat Fraser, posted an online discussion (BBC Arts Online May 2017) relating to the need for more disabled actors, especially in ‘normal’ roles. His first acting role was in the unfortunately titled ‘Freak Show’, a US drama series, but he has gone on to secure a mainstream acting role in Richard III. He argues that there is little difference between the current number of disabled actors in relation to 20 years ago, but believes that there is now a tolerance towards the conversation. In January 2018, the BBC drama Silent Witness included 3 disabled actors, as the producer, Tim Prager wanted to ‘normalise disability’ by ‘properly representing individuals with SEND’, and felt that television was a powerful tool in which to do it (BBC Writers Room online January 2018).

However, online responses to the programme included those who believed that the BBC were only ‘ticking the PC boxes,’ and that they should stick to entertainment and not try to ‘influence how we view disabled people’. Rosie Jones one of the disabled actors involved felt that it was time we saw more individuals identified as having SEND in the media, who are ‘gritty and flawed and are three dimensional just like any other person’, a view echoed by Schwartz, Blue, McDonald, Guiliani, Weber and Seirup (2010: 841) who call for more ‘authentic person centred depictions of individuals with disabilities engaged in daily living’, whilst Renwick, Schormans and Shore (2014:21) believe that more ‘authentic images of the capabilities, experiences and occupations of people with disabilities’ are needed in the media.

To conclude, I will consider the notion of the ‘supercrip,’ as being an ‘alternative’ view, and in direct opposition to those individuals identified as having Special Needs and Disabilities, portrayed as disadvantaged or ill, or even ‘pitiful’ (Amit 2004:447). A supercrip or a ‘super cripple’, is defined as an individual in the media, who against all adversity can achieve and excel alongside the able bodied, in a mainstream world (Schalk 2016, Zhang and Haller 2013, Amit 2004). They give examples of dancers, musicians and actors, as well as athletes and those playing a part in the economy, and one cannot deny the achievements of these people. However, it is my belief that we need to accept and celebrate those identified as having SEND, without putting them up for competition, an example being the Paralympics having the same media coverage and profile as the Olympics, and without giving them, what could be argued an unacceptable label.

This view is shared by Schalk (2016:71) who believes that at the mention of the word supercrip, disability studies scholars ‘sharpen their critical claws to rip to shreds’ what has now become a quite infamous figure, and one which does little to advance complex or socially just understandings of disabled people. It could also be argued that the mass media plays a huge part in influencing our views and beliefs, and that more progress needs to be made in order to reflect a positive image of those individuals identified as having SEND in society, by normalising their roles in all form of media. The current legislation which appertains to SEND will now be considered.

2:8 Current Legislation

 *‘How can we make sense of contemporary educational policy making?’ (Steer, Spours and Hodgson 2007).*

As previously discussed the SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2014) [the code] sets out the provision of SEND education in England and Wales. It followed the Special Needs and Disability Policy (2014) [the policy] which was presented to the then coalition government in February 2014. A previous section concerning the historical changes of SEND education begin to portray a largely negative view of the code, a view shared by many, and this view will now be discussed in further detail.

The main actions that the code proposed were:

* To improve the support system for young people with SEND and their families, for example to introduce a coordinated assessment process across education, health and care by the creation of Education Health and Care Plans (EHC Plans), to replace existing statements of special needs.
* To improve educational provision for pupils with SEND, for example making sure all schools including academies and free schools were brought into the system.
* To help young people with SEND prepare for adulthood and life outside the education system, for example putting in place employer based study programmes to develop skills for the work place.

The code also stated that it wished to address the ‘problem’ of accessing support for children identified as having SEND, as well as ensuring that they have the ‘same opportunities’ as everyone else, in order to move ‘smoothly into adulthood’. However, the code does not identify what the ‘problem’ is, and indeed gives the impression that support previous to the code had been lacking, and no indication is given as to who the ‘everyone else’ is, and if indeed this mythical group do actually have access to all relevant opportunities.

Moving ‘smoothly into adulthood’ is again left open to interpretation, which could be argued has an economic bias which will be discussed shortly. The code also uses emotive language such as ‘fresh approach, new start, greater choice and high quality provision’, giving the impression of new innovations, which according to Norwich (2014: 416) is not the case, with no radically new aspects apparent and ‘unresolved issues from previous codes remaining unaddressed’. Lacey, Ashdown, Jones, Lawson and Pipe (2015:20) believe that the Government current at the time, had no real commitment to challenge the status quo of the provision and placement of children identified as having SEND, whilst Tisdall and Riddell (2006: 363) argue that while ‘policy frameworks shift, practices remain the same due to inertia and resistance to change’.

As well as the terminology used in the code being ambiguous and emotive, it is also inconsistent, a view supported by Ellis and Todd (2012: 61), an example being the acronym ‘SEN’ being frequently used when the policy title includes disability (SEND). Ellis and Todd also believe that the code reflects a medical model of SEND, and is open to interpretation. Within the code there is no mention of ‘behaviour’, which is ironic as the largest incidence of pupils identified as having SEND prior to the code had the label of ‘behavioural, emotional, and social disabilities’ (BESD) (Norwich 2014:420), and this omission is according to Robertson (2012:78) was a way for the government to ‘distort figures’, and make it appear that the ‘incidence of SEND’ was falling.

The code which now includes young people identified as having SEND up to the age of 25, is encouraging of young adults to join the workforce, possibly a market led initiative rather than one to enhance a young person’s life, and in ‘Fulfilling Potential: Making it Happen’ (2013), a White Paper from the Department of Work and Pensions, it was stated that the ‘government’s ambition’ was to support young people identified as having SEND into employment.

It calculated that this would boost the income of the young person by between 55% and 95%, enabling them to live a more independent life and so saving the ‘public purse’ approximately £1 million per person over a lifetime. It did not consider the ‘ambition’ of the young person, and failed to acknowledge the fact that increased income very rarely affects the ability to live independently, although financial security is advantageous when accessing provisions for living.

Coffield, Edward, Finlay, Hodgson, Spours, Steer, and Gregson (2007:732) believe that the majority of teachers do not engage with policy and guidance but rely on dissemination on a need to know basis, an argument I would support as a teacher with experience of an ever increasing workload. In the previous Code of Practice (2001) it stated that a child identified as having special needs was in need of further support if they were still failing after receiving ‘high quality teaching’. However a phrase of this type is not to be found in the current code, with Norwich (2014:420) believing that silence speaks many words, and although the code promised extra funding to train ‘specialist teachers’, and ‘talented support staff’, it did not offer funding for professional development in SEND for existing teachers, or mention an overhaul in initial training, and it will remain to be seen what the outcomes of the revisions of the code pledged in 2019, will suggest to alleviate this problem.

The Education and Health Care plans which were intended to replace statements, were according to the code, a way of ensuring that pupils identified as having SEND had access to well-coordinated integrated services across education, health and social care. However, most educational professionals believed that this was going to happen after the publication of ‘Every Child Matters’ (2003), which at the time stated that the existing system for supporting children and young people who were experiencing difficulties was poorly coordinated. It also stated that there needed to be a common cause across professional boundaries in order that the needs, interests, and welfare of children identified as having SEND could be better advanced, but it could be argued that this system is still not fully operational, and the needs of many children are not being met.

Norwich (2014: 417) states that EHC plans are misleading, and are actually education plans with limited input on health and social care, which only relates to the SEND component. When the date passed to fully implement EHC plans in April 2018, 4000 pupils in England still had obsolete statements, with many local authorities’, months or even years behind with this process (NEU 2018). Ironically the code states that it can take families too long to find out their child needs help, but this administration dilemma is doing little to alleviate this. Many parents are all too fully aware of their child’s needs, and incidences such as those quoted by Massey (2016:67) are becoming more common. He highlights the experiences of a mother who during the course of the EHC process had to repeat the story of her son who was identified as having SEND, over 95 times to different individuals involved, all of which were purportedly part of the ‘well-coordinated integrated services’ promised in the code.

The drivers of the policy, the ‘intended aims or goals’ (Hyatt 2013:838), or the ‘cues to action by those who manage and deliver public services’ (Steer, Spours, Hodgson, Finlay, Coffield, Edward, and Gregson 2007:177) could be identified as: to improve support for children and young people identified as having SEND, to promote equal opportunities, to improve communication between agencies and services, and to better prepare children and young adults for adulthood and the workplace.

There are however more complex drivers, including the lack of adequate support and training for teachers, and the economic outcomes of pupils identified as having SEND joining the workforce. Gray and Norwich (2014: 125) have the view that a driver of the policy was the introduction of a new funding policy, whilst Norwich (2014: 419) believes that the increased incidence of SEND, due mainly to clearer definitions, would stretch this funding, and initiate economic problems, which was partially correct, as it wasn’t anticipated that this funding would be withdrawn.

The levers of the policy refer to the ‘governing instruments that the state has at its disposal to direct, manage and shape change in public services’ (Steer, Spours, Hodgson, Finlay, Coffield, Edward and Gregson 2007: 179), and the political character of policy levers ‘means they can become an end in themselves’, such as government targets. In the case of the code the intended levers centre around a more effective system which is more accountable through EHC plans, funding of specialist teachers, and support for life after education. However the ‘hidden’ levers of this policy are the need for: economic justification, i.e. young adults identified as having SEND ‘contributing’ to society, the educational justification, the confirmation that the SEND system is effective, and meeting the needs of all pupils who require it.

The questions that could be asked of this policy are: Does the policy address the current needs of pupils identified as having SEND? Is the policy innovative or a recycling of past practice, and do the stated outcomes actually benefit pupils identified as having SEND or are the ‘hidden’ levers at the forefront of the governments’ aims? Whilst undertaking an international comparison of the outcomes of children identified as having SEND, Stobbs (2014:131) concluded that England had a ‘long tail of underachievement’, due in part to policy and practice, whilst Gedge (2015: 6) also questioned this aspect and asked ‘do we have an education system that fits only the privileged few?’

It is my opinion that the policy did not address the needs of pupils then or now, and used emotive language and empty promises to give the impression that needs have been met. Norwich (2014: 417) expresses the view that much of what is proposed in the policy is not radically new but involves the ‘extending, integrating and tightening up’ of existing principles and practice, with ‘unresolved issues not being addressed’, which does not give SEND education a rigorous base on which to build a system which meets the needs of all pupils, or trains and supports teachers.

From what has been discussed in this section, it could be argued that the hidden levers are the true levers, and the idealistic aims in the code have little chance of success in the present economic climate. Armstrong (2014: 741) believes that policy makers must be persuaded prior to policy formation to engage in dialogue with researchers of SEND, and that more emphasis needs to be placed on how policies are translated into practice (Lacey, Ashdown, Jones, Lawson and Pipe 2015).

It is also a concern that learners identified as having SEND are subject to ‘continual interventions’ and consideration should be given to the fact that a ‘rich data system’ is at the disposal of policy makers, but the ‘analysis of this data is wanting’ in terms of policy formation (Stobbs 2014: 128). This concern will need to be addressed in order to analyse the current situation and so construct policies which have a positive impact on SEND education, in order to avoid policy being something that is ‘done to teacher education as opposed to something which they [teachers] can contribute and make a difference’ (Clift and Liaupsin 2019:57). Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development in respect of SEND will now be explored.

2:9 SEND in the Context of Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development.

 *‘Enlarging the candidate pool for special education practitioners ultimately relies on increasing awareness, acceptance, and integration of people with disabilities into the greater society’. (Zhang and Wang 2014:168).*

This section will consider a brief precis of teacher training, and will then consider the routes into teaching in the present day (2019). The SEND training received by initial teacher training students will then be examined, with consideration to what could be argued, were missed opportunities to enhance SEND experience. Continuing professional development for serving teachers in the field of SEND will then be explored, and the section will conclude with implications for the designation of teacher training acronyms.

A brief history of teacher training (Figure 1) is as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Date |  |
| 1876 | Denominational training colleges. |
| 1890 | Training moved to universities – focus on a particular subject. |
| 1919 | Teachers with degrees taught in Secondary whilst degrees were not necessary to teach elementary – school based apprenticeship.  |
| 1920’s | Very little focus on pedagogy or practice. |
| 1944 | Education Act which elected to keep tripartite system but make education more accessible by expansion of teacher training. |
| 1950 | Emphasis on what to teach not how – ‘you landed in the classroom with nothing so you replicated your own experiences’ – Walsh 2017:372. |
| 1956 | Teacher shortage – 1 year ‘emergency’ training course established. |
| 1988 – 1996 | Small colleges closed and merged with polytechnics for cost effectiveness. 25% of new teachers reported feeling ill prepared for the classroom. Teachers to make the ‘best of things as they are, hope for better to come’ – Gardner and Cunningham 1998:253. Any SEND input in ITT courses dependent on the expertise and ideology of trainers – Hodkinson 2009. |
| 1994 | National Curriculum introduced along with new pay and conditions for teachers. Teacher recruitment in line with teachers leaving profession. More school based experience for students. HMI 1990 stated that ITT students were inadequately prepared to teach SEND pupils. |
| 1997 | Teacher Training Agency created. |
| 2000 | Literacy and Numeracy strategies introduced. New ITT curriculum introduced – ‘hurried and inadequate modifications’ – Ball 1999:197. |
| 2000 | Increased government intervention as teacher autonomy eroded. Teachers and Teacher trainers become ‘functionaries of the state’ – Ball 1999:201. |
| 2006 | Specialist training for teachers wishing to teach SEND pupils phased out, SEND training moved away from ITT towards CPD. Introduction of competences to assess teachers included some diversity. |
| 2007 | The TDA developed a programme which enabled students on Initial Teacher Training and Education (ITTE) courses placements in specialist special needs provision. Ensuing results confirmed the importance, relevance and success of the programme – Golder, Jones and Quinn 2009. |
| 2018 | The above programme no longer exists due to time constraints on ITT trainees, SEND input is still poor and fragmented, and there are several routes into teaching, many school based. |

Routes into Teacher Training in 2018 (Figure 2) is as follows:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *University* | *School centred Initial Teacher Training* | *School Direct Training Programme* | *School Direct (salaried)* | *Postgraduate teaching apprenticeship* |
| *Tax free bursary of £26k* |  *X* |  *X* |  *X* |  |  |
| *Employed during training and salary paid* |  |  |  |  *X* |  *X* |
| *Fees payable by candidate* |  *X* |  *X* |  *X* | *No fees for QTS but possible for PGCE* | *No fees for QTS but possible for PGCE* |
| *Minimum of 24 weeks spent in school* |  *X* |  *X* |  *X* |  *X* |  *X* |
| *In school from day 1* |  |  *X* |  *X* |  *X* |  *X* |
| *Ideal if you are already working or have an existing relationship with a school* |  |  |  |  *X* |  *X* |
| *Awarded QTS – Qualified Teacher Status* |  *X* |  *X* |  *X* |  *X* |  *X* |
| *Opportunity to achieve postgraduate qualification* |  *X*  |  *X* |  *X* |  *X* |  *X* |

*Accessed from https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/sites/default/files/pdf/compare.pdf*

According to Bond, Johnson, Patmore, Weiss and Barker (2017) teaching is one of the most dynamic and diverse careers, offering clear structure and progression, and as can be seen from Figure 2, can now be accessed in many ways, and has undergone many reforms over the years (Figure 1). However according to Blanton, Pugach, and Boveda (2018:3) in 60 years of modern reform rarely has ‘teacher education been interrogated’ in relationship to prepare students to teach pupils identified as having SEND, with Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely and Danielson (2010:357) stating that teacher preparation in relation to SEND has ‘lost its focus’, in part due to it being an ‘emerging, complex, multifaceted field’ (Cochran-Smith and Villegas 2016:439).

Gavish (2017:154) has the belief that there is a lack of research on the professional world of special needs teaching, but believes that trainee teachers have already shaped their views and ideas concerning teaching before they embark on formal training. This view is shared by Young (2008: 903) who claims that students are socialised by prior experiences before they embark on training, but that their beliefs about SEND should be ‘clarified, supported and challenged’ through their training, which is essential if we wish to avoid teachers only taking their own experiences as pupils and student teachers into the classroom, as Lund (2018:2) believes that these prior experiences ‘are so deeply embedded physically and are so tactic, like putting on your socks, they can be difficult to change’.

At the onset of teacher training Gavish (2017:167) discovered through research, that many students have already ‘painted an imaginary world’ of SEND, and many believe that special education teachers are ‘exemplary figures’, who are ‘highly ethical, omnipotent, who mould the lives of others, have complete control of their world’, and who operate at the ‘extreme limits of human capability’. Students were also found to believe there was a dichotomy between the world of special needs and the ‘regular world’, and on the whole they held a medical view of special needs.

The status quo at the present time (2019) in England and Wales is that both trainee teachers and serving teachers must demonstrate that they are able to meet a set of standards formulated by the Department for Education. Only one standard relates directly to SEND, and this states that teachers ‘must have a clear understanding of the needs of pupils including those with special needs and those with disabilities’ (2011:11). However other generic standards could relate to SEND teaching, with examples being; ‘to understand how pupils learn and how this impacts on teaching’, and ‘to be aware of pupils’ capabilities’.

At the present time there are no teacher performance or evaluation levels for SEND teachers, which can lead to inaccurate performance management evaluations and decisions, which in turn can affect teachers’ pay and future employment, an argument put forward by Woolf (2015:278, 2019:133). This is a factor which could influence the career decisions of teachers and could detract them from considering a career in special education, especially in the current economic climate.

In 2006 specialist initial teacher training for those wishing to pursue a career solely in special needs teaching was phased out, and all prospective teachers including those intent on perusing a career in special education had to follow a generic training pathway, albeit by different routes. However Stangvik (1979:148) states that the ‘problems’ of SEND cannot be handled successfully by a ‘special education system that is externalised conceptually, symbolically and practically from ordinary schooling’, whilst Clift and Liaupsin (2019:64) believe that policy makers need to ‘work more proactively to make the case that special education is important across our field’ and should not ‘perpetuate a conception that special education teacher education is somehow only valuable to a small subset’.

This view is echoed by Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely and Danielson (2010:358) who argue that successful teaching no matter what the child or school, means progress in education as a whole. They go on to state that the possibilities to reform teacher training could be brought about by the sharing of knowledge, and by identifying and expanding the valuable ‘intersections’ between special and general education, which are too often missed (Cochran-Smith and Villegas 2016:439).

Two such missed opportunities due to their discontinuation, were the Specialist Special Education Programme 2007, and the one year National Development and Evaluation Project 2011, both instigated by the Training and Development Agency (TDA). The Specialist Special Education Programme, in which I was heavily involved, was to strengthen the SEND element of initial teacher training by placing trainees in a SEND provision for a block placement of three weeks. Prior to this they would receive input from their training provider, they would have an in-school mentor during the placement, and the opportunity to follow up some of their findings after the placement. It was during this time, as I acted as both as a teacher trainer and a school mentor, that the ideas I held about teachers views on special education began to crystallise, and I received a great deal of feedback very similar to this collected by Golder, Jones and Quinn (2009:187) from students who had completed their placement:

*‘Going into the placement with no prior experience in a society which chastises minorities, I had no idea what to expect; through the tutorage and close contact with staff however, I feel that I have obtained a grasp of this vast and diverse teaching genre. My eyes have been truly opened to what I had never seen’.*

The feedback I received along with that of other colleagues mirrored that of Golder, Jones and Quinn (2009:186) who discovered that all ‘trainee teachers found the placement experience to be beneficial to their professional development’ and increased their knowledge and understanding of SEND. They also reported the placement developed their awareness of teaching and learning strategies, which would benefit the trainee teachers in both mainstream education when dealing with inclusion, and in a possible special school/provision career, with Walton and Rusznyak (3013:118) adding that it would also promote ‘socio-cultural diversity’.

The placements were a success on many levels, with Golder, Jones and Quinn (2009:189) stating that the continuation of the initiative would have benefited trainee teachers and the profession as a whole. However this initiative was discontinued due to the pressure of time allocated to school placements, and a withdrawal of funding, and although this programme provided ‘meaningful and authentic experiences with people with disabilities and their families’ (Golder, Norwich and Bayliss 2005:93), it unfortunately no longer exists.

The second missed opportunity which also no longer exists, was the National Development and Evaluation Project which supported PGCE students and offered the time to teach individual pupils with some identified special need. Students involved deemed it a success, especially in enabling them to link theory to practice, and it was hoped that this project would be developed, with the opportunity for one to one teaching with pupils identified as having SEND becoming a part of future training.

Norwich and Nash (2011:9) supported this initiative and stated that it created opportunities, and that interest and commitment to special educational needs was more likely, if ‘what is special about teaching these pupils can be seen to connect to general teaching principles and practice’. They also stated that the special needs aspect of initial teacher training had been a ‘policy backwater’ (ibid: 10), which resulted in students reporting difficulty in connecting theory to practice (Giannakaki, Hobson, and Malderez 2011:468), with their research findings showing that exposure to more school practice enhances student confidence.

The SEND element of initial teacher training is it appears, still lacking (Hodkinson 2009, Giannakaki, Hobson and Malderez 2011, Woolf 2015, Blanton, Pugach, and Boveda 2018) irrespective of which training route is taken. Students report that the little input they receive is ‘squeezed’ into an overcrowded curriculum (Barber and Turner 2007:33) and that as newly qualified teachers they are ill prepared (ibid: 34), with Bialka, Hansen and Jin-Wong (2019:148) discovering that ‘few ITT programs prepare students on how to discuss disability’ with a result that many hesitate to engage SEND pupils in conversation for ‘fear of offending them’. It appears that many students utilise their existing knowledge and understanding to help overcome this lack of input (Lambe and Bones 2006, Sharma, Florin, and Loreman 2008, Zhang and Wang 2014) and whilst it could be argued teachers learn by teaching (Vaillant 2007), many trainees decry the lack of teachers as role models within schools (Bishop 2010:121) .

Ruppar and Roberts (2018:327) put forward the idea that the ‘deficit narratives’ which are often associated with SEND go ‘hand in hand’ with society’s understanding of the role of an SEND teacher, and believe that this deficit narrative gives the impression that SEND teachers are ‘loving and care-givers’. However their research found that in reality SEND teachers set ‘high expectations’, focus on how pupils ‘learn and succeed’ with one of their main aims being to ‘advance their students status in society’, whilst Carter (2017:173) argues that many SEND teachers are ‘fearful’ of letting their students down, due to their own lack of knowledge of SEND.

Darling-Hammond (2006:312) states that it is ‘essential that teacher educators and policy makers seek strong preparation for teachers that is universally available rather than a rare occurrence that is available only to the lucky few’, and suggest that initial teacher education needs to be ‘research informed’. Burn and Mutton (2015:228) argue for beginning teachers to input into ITT, and Hanley and Brown (2017:352) argue for ‘time and space’ to be created in order to facilitate ‘analytical learning narratives which could enhance effective ITT’.

The 2015 government review on the reforms needed in teacher education stated that schools should ‘play a greater role in leading the recruitment, selection and training of teachers’ (DfE 2011:11), with Mutton, Burns and Menter (2017:15) responding by arguing that it is not the time in school that is important but the ‘quality of experience’. The traditional training route sees universities providing knowledge, and schools giving the opportunity to put the theory into practice (Carter 2015:167), but if schools and universities do not work together to ensure this takes place, it can result in new teachers reverting to ‘instructional behaviour’ linked to the ‘memory of their own schooling’, as discussed previously in relation to research carried out by Lund (2018).

If we are therefore to argue that initial teacher training is lacking in training and support in SEND, is it possible for continuing professional development (CPD) to fill this gap? Vaillant (2007:177) takes the negative view that teachers ‘do not generally apply what they have learnt in CPD opportunities’, whilst Hardy (2012:816) also has a negative view and sees CPD as little more than a ‘response to new accountability demands on teachers’. This negativity persists with McMurray, O’Neill, and Thompson (2016:145) stating that CPD has a ‘poor reputation’, and is ‘ineffective when delivered as a one stop workshop model’, and Hardy (2012:818) arguing that CPD tends to have ‘subject specific content with little time allocated for teachers to critique their own practice and that of others, and to link theory to practice’, all of which are aspects which could negatively affect in-service training relating to aspects of SEND.

The DfE (2016) believe that effective CPD should ‘improve pupil outcomes, should be underpinned by expert evidence and expertise, should include collaboration and expert challenge and should be sustained over time’. However Vaillant (2007:175) believes that it is the ‘economic, political, social, and cultural shifts of society that underpin CPD’, as teachers are constantly recomposing their knowledge in the ‘ongoing dynamics of teaching and learning’, which is in contrast it seems to what the DfE are proposing. Hodkinson (2009:286) states that too much reliance is placed on schools to deliver effective CPD in relation to SEND, and as such trainee teachers need better preparation during the initial stages of their training. When CPD is delivered it is usually concerned with the ‘diagnostic’ element of SEND, with scant mention of pedagogy, and does not address the psychological or emotional preparation required to teach pupils identified as having SEND (Yotanyamaneewong 2012,Davies and Lee 2001:272).

In research carried out by O’Gorman and Drudy (2010:162) it was found that when asked what CPD relating to SEND would be beneficial, teachers had a consistency of response and believed the writing of Individual Education Plans was the area in which they most needed support, which corresponds to findings from Hagman and Casey (2017). It was also suggested that CPD time would be well spent considering the testing, assessment and administration relating to SEND, along with the opportunity to contact teachers who were experienced in the field.

Davies and Lee (2001:263) hold a pessimistic view of ‘SEND training in general and professional development in particular’ and believe it has not kept pace with new initiatives, and often focus on ‘knowledge, skills and competences’, rather than on personal professional development. In research carried out by McMurray and O’Neill (2016:145) they discovered that the most effective CPD is delivered in house by teacher colleagues, and that the least effective is delivered by outside agencies, a model which would be difficult to implement if none of the staff were skilled in the field in question.

In conclusion it could be argued that ITT and CPD relating to SEND is lacking, and that this may be mirrored in the life histories to be found later in the study. Within this section I have used the acronym ITT, mainly because this term has been used in my own career. However researchers, academics, and training institutions also use ITE (Initial Teacher Education), ITP (Initial Teacher Preparation) and IPD (Initial Professional Development). This anomaly raises the question as to whether we are training, educating or preparing trainee teachers, and what indeed constitutes ‘professional’ development. This point will not be argued at the present time as it is not the focus of the study, but it is evident that training institutions need to be clear concerning the preparation of trainees, including the importance of SEND as an element of the overall experience, and section 2:12 will examine if this aspect has had any influence relating to the recruitment and retention of SEND teachers.

**2:10 Teachers experiences of working in SEND settings and contexts.**

Literature regarding the experiences of teachers working in SEND settings and contexts appears to be lacking, with Brownell, Smith, McNellis, and Miller (1997:144) arguing that there is a ‘limited research base’ appertaining to this concept, and Wilson, Powney, Hall and Davidson (2006:249) reiterating this view, and stating that research into the experiences of teachers in SEND settings is ‘sparse’ in relation to the concept of a ‘teaching career’.

 After reviewing the relevant literature pertaining to this area, it appears that the majority focuses upon the retention and attrition of teachers (Clandinin, Long, Schaefer, Downey, Steeves and Pinnegar 2015; Harfitt 2015; Arduin 2015; Norwich and Nash 2007), which is discussed in the next section, or on the experiences of teachers who teach pupils identified as having SEND, but in a mainstream setting (Hornby 2015; Hodkinson 2011; Runswick-Cole 2008; Avramidis and Norwich 2002).

However, of the research that has been carried out, most exhibits a positive view of teaching in a special school, although for those teachers who transfer from mainstream to special there can be problems associated with differentiation, pedagogy, and progress. Peter (2013:123) identifies the problems of adapting to individualistic teaching as opposed to whole class, and argues that teachers need to become aware of the flexibility required to respond to the ‘unpredictable contingencies and idiosyncratic responses’ that pupils identified as having SEND can pose, a view supported by Lewis and Norwich (2005:3) who believe that pedagogy needs to be ‘general and flexible enough to enable wide variations’.

The widely accepted model of differentiation found in mainstream provision of planning for ‘top, middle and bottom’ achievers, when teachers ‘attempt to differentiate their teaching according to their perceptions of broad pupil ability’ (Norwich and Lewis 2001:314), has to be replaced by ‘stepwise progress’ according to Feeney, Gager, and Hallett (2010:160), who believe it is the children and their development which drive the curriculum in special schools, and that progress is not about ‘ticking boxes’. They also believe that it is only in specialist provision that teachers ‘truly know’ their pupils, and teachers who begin a career in special education very quickly adopt the view that ‘children are seen as children’ and the pupils disabilities become ‘information rather than the prime characteristic’ (ibid161).

In terms of pedagogy, Lewis and Norwich (2005:3) make an argument for the validity of SEND ‘specific pedagogy’, and concede that there are pedagogic decisions and strategies common to all learners, as well as some that are ‘unique to individuals’. Their research found a lack of evidence concerning SEND specific pedagogies that were employed in schools, due they believed to either the fact that they don’t exist, or they were not found within their research. They did however identify a distinction between ‘common teaching principles and strategies’ and ‘different ways of applying them’ for pupils identified as having SEND (2001:324).

Research which has been carried out into teachers resilience in SEND settings includes that by Mackenzie (2012:153), which focuses on the resilience of teachers in special schools and argues that resilient teachers help to shape resilient pupils, a resilience they may require within society. It is also suggested that resilience is developed and maintained the longer the teacher remains within specialist provision, and whilst there may not be ‘intellectual challenge’, there is the opportunity for ‘unique rewards’. However this resilience is not always apparent and attrition is common in specialist provision, although many teachers do report positive experiences of working in SEND provision.

The personal ‘vulnerability’ of some teachers is what attracts them to special education, according to Corbett (1997:418) who suggests that some teachers ask the question ‘do I need them [the pupils identified as having SEND] as much as they need me’ and ‘does their evident vulnerability comfort and calm my own personal neediness?’ She bases these views on her own personal experiences as a special needs teacher, and at the time of her research she had become an ITT trainer who believed that the ongoing debate relating to special educational needs and disabilities should take place in the broader context of general education, not as a separate area, ‘perceived as having values and objectives divorced from mainstream’.

The notion of teachers who self-identified as having SEND, and the problems they encountered in both mainstream and special schools was explored by Wilson, Powney Hall, and Davidson (2006:256). These problems included the sometimes negative attitudes of staff, governors and parents, and the physical organisation of schools which posed difficulties for physically impaired teachers. The notion of teachers identified as having SEND, teaching pupils with similar needs is explored further in the study, where it is suggested that pupils identified as having SEND would benefit from having a positive role model in a teacher who also identifies as having SEND, examples being teachers who have physical difficulties or are hearing or sight impaired.

Liasidou and Antoniou (2013:496) believe that the role of the special school teacher involves ensuring that the pupils ‘reach their full potential in the least restrictive environment’, whilst Mackenzie (2012:157) has the opinion that special needs teachers teach to the best of their ability irrespective of any physical or emotional factors. However she also identifies a group of special needs teachers in a range of settings who she terms the ‘gently trapped’, in other words those who are fully aware of negative connotations attributed to special needs teaching, but who remain within the profession irrespectively.

Clark, Dyson and Millward (2005:61) argue that the term ‘special ’when used in education implies that the teachers of pupils identified as having SEND must take action to make ‘the special ordinary’, as the term special education suggests a notion of ‘change and intervention’. They suggest that teachers need to recognise and value all diversity, as this can overcome barriers to learning. Lewis and Norwich (2005:212) ask how specialised the teaching is of pupils identified as having SEND, and believe teaching should be an ‘interconnection between curriculum, pedagogy and knowledge’, and that what may be ‘masquerading’ as a SEND specific approach, may in reality be a position which ideally could be applied to all learners. They argue that teachers draw on ‘self-knowledge’ and ‘professional identity’, and that some teachers have a ‘very strong SEN-oriented identity’ which they draw upon in order to deliver strategies to this group. The next section considers the career decisions of teachers related to SEND.

**2:11 Career decisions and motivations related to teachers views, beliefs and values in SEND.**

According to Heinz (2015:258) teacher motivation and commitment is a crucial factor for the future success of education and schools, with Han and Yin (2016:116) stating that teacher motivation has a direct correlation on teacher effectiveness. Whitaker (2003:107) puts forward the view that much of the research concerned with the career decisions of teachers in specialist provision is ‘extrapolated from research on attrition’, a view I personally support after reviewing relevant literature.

The research relating to attrition and retention of teachers in specialist provision is usually centred on a ‘snapshot in time’ (Rinke 2008:8), and not on the process which brought about the decision, an aspect which would be beneficial in ascertaining how the experiences of teachers affect their decisions to stay or leave specialist provision.

Gehrke and Murri (2006:179) state that the level of attrition in specialist education is higher than in general education, with McKleskey and Billingsley (2008:299) reporting that teachers who begin their career in a special school are 2.5 times more likely to leave the profession than those who begin their career in general education. Corbett (1997:421) describes the first years of teaching in a special school as ‘exhausting’, with Whitaker (2003:106) identifying the lack of support afforded to beginning special needs teachers, which could also apply to experienced teachers who move from mainstream provision.

It is also argued that the status of teaching in a specialist provision does little to attract both new and serving teachers, with Johnson and Birkeland (2003:589) arguing the case that present teachers have expectations that tend to be ‘echoes from the past’, which categorised specialist school teaching as ‘low status, woman’s work, with low pay and no formal career ladder’. Corbett (1992:236) agrees with this view and argues that the traditional ‘caring role’, often attributed to female specialist school teachers, ‘oppresses women’ and ‘abuses the term care, whilst Smith (2007:10) identifies three areas which affect the career decisions of women teachers. These are: societal, which recognise women as mothers and care givers, institutional, which identifies sexism and discrimination in the workplace, and individual, which identifies the individual’s potential for agency.

In direct contrast, Purdy (2009:325) examined the attitudes of male teachers towards a career in special education, and reported that a significant number of parents would like to see more male teachers in special education. In his research carried out with student teachers it was found that only 28% of males had ever visited a special school, compared with 41% of females, but that a significant number of male students reported a ‘high regard’ towards those who chose a career in special education. However it was found in research by Johnson and Birkland (2003:589) that some male teachers avoid this career path citing it as ‘women’s work with low social status’.

In research carried out by Brownell, Smith, McNellis and Miller (1997:151) it was found that 50% of research participants who had left specialist provision, would not consider returning. Indeed one participant likened her experience of this provision as ‘managing dangerous students in undesirable conditions’ whilst another felt unable to teach in a special school that adhered to the ‘multicategorical model’, due to limited understanding of the diverse needs. However, specialist provision serves the needs of a wide range and diversity of pupils, the majority of which do not display negative behaviour.

Research concerning the correlation between the career decisions of teachers and their initial teacher training programs (Heinz 2015; Bruinsma and Jansen 2010; Rots, Aelterman, Vlerick, and Vermeulan 2007; Brownell, Smith, McNelis, and Lenk 1994) have the consensus that the initial training a teacher receives does affect career decisions, with teachers unprepared for their future careers, due to ITT promoting ‘idealistic and unrealistic perceptions of specialist education’ (Brownell et al 1994:91).

The future of the special school system also tends to be in flux in many countries and teachers can sometimes be hesitant to begin a career within this unstable environment, fearing future uncertainty. Rayner, Gunter, Thomas, Butt and Lance (2005:26) see the future of special schools in England and Wales, shifting from ‘site centred’ to child centred’, with the special school of the future a more complex less fixed organisation, with the special school teacher becoming the ‘fulcrum for a network of professional support’ for all schools. Florian and Black (2011:813) believe that mainstream and specialist provisions need to work together to ‘extend what is generally available to everybody, as opposed to providing for all, by differentiating for some’. With these two arguments in mind it would be prudent to assume that there will always be opportunities for well trained, enthusiastic and motivated teachers who are equipped to meet the needs of those identified as having SEND.

However research carried out by Ware, Julian, and McGee (2005:180) discovered that the majority of special school teachers, especially those who teach pupils with the most profound difficulties, are ‘stimulated rather than demoralised’, even though progress made can be extremely slow and requires ‘inordinate effort’ on the part of the teacher. Mackenzie (2013:444) states that the majority of special school teachers who participated in her research claimed that their decision to work in this type of provision was to ‘make a difference’ and although their ‘emotional commitment’ often left them ‘exhausted, frustrated and isolated’ they had no intention to consider a career change, and these two pieces of research support rather than detract from a special school teaching career.

Rippon (2005:276) offers the view that the most significant influence on the career journey of a teacher is the social interactions within society, and that in order to attract and retain teachers there will have to be a ‘significant shift in culture’, a view which could be attributed to all aspects of special needs education.

2:12 Recruitment and Retention of SEND Teachers.

*‘During my NQT year I felt 100 times more stress working in a mainstream school. Working now in a special school is much nicer and less stressful’. – A participant from research carried out by Williams and Gersch (2004:160).*

The government census of Initial Teacher Training (2017-2018) reported that the target for recruiting trainees for the primary sector had been met, whilst the target for secondary was 20% below target, and whilst the government estimated that over 1,000 trainees would be needed, there actually was a drop of almost 500. By December 2017 it was revealed by UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service), that the drop in the number of applicants for teacher training was 6,510, equating to a fall of 33%, and in January 2018 the Public Accounts Committee which scrutinises the value for money of public spending, stated that there was a growing sense of crisis for schools trying to retain teachers. They believe that the DfE should have been able to foresee this situation and that the balance between training new teachers and supporting the existing workforce is wrong, and that the government action to address it has been ‘sluggish and incoherent’.

In respect of the recruitment and retention of teachers of pupils identified as having SEND, it is stated that ‘workload pressures, depressed pay, and the challenges of supporting children identified as having SEND’ are fuelling the attrition of many experienced SEND teachers (Pearson 2008:94). It is also stated that trainees and new teachers tend not to feel equipped to work with children identified as having SEND, due to lack of ITT, access to appropriate CPD and the opportunity for discourse with experienced colleagues.

It appears that teacher attrition is becoming a ‘global concern’ (Pearson 2008:96), with schools ‘around the world facing a shortage of teachers with competency in special education’ (Cooc 2019:28). One of the reasons given for this attrition is that many SEND teachers have to learn ‘as they go along’, a view echoed by Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, and Harness (2001: 549 ) who believe that SEND teachers have to learn ‘on the job’, which can be formally or informally through collegial networks. Thornton, Peltier, and Medina (2007:233) argue that the shortage of SEND teachers is a ‘national epidemic’, and the only way to counteract this is to ‘elevate the professional status of special needs teachers’, whilst Cooc (2019:40) stresses the need for more ‘robust research’ into the ‘specific components of special education’ needed by teachers in ITT and CPD.

There are many factors which affect teachers’ decisions regarding the reasons as to why they join, stay or leave the profession, irrespective of whether it be special or mainstream, but Rivka (2015: 109) believes that special needs teachers ‘work under more difficult, more intense, and more demanding conditions’ than those in mainstream, with the teacher/parent/pupil relationship more complex in special education. She also believes that the ‘burnout’ often experienced by SEND teachers, is caused by ‘role complexity’ which encompasses stress, and lack of emotional fulfilment (ibid: 122) and the difficulties faced, when teaching has to ‘coexist with extreme classroom dynamics’.

Rock, Spooner and Nagro (2016: 98 ) cite workload, and role ambiguity as factors as to why SEND teachers leave the profession or transfer to another area of education, but also believe that the ‘piece meal’ approach to pre and in service training in relation to SEND does not help the situation. Mackenzie (2012: 156) states that many teachers who enter SEND education have an ‘inner urge’ to teach pupils identified as SEND at the start of their professional careers, and that the intellectual demands of SEND teaching actually maintain their commitment to this type of education. She also believes that it is often other ‘life problems’ such as family or health that cause teachers to leave, but does state that the lack of career opportunities in terms of progression can be a problem in SEND education.

Gavish (2017: 160 ) reports that to many SEND is the ‘unknown,’ although when teachers embark on a career in SEND education they find it brings ‘endless’ career satisfaction. She also reports that ITT only ‘familiarises’ trainees with special needs and disabilities as it is hoped they will ‘cope’ with the reality. She argues that the largely medical view of SEND by trainees should be replaced by the social model, but does not suggest how this can be achieved, especially if training goes no further than familiarisation. This view is supported in research by Mintz (2007:5) who found that many trainees based their attitudes on the medical model, and so rejected SEND teaching, but went on to argue that if students ‘pre-dispositions’ were ‘worked on’, presumably through ITT and CPD, ‘values and attitudes could be changed’. Mittler (2008: 7) has the view that it is the responsibility of teachers to support young people and children with SEND, to give them the skills and confidence to be the self-advocates of the next generation, but concedes that staff who provide care or deliver services to these young people lack the appropriate training, which corresponds with the previous research.

In conclusion it will be of interest when analysing the data to ascertain the reasons the participants offer for joining the profession, retaining their position, or leaving, and if indeed some of the above factors came into play, especially as it has recently been reported that between 20% and 40% of new teachers leave the profession in the first 5 years (Ronfeldt and McQueen 2017: 395). It is also of interest that a debate took place in the House of Lords (11/7/18) on the exclusion of disabled children, and Lord Maginnis shared his personal view that 80% of schools are staffed by one year trained teachers who do a ‘Mickey Mouse’ degree, and that in reality a teacher cannot be trained in one year, and are failing to be trained properly. The Earl of Listowel responded by asking how teachers who train in mainstream schools ever get the opportunity to teach children with more complex needs, an argument which will be discussed further in the study relating to analysing data and identifying themes.

2:13 Summary

The literature within this review in relation to special educational needs and disabilities, reflects a wide and diverse view which contextualises the research focus. It highlights the lack of consensus on the definition, identification and categorisation of SEND, and the negative connotations still apparent in the terminology, with models of disability linking to the categorisation of SEND, leading to a social constructivist model being employed to analyse the data. The review of the media gives a lens in which to consider societal views, whilst the history review highlights changing attitudes to SEND education. Current legislation identifies some of the levers and drivers of SEND education, whilst inclusion as a reality is examined. To conclude, a review of the literature concerned with the experiences of teaches of working in SEND contexts and settings, the career decisions of teachers in relation to their views, beliefs and values of SEND, and the training, recruitment and retention of teachers in mainstream and special education was undertaken. Chapter 3 will now examine the methodology used within the research study.

Chapter 3

Methodology.

3:1 Introduction.

This chapter will examine the use of life history and autoethnography as an approach to meeting the aims of the research, seeking clarification of the research question, and highlighting positive and negative aspects as well as dilemmas, through a social constructivist framework. This will then be followed by ethical considerations, and the process of analysis undertaken. Positionality and reflexivity concerned with using the stories of others will be discussed, along with the role of autoethnography in promoting reflexivity. The stories of two young adults self-defining as having, and being considered to have Special Educational Needs will then be discussed. To conclude I will examine the method of data collection, along with choice of participants, followed by an explanation of the analysis of the data, relating to both my participants, and my own autoethnography.

3:2 Why Life History?

 *‘Storytelling is in our blood, we think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story’ (Clandinin 2007:224).*

 *‘Stories are what makes us human’ (Hannigan 2014:498).*

Stories have played a big part in my life. They helped me escape reality when I was younger and witnessing domestic abuse, they were central in my own children’s bedtime routine evoking memories of love and warmth, and they were crucial to many aspects of my teaching across diverse curriculum areas. The students whom I lectured at university pressed me to tell more of my ‘school stories’ to illuminate a point, and the variety of methods I had to use to share a story in the special school, such as signing, brought a new and refreshing aspect to storytelling. It therefore seems logical to use this methodology in order to ‘understand the lives of others’ (Goodson and Sikes 2001:4), as the lives and careers of teachers can ‘play an important part in furthering understanding of a wide range of topics associated with education and schooling’ (ibid 57).

I agree with Goodson and Gill (2011:36) who emphasise the point that life history should ‘honour and respect the narrative of the storyteller first and foremost’, and by including my own story and writing myself into the research, it is my intention to enhance the rigour of the research by making potential biases and values explicit, to ensure transparency. I have the belief that by seeking meanings and explanations of the lives of both myself and others, I can begin to interpret the social world in which the research is set, and seek to understand why attracting and retaining special school teachers, ‘looms as a major challenge for the 21st century’ (Stempien and Loeb 2002:258).

It is important at this point to discuss what is meant by life story and life history, as these two terms are often used interchangeably in texts. I shall use the explanation of Goodson and Sikes (2001: 16/17) to attempt to clarify this. Life stories are in their ‘nature, already removed from life experiences, as they are lives ‘interpreted and made textual’, in what could be termed an ‘interpretive layer’. However the ‘move to life history adds a second layer and a further interpretation’, and involves a ‘move to account for historical context’, as without the ‘contextual issues of time and space, life stories can remain uncoupled from the conditions of their social construction’, with Goodson and Sikes stating that ‘above all there is an argument for life histories rather than life stories’.

Roberts (2002) uses the definition of a life story as ‘one narrated by the author/ teller’, and life history as the ‘later interpretive presentational work of the researcher’. He does however add the caveat that this simplification poses a difficulty in reality, in that the researcher does actually influence the process from the beginning, by asking the initial questions and conducting the interviews.

The life stories offered to me by my research participants have been analysed, set in context, and offered in the research, with the aim to ‘keep the story in the voice and words’ of those who told it (Clandinin 2007:228), whilst retaining the fact that it is not ‘a real life but a composed life’ (Plummer 2001:88). I am aware that there can be drawbacks with this method, none of which deter me! By recounting my participants’ stories in text I appreciate that it is not the story, but the ‘meaning taken from it’ (Hannigan 2014:497), as it is the reader who makes the ‘judgement’ (Polkinghorne 2007:484), about the interpretations made.

 May (2002: 11) reminds us that memory is not like a ‘video recorder’, and as both myself and my participants are not infallible, and I must accept that only a remembered account is being offered, a ‘selective batch of information’ (Friedman 2017). Goodson and Gill (2011:37) argue that research participants are often purposely chosen as their storyline appeals to the ‘researchers’ instinct’ and it is less common for a ‘conformist or conservative participant’ to be chosen, however my research participants were chosen solely on the basis that they were teachers/trainee teachers who wished to be part of the research study.

On a positive note, I believe my choice of method to research teachers lives is positively supported by other researchers, with Woods (1985:14) stating its use has ‘much to offer educational research’, and Clandinin (2007:228) believing that the life stories of educators can reveal how they found their ‘own centre through their chosen work’, and their ‘quest for meaning’ in educational practice. Pomson (2004:649) claims that teachers make the ‘most of every opportunity’ to talk about themselves and their career, not however in an egotistical manner but often to share their passion for teaching and the results they have achieved.

Goodson and Gill (2011:44) identified the fact that teachers from the 1970s will tell stories about themselves as ‘autonomous professionals’, whilst present day teachers are ‘technically compliant’ due to statutory procedures, which inhibit their creativity and ideas. This illustrates some of the changes over the last 50 years in terms of the freedom that teachers were once offered in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, which in the present are externally determined.

Other advantages of this approach for my research include: its ‘adaptability’ (Bell 2005:157), the opportunity to use ‘ordinary teacher discourse’ within my conversations with participants (Woods 1985:15), giving teachers a voice as this is ‘missing from the knowledge base of teaching’ (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009:16), having the opportunity to offer ‘informal peer support’ (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong 2009:75), the opportunity to avoid the ‘theoretical fog’ of some other methods (Plummer 2001:131), and primarily to be able to understand ‘cultural and social phenomena’ (Cole and Knowles 2001:20).Ultimately however it is because teachers’ lives and careers are ‘informative and fascinating’ (Goodson and Sikes 2001:57).

In telling the stories of teachers I aim to give them recognition as being experts in their own lives (Gramling 2004:209), as the profession of teaching is an ‘interactive-based activity *par excellence’* (Goodson and Sikes 2001:57). Throughout the research process I have been inherently aware of what Goodson and Sikes (2001:106) term the ‘dilemmas’ of choosing life history research, and how these can be avoided.

The dilemma of the relationship between the participants and their social settings, has been overcome by ensuring that the ‘history supplies the contexts, with which to locate the story, and the framework for interpreting it’ (Goodson 1992:239). Goodson also believes that there should be ‘equitable collaboration’ between ‘story giver and research taker’ (ibid 240), and that a crucial focus of life history work concerned with teacher research, is that the teachers’ own life story should be located alongside a broader contextual analysis, and quotes Stenhouse who rationalises this as ‘stories of action in theories of context’ (ibid 6), with the literature review offering the contextualisation for the study.

The dilemma of power between researcher and participants, which can manifest itself both ways, needs to ensure that manipulation and exploitation do not take place, and although dilemmas relating to participant involvement cannot be predicted, they should be recognised and supported. The dilemma associated with presentation, and stories being taken further away from the life lived during interpretation have been resolved by ensuring the participants are able to read and comment on all drafts, towards what Goodson and Sikes (2001:45) identify as collaborations between researcher and participant ‘considering the life in context’.

I am aware from various literature that there are other dilemmas, and I have endeavoured to avoid these. I am aware that any attempt at ‘describing or evaluating the complex human social condition is prone to distortions, omissions, reductions, and elaborations’ (Dhunpath and Samuel 2009:2), and that the method of life history is ‘easy to use badly, challenging to use well’ (Bird 2016). During time with participants I ‘followed rather than lead, listened rather than queried, and held back rather than probed’ (Kouritzin 2000:10), whilst adhering to all ethical guidelines, an aspect which will be discussed in the next section.

To conclude this section, I reiterate my position in relation to stories, and deduce that no amount of ‘drawbacks’ or ‘dilemmas’ would have deterred me from using this method, as apart from its research properties it has privileged me to tell and listen to stories.

3:3 Ethical Considerations.

 *‘The fundamental ethical requirement laid on all life history researchers is that informants’ rights as people, as individuals, as selves, as subjects, as autonomous beings, should, at all times, be respected’. (Goodson and Sikes 2001:90).*

As stated in my introductory chapter concerning positionality and reflexivity, I have been open and honest about my personal beliefs and values throughout the research, whilst ensuring ethical issues are addressed. In order to facilitate this I referred to the ‘five great ethical principles of current times’ (Plummer 2001:228) which are as follows:

* Respect, recognition and tolerance for persons and their differences.
* Promote the care of others.
* Expand equality, fairness and justice.
* Enlarge spheres of autonomy, freedom and choice.
* Minimise harm.

At the outset of the process I ensured that all participants had a clear written outline of my research proposal (Appendix 2), the role that they will play within it, and an overview of the method used. They needed to be aware of, and feel comfortable with the fact, that I shall be ‘delving’ into their lives, and I agree with the notion offered by K’Meyer and Crothers (2007: 91) who believe that ‘ethics demand insuring that interviewees understand why we ask certain questions and be honest about the purpose’.

Full informed consent was secured from all participants, as well as their approval to use audio recording in the interviews. All participants were made aware that if they shared any information that I considered to be concerning, for example child protection issues, I would pass this information to a third party, and that involvement in the research could not be used for the justification of negative behaviours. I did however endeavour to suggest helpful third parties which could prevent the interviews becoming ‘counselling sessions’, and when Barbara first started to tell her story and shared her feelings of low mood, I urged her to visit her G.P. in order to pursue the possibility of professional counselling, and heeded the words of K’Meyer and Crothers (2007: 88) who warn researchers not to make ‘promises of material aid and friendship that they cannot keep’.

 I ensured that I represented ‘lives respectfully’ and that I did not use ‘narrative privilege, or narrative power, to demean, belittle, or to take revenge’ (Sikes 2010:11), and care was afforded to both researcher and researched in order to protect their emotional wellbeing. This was in the form of ‘informal peer support’ (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, and Liamputtong 2009:75) who believe that therapeutic support should be available to researchers who may need this support whilst involved in research activities involving emotional issues. No support was however necessary during this research study. However I do believe that emotional needs to be expressed, and not hidden, by both the researcher and the researched, and do not want my research to be an ‘intellectual cover up of emotion, intuition and human relationships in the name of expert or academic knowledge’ (Wilkins 1993:94).

I have ensured that all conversations and data are kept anonymous, confidential and secure for my use only, and that all names and establishments, for example schools, are kept anonymous, unless for any reason the participant considered it an important part of their story that they are named. Participants’ rights were respected at all times, and their views and beliefs in terms of gender, race, origin, additional needs and religion were respected at all times throughout the research process.

No information or data was used in the research without the participants giving full consent after viewing the transcript, as transparency must be ensured at all times within a professional working relationship. I was explicit that the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any time without giving reasons would be accepted, and that participants could raise any concerns relating to the research at any time during the process.

To conclude, I believe that ethical considerations need to be on-going across all phases of the research, and I adhered to this from the outset, and was aware that the ‘devil is in the detail’ (Goodson and Sikes 2001:104) when considering the ethical implications of life history research. The process undertaken will be considered in the following section.

3:4 The Process.

 *‘Analysis is about making sense of, or interpreting, the information and evidence that the researcher has decided to consider as data’ (Goodson and Sikes 2001:34).*

I undertook the process using the ‘trustworthiness criteria’ suggested by Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017:2/3), who believe that research should be recognised as ‘familiar, and understood as legitimate by other researchers’, and that ‘trustworthiness is one way that a researcher can persuade themselves and their readers that the research findings are worthy of attention’. These criteria are as follows:

* Dependability – the process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented.
* Confirmability – interpretations and findings are clearly defined from the data, and conclusions are transparent.
* Audit Trails – there should be evidence of decisions and choices made by the researcher regarding theoretical and methodological issues.
* Credibility – ensure there is a ‘fit’ between respondents’ views and the researchers’ representation of them.
* Transferability – ensure ‘thick’ descriptions are given to ensure case-to-case transfer.
* Reflexivity – researcher to be self-critical and self-reflective.

All the stories were audio recorded, with some written notes if necessary to explain aspects such as silences, and body language, which I was unable to capture on the recording, and were transcribed into text, a process identified as having ‘layers of complexity’ (Campbell, McNamara and Gilroy 2004:129). These layers are identified as; the actual event, the account of that event, and the interpretation of the account of the event, the latter being the process I have enacted, with an awareness not to let the event ‘disappear under layers of interpretation’.

 Each story was then read, and re-read to establish familiarity, which in turn helped to identify reoccurring themes and categories across all stories, with ‘similarities and differences used to define categories and compare data’ (Maxwell and Chmiel 2014:23). The categories were recorded, from each story, and a pattern began to emerge which led me to identify the following categories as a framework for the analysis, during and after transcription. During this process I was open to identifying ‘multiple meanings’ of the data (Campbell, McNamara and Gilroy 2004:130), and endeavoured to view it from different perspectives. I adopted an open coding system which is both systematic and creative, and was aware that there are not always absolute distinctions between categories. [One of the participant’s stories, with categories/themes marked, is to be found in the appendices, (Appendix 4) to illustrate the text marking process].

The Research Categories.

* Societal – Early life. To include family, friends, education, environment and early experiences.
* Societal – Later Life. To include family, friends, relationships, further education, and early career decisions.
* Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development.
* Teaching Experiences.
* Career Choices.
* Present views and beliefs related to SEND teaching.

I will now examine each overall category, the themes identified within it, the story aspects which support these themes, and highlight any relevant theoretical views associated with the theme. Each theme will be summarised, leading to an overall summary of the category. This knowledge will then be employed to support the research findings, in conjunction with my autoethnography which is explored in the following section.

3:5 Autoethnography.

*‘Autoethnographers showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness’ (Scott-Hoy and Ellis 2008:130).*

Autoethnography is an approach to research which seeks to ‘describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experiences’ (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011:1) which is my intended aim within this research. However, there are other definitions which also mirror my objectives, and some are as follows: ‘autoethnography is a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context’ (Reed-Danahay 1997:3), with mine mirroring the attitudes and views towards those identified as having SEND in a pre-inclusion era, ‘autoethnography is a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self and others in a social context’ (Spry 2001:710), which is apparent in my own autoethnography ‘Two sides of a story’, and ‘autoethnography is a transgressive account in the context of professional practice which opens up a professionals’ life’ (Denshire 2014:831) which I believe mine does in respect of my teaching career.

Another reason for choosing this method is my love of stories, and I fully endorse the view of Bolton (2006:205) who believes that we are brought up surrounded by stories, and that they ‘flow through us and ratify us from birth’, telling us who we are and where we belong, what is ‘right and what is wrong, and help us to create the way we see our place in society’ (ibid 208). However, I had to make a decision on what stories to share, and which, if any, to withhold (Eisenbach 2016:6) and was aware that there is no final authoritative version of reality to be ‘captured or narrated’ (Bloor and Wood 2006:19). I was mindful that a story can have ‘more than one meaning’ (Bolton 2006:209, Muncey 2010:15), and that my autoethnography is not ‘real life but a composed life’ (Plummer 2001:88, Bolton 2006:211), and that ‘memory can be both a friend and a foe’ (Chang 2007:18).

Autoethnography can be identified in three parts; auto – the self, ethno – the cultural link, and graphy – the research process (Vasconcelos 2011:419, Winkler 2018:244), and researchers using this method may vary their emphasis on each, in order to purposely open up their lives in order to learn about self and culture (Winkler 2018:244). However I was conscious that my story did not ‘exist in a vacuum’ (Chang 2008:69), and as such I had a responsibility to respect all others involved, and appreciate that my ‘depiction of self’ may not be agreed by others (Eisenbach 2016:604).

After considering the different forms of autoethnography which include; ‘narrative, reflexive dyadic, interviews, reflexive ethnographies, layered accounts, interactive interviews, co-constructed narratives, and personal narratives’ (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011:7, Denzin 2014) I consider that I have employed a ‘personal narrative form’ with aspects of ‘reflexive dyadic’ and ‘narrative’ forms, with my personal reflection adding ‘context and layers to the participant’s story’ (Ellis 2004:18).

Autoethnography as an approach can bring readers into the scene which you are setting, and give them the opportunity to ‘experience an experience’ (Ellis 1993:711), whilst helping them ‘better understand a culture with a wider lens on the world’ (Ellis, Adams, Bochner 2011: 4). As my goal was to produce an ‘analytical, accessible text’ (Holman-Jones 2005:765), to impact on the research focus, I needed to begin to understand ‘aspects of life which intersect with cultural contexts’ (Tillman 2009:20). I concede that writing my story was challenging, and uncomfortable at times, but did give me the ‘occasional joy’ of writing (Denshire 2014:845), and does I hope offer a ‘thick description of culture’ (Geertz 1973:10).

As it was my intention to be open and reflexive throughout the research, I believe that positioning myself within the same context as the other participants enhanced this, by becoming both the ‘researcher and researched’ (Muncey 2010:3). It was pertinent that I considered my account as only a partial perspective, being mindful that no account however carefully constructed can be a ‘true to the moment account’, but only a ‘series of events that have been noticed and remembered’ (Bolton 2006:211, Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011:3). I appreciate that by writing about myself and my experiences I am unavoidably writing about others within my life, who have not had the opportunity to give their consent, and consequently have ensured I have adhered to ethically sound procedures (Winkler 2018:240, Chang 2008:69).

I heeded the words of Medford (2006:854) who reminds autoethnographers never to publish, if not prepared to show it to those involved within the study, and Tolich (2010:1607) who reminds us to be aware of consent and consultation, two aspects I adhered to in early drafts. It was unavoidable that within my account I ‘froze and fixed lives, attitudes, beliefs and values’ (Sikes 2017:411), with no possibility of recording future changes of individuals within my story, but feel this is justified, in that I captured a moment in time in the teachers’ careers. .

In conclusion, I contemplate my own story which I believe is an autobiographical memory ‘disrupted by another narrative’ (Hayler 2017:109), in terms of my second story intersecting my first, and that engagement with one’s own experience of education encourages an ‘awareness of the social, cultural, and political contexts of where learning takes place’ (ibid 111), which is an aspect of the research study.

 However, I am in full agreement with Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011:2) who believe that autoethnography ‘acknowledges and accommodates the subjective emotionality of the researcher’s influence on the research, rather than hiding matters or assuming they don’t exist’, and in doing so can I believe enhance it. It is therefore my aim to ensure that the account I gave was lifelike, believable and possible, and that I undertook the research as a ‘self-reflexive, self-knowing, and self-respectful scholar’ (Winkler 2018:243). The following section clarifies the role of the two young adults who contributed to this study.

3:6 The Stories of Two Young Adults Self-Defining as having and Being Considered to Have Special Educational Needs.

 *‘To date, much of the research on special needs education has ignored the views and experiences of disabled students themselves’. (Pitt and Curtin 2004:388).*

Although this research seeks to identify the perceptions of teachers regarding careers in special education, it is my opinion that it is vital to give children and young people a voice, in order to express their own views on the education they receive, with Prunty (2012:29) reporting that ‘children’s views are neither consistently nor reliably incorporated into educational decision making’.

 I therefore decided to collect the stories of two young adults self-defining as having, and being considered to have special educational needs, whose educational experiences were very different. The two young people are the son and daughter in law of a colleague, and on hearing about my research asked if they could take part. Their stories were audio recorded with their consent, and I transcribed them just as they were told. I explained the aims, objectives and process of the research, in terminology they were able to understand, and they were happy to go ahead and tell their stories. These stories are told and analysed, alongside those of the teachers, in the next chapter, and do offer an alternative lens to SEND education. The process of the data collection will now be considered.

3:7 Data Collection.

 *‘Popular consensus is that we live in an age of narratives’ (Goodson 2013:10).*

I chose life history as my approach, but needed to ascertain the necessity of research questions, the method of interviewing and recording, choice of participants, and data collection. I had made it very clear from the outset what the aims and objectives of the research were, how it was to be conducted, and my positionality, and had conveyed this to my participants. I therefore decided not to influence their story by unnecessary focus questions, and that I would let my participants tell the stories of their lives in the way they wished, including or excluding life moments, which may or may not be immediately related to the research focus.

I was aware that my participants would include details and scenarios unconnected to the research aims, but felt it important to let them tell their ‘own’ story especially if this put them at their ease, and agree with Goodson and Sikes (2001:23) who believe it is the ‘richness of the data and the nature of the lives being investigated’ that is important, not the quantity of data.

I required participants who were willing and able to tell their story and possessed the ‘linguistic, economic, social, and health capabilities’ in order to participate in the research (Adams 2008:182). Goodson and Sikes (2001:24) believe that life history research very rarely involves a random sample of informants, and I believe my participants to be what they describe as ‘purposive’, in other words they are linked to the research by their career in teaching. During the research I occasionally had to ask a participant to reiterate a point in order to clarify, but it was still be my aim to conduct ‘relatively unstructured, informal, conversation type encounters’ (Goodson and Sikes 2001:28).

All ‘storytelling sessions’ were audio recorded, with permission sought from the participants beforehand. I use the term ‘storytelling sessions’ rather than interviews as there was no agreed focus or prompts from myself, and I wanted the participants to have the freedom and comfort that can be associated with the telling of stories, in order to put them at their ease. They took place in a mutually decided location, where both parties felt comfortable and at ease. The recording of the story was paused or stopped at any time either by the researcher or the participant, and if requested by the participant, it could be erased. Participants were also encouraged to raise any problems or concerns at any time during the research process, and in the transcription process.

The Participants.

* Mid-career female supply teacher, who has never taught in specialist provision.
* Mid-career female teacher, recently moved from a mainstream to special school.
* Mid-career female teacher trainer, recently moved from teaching in mainstream school.
* Mid-career male teacher trainer, formerly a SENCO in a mainstream primary school.
* First year female QTS student on a primary initial teacher training course.
* Mid to late career female teacher with SEND experience, now teaches in offender learning.
* Mid to late career female teacher trainer, formerly a mainstream primary teacher.

The majority of participants who took part actually approached me, rather than I approach them, as they had heard about my research through colleagues past and present, and were eager to participate. Some had contacted me in the past for advice concerning special needs and I had recognised their potential for the research, and one was a past colleague who also wished to be included and who, on hearing about the study, had contacted me.

 More information about the participants will be shared alongside their stories in the next chapter. All participants were offered as many, or as few meetings as they felt necessary, to a time limit which suited them. All stories were subsequently told and recorded, in order that they could be transcribed at a later date. All the meetings went well, as did the storytelling, and I felt confident that I had both adequate, and useful data in order to proceed with the analysis, which is considered in the following section.

3:8 Analysis of Data.

 *‘We live life forwards but understand it backwards’ (Kierkegaard 1843).*

The analysis of data was undertaken using the six phases of ‘Thematic Analysis’ suggested by Braun and Clarke (2016). These phases are as follows:

* Familiarisation of the data/Transcription
* Initial Coding
* Searching for themes/Sort codes into potential themes
* Reviewing themes/Develop a thematic map
* Define and name themes/ Identify essence of each theme
* Writing up

The process enacted was therefore as follows. All the audio recorded meetings were subsequently transcribed into text, a process which facilitated familiarity with the data, and gave opportunities to re-live certain moments. Whilst audio recording, I was aware that I was not capturing the nuances of body language, facial expressions, or why a silence may have occurred, but was able to make notes during the meetings of any significant change in the participant, not related to verbal interaction. The task in hand was then to interpret and make sense of the evidence, into what I decided to considered as data (Goodson and Sikes 2001:34), and take into account ‘common sense’ points (Bell 2005:240) such as ‘never discard any early drafts’.

Huberman (1993:248) believed that data transformation was information which is ‘condensed, clustered, and sorted over time’, and I identified ‘themes’ or ‘categories’ found within my stories, in order to ‘create data and make sense of my findings’. Ryan and Bernard (2000:2) believe that this identification of what they term ‘constructs’, takes place before, during, and after the actual research, and is dependent on three ideas. These are: ‘a richer literature review produces more themes, that the themes arise from the characteristics of the phenomena being studied, and that they are often based on already agreed upon professional definitions’.

I also expected theory above and beyond that in my literature review to emerge, which enabled me to ‘develop concepts and phases which could change over time’ (Bryant and Charmaz 2001:3), and necessitated a ‘constant evaluation of the data’ (Miller 2000:113), which enabled me to see it in ‘fresh ways’ (Charmaz 2014:6). I did not expect to reach ‘saturation of data where every new story confirms the last’ (Bertaux 1981:187) due to the small sample, although this could have been a possibility, but due to geographic confines I discovered repeating themes common to particular social factors within the area of the research.

The analysis of my autoethnography alongside the analysis of my participants’ stories, enhanced the rigour of the research by making potential biases and values explicit (Goodson and Sikes 2001:111) and promoted transparency. I also avoided the tension found by Olive (2014:6) between the emic (the member of a culture being studied) and etic (the researcher/outsider) perspectives of life history research, due to the fact that I am also a member of the same culture as that of the participants. However Olive also found that the ‘inescapable subjectivity’ that the researcher brings to the study makes a solely emic approach impossible to achieve, and that an etic approach helps to broaden cross cultural themes and perspectives.

 He also found that there are a ‘myriad of sublevels’ within a culture, as not everyone in that culture has experienced the same ‘rites of passage’, which is bound to translate into differing values and beliefs. The analysis of the stories of the two young adults self-defining as having and being considered to have special educational needs, will I believe, reinforce several of my themes and facilitate another dimension to the research focus.

3:9 Summary.

This chapter has offered an explanation and an examination of my methodology, and the results which emanated from the use of this approach are presented and discussed in the next chapter, alongside the stories of my participants. As I hold an epistemological view that the ‘social world is an interpreted world’ (Altheide and Johnson 1994:489), the choice of approach was never in dispute, as I believe stories are integral in all aspects of life, and if Goodson (2013:12) credits Bruce Springsteen and Bob Dylan (my musical heroes) as the most ‘perceptive storytellers’ of our time, I believe that my decision to use this method has just gained credibility!

**Chapter 4**

**Presentation of Research Findings.**

4:1 Introduction.

 *‘As qualitative research becomes increasingly recognised and valued, it is imperative that it is conducted in a rigorous and methodical manner to yield meaningful and useful results’. (Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules 2017:1)*

Goodson and Sikes (2001:57) stated that teachers’ lives were ‘informative and fascinating’, and the stories I have collected have certainly mirrored this. They have offered an understanding of societal time and place, and have offered an insight into teaching and teacher training over the last 30 years. All participants were equally comfortable and eager, to tell their own stories, which mirrors the findings of Pomson (2004:649) who claims that when allowed to talk about themselves, teachers ‘make the most of every opportunity’. I was fortunate to have a good rapport with all my participants, and in some cases was able to return the favour by offering advice and support on SEND, special schools, and career decisions. After introducing the participants, I shall employ the categories and themes in order to present the research findings, which I support with relevant literature.

4:2 Introducing the Participants

Ann a 19 year old female in the first year of a primary teacher training degree at university. Has previously volunteered in a special school whilst at school, and has also been involved in young people’s groups such as Brownies and Guides, lives in West Yorkshire but studies in the North East.

Barbara a mid-career female teacher in her mid-thirties, who after teaching art in a mainstream secondary school since qualifying, made the move to a special school, for boys with behavioural and emotional problems, with no prior knowledge of what to expect, lives, works, and trained in West Yorkshire.

Chris a mid to late career female teacher in her mid-forties, who has taught in mainstream primary schools for her whole career, with a specialism in music, but who has always harboured the wish to teach in a special school, lives, works, and trained in West Yorkshire.

David a male teacher trainer in his early-forties, who was previously a SENCO in a mainstream primary school. He identifies as having a SEND, and has extensive knowledge of SEND, but has never taught in a special school, lives, works and trained in West Yorkshire.

Esme a female early to mid-career teacher trainer in her mid-forties, who has only recently left mainstream teaching in a secondary school, where she taught RE who identifies as having a SEND, and also has family members identifying as SEND, lived in South Yorkshire at the time of the study, trained in West Yorkshire, and now lives and works in the Midlands.

Fran a late career female teacher in her early-fifties, who trained as a mature student and taught young SEND adults in a further education college. She now teaches in a women’s prison, specialising in SEND, and lives, works, and trained in West Yorkshire.

Gill a late career female teacher trainer who is in her early-fifties, who has experience of early year’s education, both as a teacher and an advisor for her LEA. She has previously visited specialist provisions in both roles. Lives and works in Merseyside but trained in West Yorkshire.

It must be made clear at this point that the above teachers/student above have very limited if any experience of SEND teaching, especially in a specialist provision such as a special school, but the choice of participants was completely random, with me having very little knowledge of their previous experiences and career choices at the onset of the study. Their inclusion in the study was due to their availability, ability and desire to tell their stories, along with the possibility of their ‘storyline appealing to my instinct’ (Goodson and Gill 2011:37).

Other Participants include:

Hetty a retired female teacher and teacher trainer in her early-sixties, whose story is my own, lives and trained in West Yorkshire, worked in South Yorkshire.

James a young male adult aged 25 who identifies as having SEND, who has had experience of being a pupil in a mainstream and a special school, lives, was educated, and works in South Yorkshire.

Rachael a young female adult aged 27 who identifies as having SEND, who has experience of being a pupil in mainstream schools, with extra assistance, lives, was educated, and works in South Yorkshire.

4:3 Categories and Themes

This section will follow the chronological journeys of the participants through their life stories, starting with their earliest memories through to their present day views and beliefs. I have quoted them verbatim, and have endeavoured to ‘honour and respect the narrative of the storyteller first and foremost’ (Goodson and Gill 2011:36). By recounting my participants’ stories in text I appreciate that it is not the story, but the ‘meaning taken from it’ (Hannigan 2014:497), as it is the reader who makes the ‘judgement about the interpretations made’ (Polkinghorne 2007:484). It was however my intention to give the participants ‘recognition as being experts in their own lives’ (Gramling 2004:209).

 4:3:1 Societal – Early Life.

This theme encapsulates the early life of the participants, and revolves mostly around family and school life. Most participants demonstrated good memory recall of this period of their lives, although it does appear that the age of the participant influenced the memories of contact.

Hetty - *I was terrified. The ‘boy that was different’ had actually come into the shop where I was standing with my mum. He started to talk to everyone in turn, and got very close to them when he did so. He seemed so big and his face was different. As he got closer I realised that as well as talking, he was wanting to touch people on the arm or shoulder. My mum sensed his presence and very quickly hid me behind her and left the shop. I had not said a word but she seemed just as uncomfortable as I was. You never seemed to see anyone identified as having SEND 50 years ago.*

Hetty- *The only people in my early years who were ‘different’ were two of my half cousins, one who was tall, and one who was very short. They were brothers, one of whom had gigantism and one who had dwarfism. I had no idea that their size had any underlying reason, but remember my Great Aunt being offered a sum of money to allow the ‘small’ one to join Billy Smarts circus. She declined, and in later years he married and had a daughter.*

*Chris – My cousin had special needs and had facial disfiguration, my dad ensured that as a family we supported her, and kept a positive approach to those who are different. We lived near a mental hospital and I would see people out in their pyjamas, initially this didn’t bother me because of what my dad had taught us, but the way other people reacted to them made me scared.*

*Gill - My auntie and uncle were mental health nurses, but at the hospital where they worked there were many individuals who had special needs not mental health issues. Some of the patients used to come to my auntie and uncle’s house for tea when I was there, and that’s when I realised that you can’t always ‘see’ a disability.*

Some of the younger participants had been given explanations regarding the behaviour of pupils identified as having SEND, which helped to foster their understanding.

*Ann – There were kids at school with special needs and some were disruptive, but they were never sent out, we knew they had behaviour problems.*

*Fran – We had a boy in our class who was autistic, the teacher explained his difficulties so we could understand some of his behaviour.*

The two young adults who self- identify as having SEND had the following experiences.

Rachael – *At mainstream secondary I got bullied because I had one to one, I had eggs and stones thrown at me, I got left out of lessons and felt low and upset.*

James - *I was born with cerebral palsy and because I was born with it I’ve known no other so having this disability to me is normal. When I was young I was hardly any different from my group of friends in my mainstream school, but when I got to seven I began to notice a change in how my body was set, how my hand was in a fixed position and locked to my chest, and how I walked on tip toes. At this time my peers’ response to me also changed.*

At least three of my participants self-identified as having SEND and recounted their early experiences of childhood, in respect of themselves and others. They both felt that this had an influence on both their perceptions of others identifying as SEND, and on their own future careers as teachers, as they had felt empathy with others identified as having SEND.

*David – I didn’t think that what I had was a special need when I was younger, it was just a physical impairment, but people made fun of me, and mimicked how I walked. I was kicked to the ground at school but my teacher never addressed the bullying. I couldn’t tell my parents.*

*Fran – I got forgotten about, I thought I was thick and then I started being bullied. I took the bullying for so long and then I rebelled and retaliated. I ended up being suspended from school, but no one ever asked why I had been like this. I needed to know the reasons why, so I continually asked questions, I was classed as an ‘annoying’ child. People don’t class people like me as special needs.*

Rachael - *I got bullied at school because I was different but I don’t think it’s fair because I’m the same as everyone else but I have a mild learning difficulty. I think everyone should be included.*

Esme who self-identifies as having SEND did along with her family, have what she describes as the ‘dilemma’ of choosing either a mainstream or special school, an aspect which is discussed in section 1:5 relating to placement in a special school.

*Esme – I had anxiety separation disorder, then after rheumatic fever I had arthritis and hearing difficulties. I am also dyslexic. I needed access to a hydrotherapy pool which was situated in the special school. My teacher suggested I go to the special school but my dad said no as he felt I was too academic. Personally I felt there would be a stigma of going to a special school, a local girl who I was told was ‘severely mentally retarded’ went there in a taxi, and I didn’t want to be at a school with people like that. It was strange because my dad never had anything to do with my education, but he had very firm views on me not going to a special school.*

Whilst a much younger participant self-identifying as having SEND has an extremely positive experience of education in a special school.

*James – My peers in mainstream began to see me as different and my friendships disappeared and I found myself getting more and more isolated. Thankfully I ended up at a special needs school where the staff were more understanding of my needs, in mainstream only my support assistant had seemed to understand me. In the special school everyone had a disability of some sort, I felt happy and valued there, and it was ok to say ‘I am disabled’. It took me a while to settle, as thinking I was normal it was difficult to understand the needs of others. That school is the reason why to this day I can say I’m proud to have a disability.*

4:3:2 Societal – Later Life.

This theme relates to the participants’ later life and includes; family, friends, relationships, further education, and early career decisions. Certain themes that were identified in early life are still present.

*Ann – I was frightened of the ‘violent’ boy in my class at high school.*

*Chris – It was a given that the people from the mental hospital were, well mental.*

*Gill – Images of those identified as having SEND often elicited the response ‘poor little soldier’.*

*Fran – I was told that a dwarf was someone who should either be in a pantomime or a circus.*

*Esme – I remember at high school my friends told me where the mongol lived and I never challenged them because I didn’t want to look ‘un-cool’, and I cringe now when I think that the charity shop my mum used to take me to was known as the ‘spastics’ shop.*

Some participants influenced by others in their understandings of those identified as having SEND, actively sought ways of gaining knowledge and understanding of this group.

*Ann – I volunteered to help at a local special school for 2 weeks, I did it for my own personal development because I realised I knew so little about individuals identified as having SEND.*

*David – I worked as a play scheme leader in the holidays and dealt with all aspects of special needs. I found it really exciting and enlightening.*

*Fran – I worked with young people in the community with Downs Syndrome. I’d been bullied and lacked self-confidence and this helped me as much as it helped them.*

*Gill – I did voluntary work in a children’s home where some of the children had physical and mental disabilities.*

However, Chris still recalls that in her early twenties she was;

 *Frightened to death by the thought of special needs and disabilities.*

Luckily this is a fear she no longer holds, and her views and values have changed greatly over the years to the point where;

 *I would jump at the chance of working in a special school, or even working with special needs children in the community.*

Unfortunately the bullying that some participants encountered in their early years associated with their SEND, did not diminish as they got older, but did change in form.

*Rachael - In my final year at mainstream secondary I met another girl with a mild learning disability and became more confident and happier, the bullying was still there but having someone made me feel better. At college I met more people with learning disabilities and felt even happier and not as different.*

This bullying was encountered in the school environment, but was also found in the wider society.

*Fran - I was living in a high crime area, with an abusive husband, I went to my MP for advice. He said ‘get married again, get pregnant, and get a council house’. It felt like I wasn’t worth anything.*

*David – I was bullied in my first relationship, but it was now called domestic abuse. I had low self-esteem due to previous bullying incidents but I didn’t recognise the signs. My partner stole my bank card and emptied my account, and tried to stop me going out to work. The police were involved and I became very anxious, I realised I was being controlled. I believe this drew me towards children with anxiety and mental health problems because I knew what it felt like. It took years to pay off the loans he had run up in my name and my parents were so worried. My mum had a brain haemorrhage which has left her with a disability. I blame myself for this and carry the guilt. She has now been bed bound for 15 years and I still think ‘was it me’?*

Of the eight participants who are going to be, are, or have been teachers, five commenced their training immediately on leaving school, while the remaining three embarked on other careers first. For most of those who went to university straight from school, their planned teaching placements were their first experience of classroom life as a teacher.

*Ann – A child with behaviour difficulties was a real eye opener, especially the physical intervention required to remove him to a safe place.*

*Chris – I went into teaching because of my music background but because of cut backs I ended up in a primary classroom – It wasn’t really a happy experience.*

*David – Teachers used terminology I didn’t understand, especially in relation to special needs. I had never encountered some of the terminology and the acronyms they used they certainly weren’t mentioned in my training.*

*Fran – Life is about understanding, and it seemed that people didn’t understand those who were different.*

Those who entered their teacher training at a later time had firm reasons for doing so:

*Fran - University changed my life and not only in an academic sense. I’d been told I was stupid from an early age, but I set high standards for myself and I became more confident. I had always wanted to teach, I wanted to make a difference to people like me who had struggled.*

*Barbara – Teaching was a ‘portable’ profession which suited my lifestyle, I thought about becoming an occupational therapist, but teaching was for me.*

*Hetty - When my children were 4 and 5 respectively, a friend told me about the ‘Mature Matriculation’ scheme, which prepared more mature people with limited qualifications for higher education. I jumped at the chance, and after 12 months I went to Leeds University and passed the exam that would seal my future. I was accepted at Bretton Hall College on a 4 year Bachelor of Education honours degree the year my youngest started school, and finally my dream had been realised, I was going to be a teacher.*

Two participants have children who have been identified as having SEND, and as such have alternate views and experiences of the education system.

Fran – *My son was born with coeliac disease and was very ill as baby. In nursery school they often tried to give him food that could have been life threatening. I knew there was something else wrong and when he was 15 he was diagnosed with autism. His head teacher at primary school had labelled him naughty, but luckily the SENCO at his high school had a daughter who was autistic so she understood. Like me he was bullied for being different, and we had to involve the police. I worked hard and became a teacher to show my son that there are no barriers if you work hard. Because of my needs and my son’s needs I know how easy it is for people to give up on you.*

*Esme – My son is autistic. There were 7 kids in his class who were identified as autistic, 3 went to a special school, seemingly for attacking the class teacher. The same teacher said that my son was not autistic he was just copying the behaviour of the others. My son was a genius at maths so I thought* *he can’t be autistic, but there were some traits there, like him walking on his toes. He became ‘lost’ in the mainstream secondary, he struggled with the noise and the school labelled him as ‘naughty’. He was bullied and had his glasses knocked off many times, and I realised that a ‘label’ might be beneficial for him. He was finally identified as autistic just as we moved house and him schools. He was fortunate to get a placement at a maths specialist school with an autism unit attached. The new school has a really good ethos towards those with SEND, especially autism, and he has settled well, and can now say ‘actually I’m autistic’, without worrying about repercussions.*

4:3:3 Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development.

This section will consider the initial training of the participants, with the emphasis on the input they received in relation to SEND, the training route they took, and the continuing professional development which was on offer to them throughout their teaching careers in respect to SEND.

*Ann – What SEND training? I’m going into my second year of teacher training and up to press I have had 4 lectures on SEND in my professional skills input. The lecturer is terrible. She showed us a series of vague slides very loosely related to SEND, about 50% of the students don’t turn up and some that do play candy crush on their phones. I feel as though I’m really missing out and end up coming home and trying to do my own research on the internet. I’m studying for a B.A. with QTS.*

*Barbara – I got into teaching by studying for a PGCE after getting a B.A. in art. During my course we went into a special school for 5 days, but only to observe. Other than that I had no SEND input in my training.*

*Chris – I gained a B.A. in music and then went on to do a PGCE. My PGCE didn’t prepare me for teaching, let alone the teaching of special needs. I had no SEND input and had no contact with any SEND pupils on my 2 placements.*

*David – I had no SEND input in my initial training. I was in to it, but the SEND lectures clashed with my main subject so I was told I couldn’t do it. I did a B.A. with QTS.*

*Esme– I don’t recall any SEND input during my training, apart from one morning on behaviour management. I did a B.A. with QTS.*

*Fran – After uni I did an applied PGCE. I hated it. All the others on the course wanted to teach ‘A’ levels and be the ‘teachers of the future’. No mention was made of SEND.*

*Hetty - In our second year of a B.Ed. (Hons) degree an announcement was made. We were to go on 2 extra placements, one to observe children of ethnic origin, and one to observe children identified as having special needs. Each placement was to be over 3 afternoon sessions, in a school chosen to highlight these two areas. We had no preparation and were duly shipped out in threes and fours to the schools. The much awaited special needs placement saw us in a mainstream school. The class we were placed in had amongst it a few pupils with Individual Education Plans, but none that had a Statement of Special Educational Needs. After a quick debrief back at college that was it! Our special needs training was complete. No reference would be made again to the identification of needs, or pedagogy required to successfully teach these children, I did ask at one point if we needed any more input in SEND but was told ‘I probably wouldn’t need it’!*

Only one of the research participants had a positive experience of SEND input during their initial training;

*Gill– I did a 2 year PGCE and there was a strong ethos of inclusion and a very holistic approach to teaching. A big deal was made of SEND training, due to staff expertise. I was very lucky as my supervisor had been a SEND advisor for a local authority. I learnt not to label children with a deficit model.*

One of the young adults who identifies as having SEND, questions the understanding of teachers relating to those identified as having SEND:

*James - When I go to speak in mainstream schools the teachers ask what I want to focus on, but I say that I just want the children to ask me any questions [about SEND]. There are no such things as silly questions we all have questions we need to ask. But the teachers in mainstream schools seem to want to wrap me in cotton wool and protect me, but I don’t want people to fear the word disability. If the teachers tell the children not to ask certain questions then the children will keep them hidden, and they still won’t know how to respect and treat disabled people. Some of the teachers hold the children back from asking questions, which can cause a divide, I think it’s the teachers who feel uncomfortable.*

Only one of the participants was able to visit a specialist provision during training, but some did have the opportunity to work with pupils identified as having SEND during their mainstream placements.

*Ann – My first placement school was very inclusive and 25% of the pupils were identified as having SEND. It’s been a real learning curve but I’m so glad I got the chance to do it. Some of the other students on my course have come into contact with very few pupils identified as having SEND.*

*Chris – I have no recall of any pupils identified as SEND on my placements.*

*David – I didn’t realise how many needs I would encounter on my mainstream placements.*

*Barbara – I remember very little CPD that dealt with SEND. I believe we had half a day on autism and dyslexia.*

*Chris – I have never accessed any CPD on SEND. I think that’s why I had a fear of those identifying as having SEND. I would love some training or experience in SEND so I could apply to a special school, does working in a mainstream school for 25 years count?*

*David – I became a SENCO, but still with no support or training. I had to find my own way through the fog.*

*Esme – I had very poor CPD relating to SEND. What I did have was delivered by a private company. It was very practical highlighting a medical model, with no mention of pedagogy which is what I wanted.*

*Hetty – The asthma nurse came into school on an INSET day to talk about children with asthma, it seemed the school thought that was the most extreme special need we would encounter.*

4:3:4 Teaching Experiences

At the outset of their teaching career only one of the participants choose to work in a specialist provision, albeit not a special school.

*Fran – I knew I wanted to teach SEND, people don’t recognise the wide variety of needs out there. There are people with hidden disabilities like me, but I always knew I didn’t want to teach kids. I was once attacked in a burglary and realised my attacker had had no education, and that this was a perpetuating problem. I knew then that I wanted to work in a prison environment. I wanted to make a difference and felt I could do that in a prison. You need to look at the bigger picture, I believe there are a lot of different needs that could be classed as special, trans-gender being one of them. Regardless of where you work it should be all about the students.*

The remaining six participants who are teachers, all chose mainstream education for their first teaching post. Some gave a reason as to why this was the case:

*Barbara – I wanted to be an art teacher, and mainstream was the place to do that.*

*Chris – I wanted to be a music specialist, and I only had experience of teaching mainstream children.*

*Esme – I did have a tour of a special school and I would have liked to have worked there so I applied, but I didn’t get an interview. I’m sure it’s because I’d had no SEND input when I was training. I have a passion for SEND because of my own difficulties, and I could have done a good job if I had had the chance.*

*Hetty – To be honest I didn’t really know if there was a special school in the area and certainly didn’t feel as though I was prepared to work in one.*

Another participant whose first position was in mainstream, was extremely alarmed to find that a high proportion of the class were identified as having SEND, and that he was ill prepared to teach this group.

*David – There were so many needs in my class, I was unaware of the terminology that was being used in respect of those identified as SEND, and I didn’t know what an IEP was, let alone how to write or execute one. I had one child with severe communication needs who had a teaching assistant. I sent them out of the classroom and let them get on with it. I realised no progress was being made because the child had no social interaction, I had created a dependency model. I asked another teacher in the school who had a teaching assistant in class, how to manage the situation, and the teacher said she didn’t even know the child in her class who was identified as having special needs because she was taught solely by the teaching assistant. The teachers’ response was ‘I’m not paid to work with children like that, I’m not a babysitter’. I realised then that a teacher should take responsibility for all children in their class, not just the ones they chose to work with, and that children identified as having SEND deserve to be educated and accountability must be taken seriously. I also realised that I had never considered how to work with teaching assistants in the classroom, this was never mentioned in training.*

As their teaching careers progressed the participants had a range of experiences within their given schools, both positive and negative, some regarding SEND.

*Barbara – I loved being an art teacher, I had a lot of support from colleagues and knew all the kids. However after my school merged with another, the cohorts changed. Many kids now came from a large council estate and the behaviour became ‘overwhelming’. I felt respected by the children but not appreciated by the management team, there were many issues relating to accountability, and I feared for my job because I was high on the pay scale. I found the increasing workload and the stress of performance management very hard to cope with. At this time I had a trans-gender pupil in my class who was transitioning from female to male. One day without thinking I called the pupil by their female name which I had known them by for 5 years. A complaint was made against me accusing me of ‘hate crime’, and the parents, the head teacher and the union were all involved. The complaint was not proved and no further action was taken but it rocked my confidence. I questioned if I should leave teaching altogether or did I just need another school?*

*Chris – As my career progressed I got a bit ‘turned off’ by teaching, I felt vulnerable and I wasn’t respected. The workload was getting ridiculous and I believe experience counts for zero – you become too expensive. I left my permanent job and went to an agency to work on supply. They asked if I would go in a special school and I said ‘no way’, because I would be jumping into a world where everyone else is trained. I found conditions like autism scary especially in a mainstream class, I could have maybe coped with the one autistic pupil but not the other 29 at the same time. I also felt that I had little or no experience of behaviour management either in my training or during my career.*

*David – I enrolled on an M.A. but first completed my certificate in SEND. I knew I needed training and hadn’t got it anywhere else. I became part of a SENCO network which was a steep learning curve. I wish I had had more SEND input in my ITT, and my early years of teaching, I was still in mainstream but my school had a very strong inclusion agenda. At one point 50% of all the pupils had some form of SEND, and parents of children with SEND wanted them to go to our school. We seemed to get the children no one else wanted. We were committed to inclusion but we paid the price. We were welcoming and inclusive but OFSTED were only interested in the data. They judged the teaching as inadequate even though they didn’t look at it, and judged achievement not to be in line with national expectations, even though many children did make progress. They decided everything was inadequate, the teachers were broken and the head left. We had paid the price for inclusion, whilst the schools who had pushed these children out were succeeding.*

*Esme – In my mainstream secondary we tended to address needs as they arose, autism, foetal alcohol syndrome. I used the experience gained from my son to help me teach SEND pupils especially autism. I enrolled on a M.A. and looked at teachers perceptions of SEND, I found that teachers were sad that they had no time or space to understand those with SEND. It was at this time that I realised that I had other special needs, OCD and dyslexia.*

These experiences do seem to have an influence on subsequent career decisions, as can be seen in the following section.

4:3:5 Career Decisions.

As the professional lives of the teachers progressed, and they experienced a range of teaching experiences, some had choices to make about career progression.

*Barbara – I needed a change. I had always taught in a mainstream school but there I was at an interview for a special school. There were 4 at the interview and the other 3 all had SEND experience, I thought I’d no chance of getting the job so I relaxed. However I got the job because they said they appreciated my honesty, I handed in my notice and felt as though a weight had gone, but realised this was a leap of faith. I planned all summer and started in the September. By day 2 I realised I couldn’t do it and believed I’d made the wrong decision. I couldn’t get them to do the work I had planned and they were swearing and fighting, it was soul destroying. I felt as though I had been thrown in at the deep end. I went to my doctor and told him I felt ‘flat’ and couldn’t cope.*

It was at this point that Barbara was urged to contact myself by a mutual friend, as she knew that I had been through a similar experience when I transferred from mainstream to special;

*Hetty - If I had thought that planning for 32 mainstream children was challenging, I soon realised that it had actually been a ‘walk in the park’, and any teaching strategies I had relied on before, either went out of the window or became modified beyond all recognition. I was invited back to my previous school one evening to watch a production. We had always been very ‘hot’ on productions and this was no exception. The pupils put on an amazing performance, word perfect, no prompts needed. All behaved beautifully and were thrilled to see me. I went home and felt a massive loss of conviction and confidence in the choice I had made. But I am not a quitter, and in the successive weeks I began to build my confidence and trust in my own abilities, and it paid off.*

 I endeavoured to offer her advice whilst trying to build her self-esteem, and assured her that things would get better and that she had made the right decision, based on my own experiences. After we had shared many phone calls in which she was able to share her apprehension she felt ready to return to work.

*Barbara – During the half term holiday I went into school and reorganised the environment in order to deliver learning suitable to the pupils’ needs. I realised that work needs repeating, and that experiences were more beneficial than outcomes. It was time for a total change of my world, I needed to let go of mainstream, and allow myself time to adjust. Now at last I feel settled, I’ve stopped re-acting and over-reacting, and nobody can tell you what it feels like. The kids are producing amazing work and I am having so many good experiences that I never had in mainstream. I know all about every child, and enjoy offering them life experiences. I’ve just had my best lesson observation ever and was praised by the Senior Management Team for my achievements!*

The elation that Barbara experienced was also mirrored in my own story, as highlighted in this quote:

*Hetty - I delivered a university lecture concerned with the use of resources and equipment to enhance learning for pupils identified as having special needs and disabilities, the lead OFSTED inspector who was observing me said that my lecture had been an ‘awe and wonder moment’, one that he would never forget, and that I had taught him so much. I was classed as ‘outstanding’, but would always be grateful to my colleagues at the special school who had got me to that point.*

Three participants subsequently choose careers in teacher education, and highlighted their wish to offer their students more effective SEND input that they themselves had received.

*David – I had been disgusted at my lack of SEND knowledge as a teacher, so when I became a teacher educator it was my aim to make sure the students got lots of knowledge and experience of SEND. I started to develop theoretical underpinning of SEND to support my lectures. I became a governor at my previous school, and attended as many conferences as possible linked to SEND. I do believe that so much more needs to be done to prepare teachers for SEND teaching. Teaching Standards seek to ensure breadth of experience, but not in special provision.*

*Gill – I am now a teacher educator, making sense of putting theory into practice. I ask the students questions such as ‘what does play look like in a special school?’ which gets them to think more widely about SEND. I use my experiences from teaching and advisory roles to cover aspects that would otherwise have been omitted. These are things like bereavement and attachment theory. I find that new teachers don’t have institutionalised views and just want to be good teachers whoever they teach.*

It appears that these participants are using their previous experiences to endeavour to give their students input that they would have wished to receive, but unfortunately didn’t. This is also reflected in the next section relating to their present day views and beliefs.

4:3:6 Present day views and beliefs related to SEND teaching.

After sharing their life stories, the participants were all eager to discuss their present views and beliefs about SEND teaching, and teaching in general. All the teacher participants had views relating to SEND in their own professional lives and careers, as did the two young adults self-identifying, and identified as having SEND.

*Barbara – If anyone now asked me ‘should I work in a special school’ I would say ‘do it’! I can’t believe I spent 15 years in a mainstream school. Working now in a special school I feel as though I’ve ‘woken up’. I can enjoy my subject area again and feel I have the freedom and fulfilment I never had before. Everybody has got everybody’s back and we work as a team, and my own emotional stability has improved tremendously. I’ve learnt so much [about SEND] without realising it, and now concentrate on the ‘small rewards’ that you get from SEND children rather than worrying about accountability. I don’t know if I will be able to do this job when I am 60, but I won’t leave teaching now I’ve found special needs.*

*Ann – I’m not sure yet what my future holds after I graduate. I’m still unsure about working in a special school, even though I enjoy working with SEND pupils. I am unsure about working with violent children, it seems that many children show aggression from an early age. Maybe if I get a placement in a specialist provision it will help allay my fears and I might choose to work in this environment.*

*Chris – I wish now I had taken the opportunity to work in a special school, I feel that due to my maturity I could cope now. I’m not as judgmental as I was when I was younger and am more understanding of differences. I wouldn’t mind not getting ‘results’, and now realise that achievements come in many forms and that the ethos of the school is what drives this. I would like to work in a team instead of being in constant competition with other teachers, and have the notion that special school staff are more mature, are jollier, and actually want to be there! I believe they are there to make a difference and feel that would be motivational. I would be intrigued to see inside a special school, but wonder if I’ve left it too late to make the move.*

*David – The injustice of the educational system makes me bitter, it’s a one size fits all mentality. I’m concerned about schools excluding SEND pupils to massage results. We must push forward for inclusion, children need someone to fight for them. It seems special schools are going the same way as mainstream with growing emphasis on progress and achievement. Students on ITT courses are getting better SEND input, but not enough, as there is a strong focus on subject knowledge. There are more diverse needs in all schools but teachers are not prepared, there isn’t the time. Some ITT students are given the choice to access specialist provision but this can range from 2 days to a week and is tokenistic.*

*Esme – I have a love and a passion for SEND. I never got to work in a special school but now I am a teacher educator I try to ensure my students can access training related to SEND. My own difficulties and those of my son have made me see how important this is. I believe all children deserve a high quality of education, and that all teachers should receive training so that they can work in whatever area of teaching they may choose.*

*Fran – I genuinely wanted to be a teacher, especially of those with special or additional needs. I believe some teachers choose special needs teaching because they think it’s all they can get, or a stepping stone to something better, or so they think. For some teachers it is all about them not the students, it’s a power game. I believe you should go into it to make a difference, education isn’t always what it is perceived.*

*Gill – I never had a teaching ‘plan’, things just happened, SEND just happened! I realised that they are just kids that shouldn’t be wrapped up in cotton wool, it’s all about the practitioner taking risks. A child is a person first, don’t throw anything out due to a label, just adapt your own thinking. Avoid ingrained ways of working, an example being; a child is like this, so this is how you teach them. All children are individuals you must accept that. I sometimes worry that choices are taken away from SEND children.*

*Hetty - I am a special needs ‘convert’ as I believe are many others, and I accept that we are all different – all special in some way, with our own views and beliefs. I also believe that we are still a long way from true inclusion being a reality, and that it is unlikely that some of society’s views about those identified as having special needs and disabilities will be changed in the near future. However I do believe that more positive, and hopefully less tokenistic in-roads are being made towards an inclusive society, and if this process is to start in schools then we must ensure that teachers, present and future, receive the best possible initial training and CPD in the area of SEND.*

However, looking to the future;

*Barbara – I don’t think I have the commitment for a 30 year career, I think the government are stupid for not addressing teacher recruitment.*

*Chris – I’m looking forward to retirement, teaching is a young person’s job, and you need drive and energy to do it. I hope the government get the teacher crisis sorted out.*

The two young adults who self-identify, and have been identified as having SEND also had a view on their education.

*James - I think working in a special school could be a stressful job. But it could also be happy and rewarding, working as one big family. It’s a great place to be, to help people learn, when they wouldn’t have been able to somewhere else. That’s a 100% reason to work in a special school. My school made me realise that it’s ok to be who I am, and now I’ve got a job, a wife, and our own place and we live as independently as possible. I now work as a disability peer support worker for the learning disability team at CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] it’s tailored around me and uses my strengths. I support young disabled people with transitions, such as college to work, and the job means that I go back into special schools where I feel safer. When I go into some mainstream schools I feel isolated and wonder what people are thinking of me. I now use that as a strength, I call it changing the fear to fuel, and I can fuel peoples’ understanding of disability and this has made me more confident.*

*Rachael - MENCAP have given me support. The job centre didn’t help me, I wanted to work I didn’t want benefits but they couldn’t help me. I gave up. I’m more confident now I’m married. I now work as a cleaner, I’m learning how to travel on my own and use money. I think now I might be a bit autistic, I should have had more support in mainstream, there’s a lot of bullying especially if you are different.*

4:4 Summary.

These are the stories of my participants as they were told, who spoke freely of their experiences of teaching, their personal experiences, and their perceptions relating to SEND teaching. These stories offer a rich insight into the lives of individuals who live, work, or trained in the industrial North of England, the teachers, past, present, and future, who have experienced the many nuances of teaching, and wished to share their experiences. These experiences will now be analysed against the objectives of the research in the next chapter, including relevant supporting theory.

**Chapter 5.**

**Analysis of data.**

5:1 Introduction.

My aim for this research study was to collect the stories of teachers and student teachers, along with my own autoethnography, to consider views and beliefs about special school education, and the role these views and beliefs played, if at all, in career decisions related to teaching. In order to undertake this I used a social constructivist approach and believe that I have been successful in achieving my research aims through this approach.

5:2 Summary of Findings.

In order to examine and analyse the findings, I will initially use the themes taken from the previous chapter, before summarising the findings as a whole.

5:2:1 Societal – Early Life.

Most participants including myself, appear to have little or no memory of individuals identified as having SEND, although the findings relating to this theme do suggest a link between the age and experiences of the participants, with Ann in her early twenties having a very different initial view regarding those identified as SEND, to Hetty in her mid-sixties. This could I believe be due, not to memory problems, but to the fact society had kept those identified as having SEND ‘hidden’ in previous times, ‘locked away in isolated residential settings’ (Davis and Watson 2001:671).

However, the responses could also correlate to the participants’ understandings of what they identified as a special need or disability in their younger years. My personal recollections were certainly based on ‘visual differences’, the appearance of the young man identified as having Downs Syndrome, or my cousin whose small stature was due to dwarfism. I had never considered, or possibly even understood that there were a myriad of needs that could not be seen. Research has suggested that children very often only recognise an individual identified as having SEND, if there is a ‘clear physical manifestation’ or a ‘physical indicator’, such as a hearing aid or a wheelchair (Magiati, Dockrell and Logotheti 2002:428), and it is also possible from their responses that some of my participants were also more aware of ‘visual’ needs, thus adopting a medical model of identification.

The more mature participants lived in a time when individuals identified as having SEND were hospitalised because of their needs, or sheltered from the outside world by their families, often due to shame and embarrassment. However in a more recent study carried out by Connors and Stalker (2007:24) it was found that some families still refuse to divulge their children’s difficulties preferring to ‘keep it in the family’. The more mature participants were also brought up with fictional ‘disabled’ characters, described in terms of visual difference, many from books that were on exam syllabus reading lists, examples being:

*‘Philip was simply a hunchback’ – The Mill on the Floss, George Eliot*

*‘What teeth he had were yellow and rotten, his eyes popped, and he drooled most of the time’ – To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee*

*‘There was a mad women in the attic’ – Jayne Eyre, Charlotte Bronte*

*‘He struggled to walk with his crutch’ – Christmas Carol. Charles Dickens*

However it does appear from the memories of both myself and my participants that ‘hidden’ disabilities were not discussed, or if they were it was in completely the wrong context, with children identified as having autism or behavioural problems being labelled ‘naughty’, as identified in my own childhood memories found in my autoethnography. Younger participants not only have a greater recall of individuals identified as having SEND, but also appreciated both visual and hidden difficulties. However in 2007 the charity Barnardos issued the statement:

 *Generally young people do not know how to appropriately talk about people with learning difficulties or disabilities, and comments that are made are expressions of sympathy couched in discriminatory language which is applied equally to people with physical and learning impairments’. (Barnardos Annual Report 2007)*

Teachers whilst acting in ‘loco parentis’ are it seems becoming tasked with more responsibilities, that were once carried out by family groups,. Reports abound of teachers having to toilet train young children, teach them how to use a knife and fork, assist with social problems, and offer ‘counselling’ sessions. Could it be argued that although they have a part to play in seeking solutions for the problem highlighted by Barnardos, is it their sole responsibility?

The role of all types of media may also be an influence on participant’s views of SEND, with coverage changing over time, and individuals identified as having SEND now having greater prominence, especially on television. The more mature participants tended to identify those identified as having SEND by visual differences, having little knowledge of any others, whilst younger participants were more aware of conditions such as autism and ADHD, having been educated alongside them in inclusive environments, and experiencing these conditions through the media. Recent books such as ‘The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time’ by Mark Haddon, portrays the life of a young boy who finds difficulty relating to the world around him, and although not explicitly stated, it becomes clear through personal experience that he has a form of autism.

At least three of my participants self-identified as having SEND and recounted their early experiences of childhood, in respect of themselves and others. The strongest memory of two of them was being bullied, both physically and verbally, with Cleave and Davis (2006:1722) stating that those with a special health care need were ‘generally associated with being bullied’. They both felt that this had an influence on both their perceptions of others identifying as SEND, and on their own future careers as teachers, as they had felt empathy with others identified as having SEND.

Participants who shared these childhood experiences also went on to talk about negative incidents such as bullying, which had recently affected their own children identified as having SEND, an indication that the problem persists. Magiati, Dockrell and Logotheti (2002:412) believe that children who have little or no contact with peers who are identified as having SEND, develop negative attitudes, with this negativity leading to unrealistic expectations of individuals identified as having SEND, which could have been instigated through societal influence.

However research by Kelly and Norwich (2004:413) found that most pupils in mainstream education who identified as having SEND did not internalise a negative view of themselves, and that these positive self-perceptions were more apparent in pupils in special schools, with James who attended a special school for his secondary education, keen to identify as ‘normal’.

Policy changes mean that there is an increased likelihood of mainstream peers ‘working with, and encountering children with differing disabilities and difficulties’ (Magiati, Dockrell and Logotheti 2002:409), with the inclusion agenda supporting a diverse range of needs in schools. However, Schwab (2017:162) claims that it is not the contact that is important, but the nature of the contact, and ‘superficial’ classroom contact can result in a negative outcome, and therefore suggests that all children irrespective of needs should work together on ‘valued’ tasks, in order to promote a greater understanding of those identified as having SEND. However simply ‘working together’ irrespective of the task being valued or not, will not challenge any misconceptions held unless positive input is available.

The influence of family values and beliefs also played a part in shaping the participants’ views on SEND, as it could be argued that families are the main socialisers of young children (Morgan 2013:20), with some families actively encouraging positive relationships with individuals identified as having SEND. This is considered by Han, Ostrosky and Diamond (2006:9) who suggest that young children should be provided with developmentally appropriate facts that are accurate and positive in relation to SEND, ideally by their parents, as younger children are not able to understand ‘hidden’ disabilities, as they have not yet developed the necessary ‘abstract thought processes’ in order to discern them, reiterating the findings in section 4:3:1 relating to early life experiences.

Looking back on my own early life experiences it seems that my mum was nervous concerning individuals identified as having SEND, and certainly did not want to engage in conversation with anyone who was ‘different’. This in turn was transmitted to me, with people who were ‘different’ being a subject, along with many others, that was not discussed in the 1950’s and 60’s. However it could be argued that this situation has not dramatically changed over the last 50 years, and a report commissioned by SCOPE in 2014 found that 67% of the British public feel ‘uncomfortable talking to disabled people, but would welcome advice on how to avoid being patronising’, a situation that has previously been discussed in relation to children and to trainee teachers.

The participants who self-identified as having SEND reported feeling an empathy towards pupils who were experiencing difficulties, as they were similar to those they had experienced, and believed that as teachers they could play a part in helping pupils identified as SEND overcome negative experiences. According to Cole (2004:20) mothers who are also teachers (these particular participants were also mothers) are in a position to act as ‘agents of change’ for both their own children and the children they teach, and are at the intersection of issues and tensions related to educational inclusion and exclusion. Rutherford (2016:128) believes that urgent action needs to be taken to end the ‘systematic discrimination of special needs students’, and believes that it is the responsibility of teacher educators to contest ‘special needs ideology’, which can persist within society.

Connors and Stalker (2007:21) believe that ‘barriers to being’ are experienced by those identified as SEND, which result in ‘hostile, hurtful behaviour towards them’ which it could be argued, be physical or verbal. The charity Anti-Bullying Alliance found widespread use of ‘disablist’ language by pupils in school, which was very rarely challenged by teaching staff, but more worryingly they also found some teachers who used this language (Anti-Bullying Alliance 2014) which may give an insight into the problem highlighted by Barnardos concerning young people being unaware of how to speak to those identified as having SEND.

Chatziheochari, Parsons and Platt (2016:697) carried out research that suggests that bullying is a ‘pervasive experience in disabled children’s lives’, and tends to be ‘under-researched’ and that schools are actively involved in the re-production of disability related to inequality. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (2017:5) believe that the public attitude towards those identified as having a disability have changed very little over time, which once again anticipates the question as to how this situation can be addressed and by whom, and if the answer lies within a societal shift.

It is I believe relevant, that in research carried out by Hong, Kwon and Jeon (2014:171) they suggest that children as young as pre-school, ‘display favouritism towards peers who share similar characteristics, but hold a negatively biased view, alongside relative discrimination, towards peers with characteristics they perceive different to their own’. Should we therefore be considering addressing the issues of SEND with very young children, before ‘ingrained’ negativity is allowed to take place, and who should be responsible for this role, an issue that has previously been discussed (4:3:1).

It was also found that younger children find it hard to accept instances when a disability interfered with an activity, e.g. throwing a ball, and the researchers call for early intervention to improve social interaction as suggested above. It was discovered that children’s views towards those identified as having SEND were usually shaped by prior contact or parental views, and the older the children got, the more they took on their parents’ views, unless challenged in any way, another vitally important rationale for early intervention.

Esme who self-identifies as having SEND did have along with her family, what she describes as the ‘dilemma’ of choosing either a mainstream or special school, an aspect which is discussed in section 1:5 relating to placement in a special school. Parental choice and pupil voice is purported to be important in the life choices of those identified as having SEND, although this is not always the case. The SEND Code of Practice (2014) states that it can take families too long to find out their child needs help, with Warnock and Norwich (2010) arguing that the SEND procedure is a ‘battleground’ between parents and local authorities, an aspect which seems to persist no matter what legislation is in being at the time.

In research undertaken in 2008, Runswick-Cole examined parental attitude to the placement of children identified as having SEND in mainstream schools, and found that between 1994 and 2008 there were 25,000 appeals to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Tribunal (SENDisT), by parents who wished their child to be placed in a particular provision. She also found that some of these appeals were due to the fact that some parents felt that their child had been discriminated against on grounds of disability.

Mann, Cuskelly and Moni (2018:188) discovered through their research, that the main reasons parents requested a special school was to ensure the well-being of their children and ensure access to specialist teaching. They also highlighted the fact that 66% of their participants had indicated that someone in authority had told them that it was best to transfer their child who was identified as having SEND from mainstream to special, and that this left them feeling ‘powerless’ in respect of decisions regarding school choice. One also needs to ask who in ‘authority’ is making this decision, what is their decision based on, and is there some opposition to the inclusion agenda. However, once in a school of choice some parents find it a struggle to keep their children who have been identified as having SEND within the chosen placement, with ‘off-rolling’ an ongoing issue which is discussed in section 2:5.

To summarise it appears that early life experiences of SEND, are based on the age of the participant, their individual family values, any contact with individuals identified as having SEND, and personal experiences, often linked to the view of society at the time, with the medical model often the basis for these views and beliefs. Vignes, Godeau, Sertenec, Coley and Navarro (2009:474) state that young people who have the most positive attitudes towards those identified as having SEND are usually, ‘female, have a good quality of life, have been friends with someone identified as having SEND, and have received positive information about SEND from parents and the media’. The decision on school placement, whether in special or mainstream also affected the views of some participants, sometimes with the role of the special school coming into question.

5:2:2 Societal – Later Life.

In the later life of the participants it was apparent that disablist language was still widely used in society, usually linked to the medical model, although again this was linked to the age of the participant. However, it seems that although the terminology may have changed over time, it still has negative connotations. An argument put forward by Vehmas (2010:92) suggests that the ‘language of special needs’ should be abolished, with Mukuria and Bakken (2009:105) reaching the consensus that if labels are to be assigned to individuals identified as having SEND, then they should be assigned ‘professionally, cautiously and with common sense’, in order to help those who have been labelled to understand themselves and raise their self-esteem. This argument is expanded upon in section 2:4, however it is clear that labelling, especially in a negative manner is unacceptable for those identified as having SEND.

Some participants were still influenced by others in their understanding of SEND, and actively sought to gain personal knowledge and understanding of individuals identified as having SEND. Their hope was that this knowledge and understanding would dispel any negative views they may have held of individuals identified as having SEND, whilst two of the participants who had experienced forms of bullying in their early life, found that for them this endured into later life in the form of domestic abuse, with Itzin, Taket, and Barter-Godfrey (2009:138/9) stating that overall government policies pay ‘little attention to the needs of people with learning disabilities’ in protecting them from abuse, even though they are often more vulnerable and much less likely to be able to access appropriate services. They also state that disabled women are twice as likely to experience domestic abuse as non-disabled women.

Research has claimed that there can be an assumption that ‘physical disability denotes intellectual impairment, and possibly social deviance’ (Humphries and Gordon 1992:454), and that some perceptions of those identified as having SEND, are ‘myths’ surrounding a physical disability. Sikes (2005:91) supports this argument and states that EBD schools, mental hospitals and boarding schools often have ‘highly coloured myths’ developed and told about them, with some participants influenced by others in their understandings of those identified as having SEND through societal influences.

In a survey carried out by the charity SCOPE (2017) of 500 adults identified as having SEND, over half of them said they had experienced bullying or harassment at work because of their impairments, whilst the charity Anti-Bullying Alliance, carried out a survey in 2014 of 1000 adults and found:

* 1 in 10 adults had used abusive language towards those identified as having SEND.
* 44% of adults used words such as ‘spaz, spastic, retard, and mong’ in casual conversation.
* Half of them identified this as ‘banter’.
* The majority of adults were ignorant of the meaning of ‘disablist’ words.

It would appear from the responses of some of my participants that the bullying they encountered as children ceased when they became adults, although none put forward a view as to why this might have occurred. However if we revisit some of the arguments in Chapter 2, this may give an insight into this problem which appears to transcend all age groups. Examples of this being: the language associated with SEND which can ‘foster fear, mistrust, loathing and hostility (Corbett 1996:3), the historical aspect of SEND which has seen the perpetration of negativity to those identified as having SEND, and the media which continues to create ‘stereotypes of the weak in society’ (Mehraj, Bhat and Mehraj 2014:16), all of which adds to the ‘negative oppression of those identified as having SEND’ (Zhang and Haler 2013:320), which can for some lead to domestic abuse in later life.

It would appear from their narrative that all the participants had firm intentions to become teachers, and that none had been coerced by factors such as family influence, or inability to follow another profession. Hennessy and Lynch (2017:106) argue that choosing teaching as a ‘fall-back’ career negatively affects job satisfaction, whilst Maree, Hislop-Esterhuizen, Swanepoel, and van der Linde (2009:36) believe that the role of parents influencing their children to choose a particular career cannot be ‘underestimated’, although this was not a factor found in the study.

Kass and Miller (2018:90) carried out research into why academically excellent students choose teaching rather than a ‘more prestigious’ career, and identified four possible reasons, these being: ‘past feelings of helplessness, the search for interpersonal boundaries as a marker of identity, the need to belong, and to seek compensation for unjust of humiliating experiences in childhood’. They believe that those who choose to be teachers are seeking to ‘replicate significant childhood memories’ and satisfy ‘unrealised childhood desires’ and give many examples to substantiate this theory.

Kass and Miller (2018:91) give an example of a student who was studying tourism at university, but due to being ostracised by her peers whilst at school due to her needs, and with no intervention by her class teacher, she chose to change career and become a special needs teacher, as she wanted to be the opposite to her own teacher, and strive to avoid the humiliation which she had suffered. At first reading it could be argued that this is a simplistic and emotionally charged theory, but after consideration, I concur that this theory possibly mirrors my own experience, as I suffered humiliation in both my school and family life.

However I would challenge why ‘academically excellent’ students shouldn’t pursue a career in teaching, based on the belief that it is a valid and rewarding profession, although Sanderson (2017) believes that isn’t the case because teaching has ‘low status, long hours and poor pay’. See (2004:6) states that financial incentives alone are not an incentive, and that the ‘value and perceptions’ of teaching need to be promoted, which should be initialised during career discussions for secondary school pupils in order to elevate the value of teaching, and should continue across career discussions at all levels.

Runswick-Cole (2004:20) believes that mothers who are also teachers, can find themselves at an intersection between ‘issues and tensions related to educational inclusion and exclusion’, and that their own family experiences are at the ‘heart’ of their professional knowledge. She also suggests that professionals associated with SEND listen to the experiences of both mothers and mother/teachers, to help ensure that children do not become ‘victims of inclusion’, and that boundaries of ‘discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion can be knocked down’.

 Sikes (1997:78) has the view that when teachers become parents their ‘professional knowledge, consciousness and practice is often in some way altered’, and because ‘emotion has intruded on the professional picture’, they no longer ‘other’ their pupils, and their theoretical understanding becomes ‘humanised’, as was the case with both Fran and Esme who used both their own empathy, and the experiences of their own children when teaching pupils identified has having SEND.

It therefore appears that in later life all participants were more aware of individuals identified as having SEND, but still felt that there were ‘gaps’ in their knowledge. A chance discussion with my own General Practioner highlighted his concern regarding how individuals identified as having SEND are viewed in the community. He concedes that his training and position have resulted in him often using a medical model, but is adamant that this needs to change, and professionals like himself need to adopt a social model. It is his belief that societal attitudes often mirror those who hold prominent positions, such as doctors, and he believes he has a part to play in changing attitudes, by developing a social model through staff training involving individuals who identify as having SEND.

5:2:3 Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development.

Overall, it has to be argued that the provision of SEND training appears relatively poor in both initial training and continuing professional development, and within this study 87% of participants had extremely poor SEND input in their teacher training, ranging across a thirty year time span, and seven different teacher training institutions. Indeed the one positive experience was it seems, down to the teaching staff at the time rather than the course content. The argument concerning lack of SEND input in initial teacher training is also explored in section 2:10 and appears to be irrespective of which training route is taken.

Considering that inclusion is at the forefront of educational reform, it was a possibility that present day students would be well prepared to teach pupils identified as having SEND, but this does not seem to be the case. Robinson (2017:165) states that in order to be inclusive, teacher education must adopt a ‘complex, multi-modal, collective, critical theoretical, socially situated, research orientated pedagogic model’ if it is to advance the training of teachers, although there seems little evidence of this at the time of writing.

The 2016 NQT Annual Survey reports that ‘in line with previous years, NQT’s feel their training has prepared them less well in the areas of; SEND, deploying support staff, and communicating with parents and carers’, a view supported by Barber and Turner (2007:33) who report that the little input students do receive on SEND is ‘squeezed’ into an overcrowded curriculum, and that as newly qualified teachers they are ‘ill prepared’ (ibid: 34). It is argued that their existing knowledge and understanding helps to overcome this lack of input, a view supported by Lambe and Bones (2006), Sharma, Florin, and Loreman (2008) and Zhang and Wang (2014), and whilst it could be argued teachers learn by teaching (Vaillant 2007), many trainees decry the lack of teachers as role models within schools (Bishop 2010:121) .

Some of the more mature students, while having a genuine interest in SEND, often believed that they would not require the skills to teach this group, as they believed that those identified as having SEND were only found in specialist provision, which they had not considered as a career option, albeit this being 30 to 40 years ago. It is therefore interesting to find that all participants have a clear recollection of their lack of SEND training, feeling it was an important part of teaching even if their chosen career did not ultimately require it, with Barber and Turner (2007:34) stating that age and life experience are ‘positive and relevant factors’ in teacher training.

MacBlain and Purdy (2011:382) believe that poor preparation and lack of emotional support during ITT has a direct effect on NQT’s tasked with teaching those identified as having SEND, in both mainstream and special schools, leaving the profession after a very short time, an aspect discussed in Chapter 2 regarding the recruitment and retention of teachers. They believe that during the induction year of NQT’s the induction process focuses on the schools priorities not on the individual needs of the teacher, which causes the NQT to feel ‘disillusioned and stressed’.

Also of interest is the quote from James who goes into mainstream schools to speak to the pupils, who believes that the teachers feel ‘uncomfortable’ on the subject of SEND, and actively deter their pupils from asking questions, which they feel may offend. The lack of SEND input for teachers is a worrying aspect, but the fact that teachers can qualify whilst still lacking a basic understanding of those identified as having SEND, is I believe a monumental error on the part of the training bodies, and does little to promote SEND teaching.

If we are to believe that SEND input in initial teacher training is lacking, can it be found in continuing professional development, and is it filling the ‘gap’ for these teachers? Due to increasing inclusion practices more children identified as having SEND are being educated in mainstream provision, which requires teachers to be able to effectively teach a range of needs, with Lewis and Norwich (2005:1) considering how specialised teaching needs to be in order to meet those identified as having SEND.

In a report by the National Education Union (Dec 2018) it was reported that a lack of funding by the current government for all aspects of SEND, has left teachers unable to access training, as schools run on a ‘shoestring budget’, highlighting the fact that we are still not seeing an improvement in CPD training relating to SEND. Clearly this lack of SEND training related to CPD struck a chord with most participants, and none mentioned any other area of training which they felt had been lacking, during their discussions. This could have been due to their awareness of my research focus, or could reflect the fact that this was an area of skill most needed in their careers, but which was most lacking.

This argument is explored in section 2:9 where previous research has found that not only is CPD in SEND lacking, but that teachers do not always apply what they have learnt, and that CPD can often be viewed as yet another accountability demand, with emphasis on diagnostic criteria rather than the skills needed in order to teach those identified as having SEND, and it could be argued that we are not truly preparing our teachers to work in inclusive education, let alone in an inclusive society.

It could also be argued that there is a lack of training in respect of minority groups within society other than SEND groups, with both Barbara and Fran recounting their naivety when dealing with gender issues, and my own experience, or should I say lack of, relating to some ethnic groups. None of the participants spoke of gifted and talented children within their teaching or identified this group as having special needs, and as stated in chapter 2 this study will not consider this particular group. It is also of interest that none of the participants commented on other minority groups such as those discussed previously, when discussing their teaching experiences.

Can we therefore argue that teacher training providers are assuming prior experience of certain groups, including those identified as having SEND, and that overall, teachers are receiving a ‘one size fits all’ model during their training? In section 2:10 the acronyms used to identify teacher training were explored, these being; ITT – Initial Teacher Training, ITE – Initial Teacher Education, ITP – Initial Teacher Preparation, and IPD – Initial Professional Development, with the use of these terms usually down to individual preference. However the question remains, are we training, educating, preparing or developing our teachers, and are we doing so in an inclusive manner?

It could be claimed that teacher training providers exhibit in some measure what Freire (1970:28) termed the ‘banking process’ whereby the students ‘patiently receive, memorise and repeat knowledge’. This process also views teachers as ‘well intentioned bank-clerks’ who do not always appreciate the social reality in which they deliver their teaching, and in doing so ‘mirror oppressive society as a whole’.

This in some respect mirrors the training related to SEND offered to trainee teachers, and it could be questioned as to whether it is the institutions rather than the teacher trainers who work within them that are not appreciating the importance of SEND input, as it appears from the following prospectuses that SEND training is not a priority. Gavish (2017:159) expresses the view that individuals identified as having SEND are on the ‘margins of society’, a society which views education in terms of ‘professional mobility’ in later life, which individuals identified as having SEND struggle to access, and she believes therefore that we need ‘to change the system’ in terms of teacher training to avoid students ‘painting imaginary worlds of SEND’.

After undertaking a random internet search of seven U.K. universities which offer teacher training, I discovered that they do all use the term ‘training’, and all but one do mention SEND in their prospectus, albeit quite briefly in comparison to other aspects that a prospective student may encounter during their training, and are as follows:

*Broad range of minor subjects available such as SEND.*

*A short placement of one week with a specific focus on the needs of children with SEND.*

*The opportunity to do an inclusion placement.*

*Opportunities for teaching diversity including controversial topics and inclusion.*

*An enhanced placement in a setting such as a special provision or a museum.*

*An awareness of themes such as inclusion.*

*Placements offered in a diverse range of schools which may also include opportunities in a special school.*

These phrases do little to reassure me that the teachers of the future will be any better prepared than those of the past, possibly due to the terminology used. The fact that they state; SEND is a ‘minor’ subject, that a SEND placement is ‘short’, that there will be possibly be ‘opportunities to experience SEND, gives the impression that SEND has little importance within teaching, whilst the phrases; inclusion is ‘diverse’ with teachers only needing an ‘awareness’ of it, and teaching in a specialist provision is an ‘enhancement’ on a par with a museum experience, does little to assure that we are an inclusive society, prepared for full inclusion within education.

 It could be argued that maybe I am interpreting the phrases to strengthen my argument, but the fact still remains that the prospectuses do little to indicate a robust training in all aspects of SEND, even though this can have a ‘powerful and beneficial impact’ on pedagogical learning, which can be of benefit in any type of school environment (Walton and Rusznyak 2013:118). In 2011 Slee (155) believed that student teachers had been ‘treated to a Grey’s Anatomy approach, whereby they were instructed in the pathology of human differences and defects’, and that in some cases teacher preparation could be classed as ‘dangerous’, due to it encouraging more subtle forms of segregation through changing patterns of special education in the regular school.

I believe an analogy of this situation could be made using industry. Would a well-respected company dealing with a sensitive, precious, and individualistic product place an employee in sole charge without the correct training? Would that not be dangerous, and widely reported across the media? Yet we are happy to appoint teachers with a ‘lack of knowledge and skill base’ (Florin and Chambers 2011:24) to assume educational responsibility for up to 30 children with wide and diverse needs and backgrounds, and I agree with Pantic and Florian (2015:333) who believe that teacher educators should support trainees to develop competences in inclusive pedagogical approaches, and Florin and Chambers (2011:29) who state that universities need to re-evaluate their teacher preparation.

5:2:4 Teaching Experience.

The special school I had taught at was a the top of a hill, away from the town centre, surrounded by fields, and when we took the pupils out into the community some local residents would ask where the pupils had come from, not knowing about the school’s location or indeed its function! I am also reminded of the time I first told my colleagues that I was moving from a mainstream school to a special school, and they felt they should ‘warn’ me about what I would find, both these events highlighting the misconceptions that can be held about special education.

When offered a position in a special school Chris said ‘no way’, probably due in part to similar prejudices and preconceptions that I had experienced, with Cole (2004:68) stating that the role of the special educator as a professional may never be completely clear, with my own experiences of being asked many questions about my role including;

 *‘Are you a real teacher?’*

 *‘Do the children do proper lessons?’*

 *‘Do you have to show progress?’*

 *‘What do the children do if they can’t read or write?’*

However, I took the opportunity to enter specialist provision and have not regretted this decision, unlike Chris who regrets her missed opportunity to experience a special school. Only one of the research participants entered specialist provision as their first teaching experience, although others had an interest in SEND. Esme would have liked to have worked in a special school, but after one unsuccessful interview, she never applied for specialist provision again, and David found that his mainstream position gave the opportunity to teach pupils who had been identified as having many differing categories of SEND. Both David and Esme went on to study for a master’s degree, both focussing on SEND, whilst Gill, David and Esme ensured that SEND training played a big as role as possible in their teaching when they all became teacher educators.

The incident recounted by Fran regarding the burglar is possibly what Houchins, Shippen and Murphy (2012:271) term as the ‘school to prison pipeline’, which graphically depicts a ‘diverse group of students with similar characteristics i.e. underprivileged, disabled, mentally ill, and having poor school and academic experiences, being propelled away from educational opportunities towards criminalisation and incarceration’. Rivkin (2010:910) also believes this model exists, and his view is that very often the ‘unacceptable’ behaviour’ of those identified as being SEND leads to them being ‘criminalised’ by society.

All participants were very open about their teaching experiences, sharing both positive and negative aspects, some of which shaped their career choices. The majority of participants still decried their lack of knowledge and training in respect of SEND, whilst David highlighted the problems that had to be faced as his school endeavoured to become inclusive. Some participants also reported a lack of training and knowledge on aspects such as working with teaching assistants, and behaviour management, and also identified workload and performance management as negative aspects of their teaching.

 It could also be argued that no matter what educational provision a teacher works in, they must have a robust understanding of SEND pedagogy, and that this should not be attributed only to those working in specialist provision, with Ruppar, Roberts and Olson (2018:320) suggesting that all teachers ‘must adapt to a variety of teaching situations, and must be prepared to teach any content that a student needs to learn’. The factors concerning career choices will now be identified.

5:2:5 Career Decisions.

It appears that for differing reasons many of the research participants made a conscious decision to re-think their careers and pursue something different, although none left education. Barbara did consider leaving education after problems at her mainstream school, but has now found job satisfaction and stability in her role in a special school. Chris was ‘turned off’ by teaching due to the excessive workload required in order for pupils to achieve given targets, but a change to supply teaching has given her new experiences, and she is now anxious to start applying for positions in specialist provision. David is now a teacher educator using his teaching experiences both positive and negative, and his experiences of having been identified as having SEND, to give future teachers a better understanding of SEND, and writes about his knowledge and experience of inclusion.

Esme also encountered problems associated with pupil performance in her mainstream secondary school and is now a teacher educator. She uses her experiences of being personally identified as having SEND, to enhance her students’ understanding, and takes every opportunity to do so, such as using blue overlays when reading, to aid her dyslexia, but also to mirror good practice. Fran has continued to work in the prison environment, finding a rise in the number of prisoners identified as having SEND, and hopes to increase their life chances through employability skills.

Gill who had a more positive experience of SEND training during her ITT course, and through her teaching, is now a teacher educator who is pro-active in SEND training for her students. She covers areas such as ‘what does play look like in a special school?’ actively dispelling what she calls ‘ingrained ways of working’, which uses the model of ‘this child has this category of SEND, so this is how you teach them’, instead of treating every child as an individual.

Ann who is now a second year ITT student at university, is still unsure whether she would consider a career in special education, but would maybe ‘give it a go’, and cites being frightened of what she terms ‘violent’ children, whom she believes get placed in special schools because mainstream teachers ‘cannot cope’. This is of course her current perception, which may change with future training and experiences. My own career recounted in my autoethnography, charts my major career decision which was to move from a mainstream school to a special school, which was not only the best move I ever made, but enabled me to develop a social awareness of SEND, which led me to this research.

From the responses analysed it appears that SEND teaching has played a part in the lives of all the participants in some way, and career choices were made for many different reasons. The next section will analyse the present day views and beliefs relating to SEND teaching, and if these differ from the views and beliefs that were held by the participants in the past.

5:2:6 Present Day Views and Beliefs Related to SEND Teaching.

All participants who are, or have been teachers, exhibit a very positive view of SEND, irrespective of their past experiences, and many including myself, tend to take every opportunity to promote the needs and rights of children identified as having SEND. At the present time three participants are teacher educators who believe SEND training is crucial for trainee teachers, two are working in special education, and one is hoping to do so. The ITT student has not dismissed working in special education, and I retired from special education but am still active in many aspects of SEND, including publishing books designed to support ITT students and NQT’s, in teaching pupils identified as having SEND, serving as a governor at a local special school, and of course this research.

Research carried out by Yavuz (2018), Ketheeswarani (2015,) and Fish and Stephens (2010) found that the ‘job satisfaction’ of special needs teachers was average to high, with more mature teachers (41 years and above) experiencing the greatest satisfaction, and that the level of job satisfaction tended to increase with experience. None of the participants reported holding any negative views about those identified as having SEND during their life experiences, although some did admit to bearing some beliefs which were often born out of ignorance in their early life, and which they were pro-active in challenging in later life, as was the case with Chris;

 *I’m not as judgmental as I was when I was younger and am more understanding of differences*.

Chris also has a very positive view of what she believes special school staff ‘look’ like, with research by Ruppar, Roberts, and Olson (2018:320) finding that many mainstream teachers are unaware and do not understand the roles and responsibilities of SEND teachers, and that just as students [identified as having SEND] are segregated, so are the teachers. This view is also supported by Goransson, Lindqvist and Nilholm (2015:301) who argue that the role of the special school teacher is ‘vague and ambiguous’. Chris was also worried about negative behaviour, and in research carried out by Butler and Monda-Amaya (2016:288) it was found that a high proportion of pre-service teachers reported feeling ill prepared to manage challenging behaviour, and made a case for all trainees to receive ‘explicit instruction’ on the ‘cycles of behaviour escalation’ and the strategies required to ‘prevent or diffuse’ situations.

Apart from Fran none of the participants had a career plan as such, but none believed that this had been detrimental. Most had used their lack of knowledge and training in areas such as SEND, on which to base further study and training, in order to further their professional development, and all used positive terminology when discussing SEND such as;

Barbara on working in a special school *- I can enjoy my subject area again and feel I have the freedom and fulfilment I never had before.*

Esme - *I have a love and a passion for SEND.*

Hetty - *I am a special needs ‘convert’.*

It therefore appears from the responses given, that all participants now hold a positive opinion related to teaching in a special school, irrespective of past experiences, whilst believing that their teaching careers may have taken another path if they had received adequate training and support in SEND.

 5:2:7 Overall Summary of Findings

The participants have experienced wide and differing careers in teaching, and wanted their stories to be heard. From this analysis it appears that all the participants had limited contact within society of those identified as having a ‘visible’ SEND when they were younger, but that positive opportunities to interact with this group have become more of the norm in more recent times. It appears that the participants’ knowledge and understanding of those identified as having SEND, their individual family dynamics, along with media, all influenced the participants’ views, indicating that a social constructivist view was held. The two participants self-identifying as having SEND recounted negative incidents of bullying, but also reported little contact with others who were identified as having SEND outside their educational environments.

As the participants entered adulthood contact with individuals identified as having SEND were still limited, with knowledge of this group often coming from their peers. Disablist language was still prevalent, and the two participants self-identifying as having SEND continued to experience bullying, albeit in a different form. The participants began to realise that they lacked accurate knowledge about those identified as having SEND, and those who had their own children who were identified as having SEND, used their parenting experiences to develop their understanding. There was also a developing understanding of ‘hidden’ disabilities.

The participants entered teaching via differing degree routes, and overall their SEND input during their training was inadequate. This situation is indicative of teacher training past, present, and possibly future, and this cause for concern is widely discussed in educational literature and the media. Continuing professional development does little to offset this inadequacy, and even through this small research sample it can be seen that there is a distinct possibility that we are not effectively training teachers to teach pupils identified as having SEND.

The teaching experiences of the participants, offered them the opportunity to teach a wide and varied range of children, including those identified as having SEND irrespective of what training they had received. Misconceptions about special schools were sometimes still held, although mainstream teachers found themselves teaching a wider range of SEND due to inclusive practices, with Kurniawati, De Boer, Minnaert, and Mangunsong (2017:288) arguing that many teachers have ‘reservations’ about inclusion due to lack of knowledge and experience during initial training. Participants still decried their lack of knowledge associated with SEND, and for some this precluded them from teaching in special education provision, due to a lack of self confidence in their own abilities.

All participants are still in education, even after the incidence of negative experiences for some. All except one have had career changes, and SEND training and experience is now a priority for many. Although all participants have strived to retain a positive attitude towards those identified as having SEND throughout their life experiences, many now feel that they have a greater understanding and knowledge about SEND, overcoming what Sweigart and Collins (2017:209) term the ‘myriad of challenges and responsibilities’ associated with SEND. They all believe they can use the experiences of ‘challenges and responsibilities’ to enhance the teaching and learning of pupils identified as having SEND, and that positive job satisfaction contributes to ‘positive teaching and learning outcomes for pupils identified as having SEND’ (Strydom, Nortje, Beukes, Esterhuyse, and Van Der Westhuizan 2017:257).

The two young adults who self-identify, and have been identified as having SEND also had a view on their education, with one of them eager in the future to talk to teachers in training, as he feels this would be beneficial for their understanding of SEND. The two young adults also wanted to reject anonymity, and have their names and details appear in the study as they were proud of their achievements, and the fact that they identified as having SEND. LeRoux (2015:564) argues that some participants reject anonymity and wish to state ‘celebrate my accomplishments with me’, and I will therefore not refer to them by pseudonyms but by their correct names, and will thank them for their contribution in my acknowledgements.

The next chapter will utilise the findings in this analysis; to address the aims and objectives of the research study, address the implications for policy and practice, assess the contribution to knowledge, discuss opportunities for further research, and identify limitations.

**Chapter 6.**

**Conclusions.**

6:1 Introduction.

To conclude the thesis I will re-examine my initial views, the research process, and the ethical implications of the study. The methodology employed in the research will be discussed, followed by a summary of the literature which seeks to inform and locate the study. The research findings will then be discussed, firstly within the themes used for analysis followed by a generic summary. This will be followed by a discussion of policy and practice, and the contribution to knowledge of the study, leading to an examination of possible future research, before a discussion relating to the future of special education. The chapter will conclude by identifying the limitations of the study, and an overall summary of the thesis.

6:2 Research Outcomes.

 *‘We wrote knowing none of the stories we told would change the world. But we wrote in the*

 *hope they would’ (King 2003:92).*

6:2:1 Initial View.

My initial view before I undertook this study was that many teachers, and initial teacher training students, held distinct views about special education, especially special schools, and in many cases these views had never been challenged, and were influencing their career choices. I appreciated that these views may not have been held by others working in education, but my personal experience had led me to believe that this polarisation exists, and was open through the research to be challenged. I fully appreciated that not all teachers held particular views about special and mainstream education, and was aware that my small sample would not be able to give a view indicative of the whole profession. I did feel however that it was worthwhile to explore these views, as an indicator of a small but important factor relating to the career choices of teachers, specifically their views on teaching in a special school, and through my thesis journey have been inspired to continue by three people.

Katherine Runswick-Cole urged researchers to ‘say what they want to say, be passionate, and engage with the participants’, whilst Dan Goodley advocated researchers should ‘seek social justice, be caring, but if necessary be angry’. Pat Sikes communicated with passion to researchers about her own projects, and the fact that they ‘needed’ to be researched, and together these three inspirational people have given me the justification I needed to carry out this research.

6:2:2 Research Process.

I have collected, transcribed and analysed the life stories of five teachers, one student teacher, and have also included my own autoethnography. I fully appreciate that the sample has not been as diverse as I would have wished it, with all participants identifying as white British, and including only one male, but reiterate that this study is not about numbers or generalisations. Purdy (2009:328) reports that males are in the minority in respect of SEND teaching, with ‘preconceptions, fears and lack of understanding’ being the reasons they do not apply for SEND teaching positions. He quotes Boris Johnson, the then Mayor of London, who stated than men are being ‘scared away’ from the profession [of teaching] by ‘paedophile hysteria’, which Purdy believes is intensified in SEND teaching due to the needs of the pupils.

I have been fortunate that I have not encountered any problems during data collection, with all participants eager to share their experiences, which did not I believe, cause them any detrimental effect. I analysed their responses by engaging themes, through which I could examine different phases of their lives, cumulating in an overall analysis, and I have endeavoured to ground existing theory into my research findings and analysis.

6:2:3 Ethics and Reflexivity.

Throughout the study I have endeavoured to be both reflexive and reflective, and if I have had an awareness that my positionality has manifested itself in a particular view or value, I have been transparent about this. I believe I have built trust with all my participants, and have presented their stories without making judgements. I appreciated from the start that value free was not tenable, and that my own impact could not be avoided, but by continually looking ‘inwards and outwards’ in respect of my own positionality (Attia and Edge 2017:36) I believe that I have achieved maximum reflexivity.

I believe the study to be ethically sound and have represented lives respectfully. I have adhered to all aspects of my ethics proposal, and have been fortunate not to encounter any sensitive information or emotional complications.

6:2:4 Methodology.

It is my belief that that the methods employed in this research, life history and autoethnography, were the most advantageous methods that could have been employed in order to investigate the research focus. It has offered the opportunity for advantages such as: its ‘adaptability’ (Bell 2005:157), the opportunity to use ‘ordinary teacher discourse’ (Woods 1985:15), the opportunity for ‘teachers to have a voice’ (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009:16), and the space to offer ‘informal peer support’ (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong 2009:75). It also offered the opportunity to be able to understand the ‘cultural and social phenomena’ associated with teaching (Cole and Knowles 2001:20), and I agree with the view of Goodson (2017:7) who states that ‘when conducted successfully, life history forces a confrontation with not only other people’s subjective perceptions but also with our own’, this confrontation often avoided in other approaches.

I also reiterate my personal feelings related to stories which I shared in Chapter 3, and believe the love I have for stories has actually grown during this research, and agree with Plummer (2001:243) who believes that life stories help us to ‘see ourselves, see others, see life around us, and ultimately the universe’. Autoethnography was chosen in order to bring the reader into the context of the study, and give them the opportunity to ‘experience an experience’ (Ellis 1993:711), whilst helping them better ‘understand a culture, with a wider lens on the world’ (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011: 4). My personal reflections are intended to add ‘context and layers’ (Ellis 2004:18) to the stories of the participants, as well as strengthening my positionality and enhancing my reflexivity.

6:2:5 Literature.

The aim of the literature review is to locate the study and demonstrate how it makes a contribution to knowledge, and considers SEND in terms of; definition and identification, terminology and categorisation, models of disability, changes over time, current legislation, teacher training and continuing professional development and the recruitment and retention of SEND teachers. It also considers the notion of the role of the media as a lens through which society views SEND, and discusses ongoing controversies regarding inclusion.

The media is I believe an expedient lens through which to gain an insight into the views of society on SEND, often favouring sensationalism over fact, and only just beginning to become inclusive, with those identified as having SEND taking on roles that were historically for ‘normal’ individuals such as sports presenters or investigative journalism, rather than ‘playing’ a disabled person in a drama.

 Inclusion could be perceived as an ongoing dilemma within education, and the term is often used to create the illusion that we are an inclusive society, which in fact this is not always the case from the evidence found in research studies. The tension created between education policy geared towards ‘standardisation and normalisation’ (Lloyd 2008:228), and inclusion ‘constructed within a powerful othering framework’ (Dunne 2009:49), can result in some pupils identified as having SEND ‘segregated from the majority in order to normalise them’, which is contrary to the ethos of inclusion.

Glazzard (2013:186) has the view that current performativity ‘marginalises learners identified as having SEND’, and constructs barriers to their ‘participation and achievement’, with official scripts of inclusion conflicting with notions of ‘equity and social justice’. He goes on to state that in the ‘absence of a shared understanding’ of inclusion there is likely to be a ‘multitude of practices both within and between schools’. Indeed research carried out in Zimbabwe (Chireshe 2017:227) where teachers can obtain a Batchelor of Education degree in Special Needs Education, it was found that these specifically trained teachers felt they were lacking in training in inclusion and inclusive education, and that as in this country, an explicit and consistent inclusion policy is required across all schools.

Within a mainstream setting Avramidis and Norwich (2002:130) believe that inclusion can imply a restructuring of the mainstream educational practices, whilst Walker (2016:186) argues that a ‘dumbed down’ mainstream curriculum is not true inclusion, but does take place in schools who struggle to implement effective inclusion for all pupils. Thomas and Loxley (2001:118) put forward the view that inclusion is not solely concerned with those identified as having SEND, but should be viewed as a ‘comprehensive education, equality and collective being’ for all children, a point previously discussed involving minority groups. However Schwab, Sharma and Loreman (2018:37) believe that the best people to consult on inclusion are the pupils who are actually involved in the process, and that the views of both mainstream and special school pupils need to be researched further, as at present inclusion is a ‘process not an end point’ (Mallet and Runswick-Cole 2014:111).

6:3 Research Findings.

 *‘Disability - the barriers that society imposes on people with impairments which limit or exclude them’. (Paul Doyle 2014 – an inspirational academic who was labelled ‘special’ and ‘disabled’ from an early age, who had to ‘endure’ a residential special school which didn’t meet his needs [his words], but who successfully completed his Ph.D. at Sheffield University in 2014, and who was one of the people who inspired me to do the same).*

6:3:1 Introduction.

 *‘Difference and identity are constructed in and through social relations. Difference can be seen positively as diversity, or negatively as deviance and deficit, this is dependent on the mind-set of individuals or groups in society’. (Thomas and Loxley 2001:87)*

At the onset of the research study I questioned the role of society in terms of its attitudes towards ‘difference’ which includes SEND, and if in fact we celebrate or discriminate, and if these attitudes have any association with the misconceptions that may be held. In terms of SEND, I do believe that discrimination can still be located in pockets of society, but recognise that there is beginning to be a growing acceptance, with the profile of individuals identified as having SEND being raised. However Kauffman, Schumaker, Bader and Hallenbeck (2018:4) believe that to treat disability like other forms of diversity is in fact a ‘myth’, and that special education should focus on how disabilities are ‘unique diversities’ upon which instruction should be based, and not a ‘ruse for providing second rate education’. The research findings will now be discussed, firstly within the themes used for analysis followed by a generic conclusion.

6:3:2 Early Life Experiences.

It appears that the early life views of the participants, along with their understanding and acceptance of those identified as having SEND, can be a consequence of early socialisation within family groups. Werner, Peretz and Roth (2015:98) have the view that attitudes towards those identified as having SEND that are learnt at an early age, are ‘internalised by children and held throughout their lifetime’, but I would argue against this, as both myself and some of my participants have clearly had distinct changes in attitudes through life experiences.

However changes over time concerning the care and education of those identified as having SEND, do appear to have influenced the participants in terms of both an awareness of SEND, and a degree of understanding. Norwich (2008:17) maintains that the inclusion agenda remains a ‘broad and significant social and political value commitment’, which in my own personal view is one which needs further clarification in relation to policy and practice. It has however offered the opportunity for young people irrespective of need or ability to share some common ground, by sharing educational experiences and opportunities to socialise that are age appropriate and encourage open conversations.

From the stories told, it appears that participants did not suggest that early life experiences influenced later life decisions regarding SEND teaching, and as already stated attitudes and views relating to those identified as having SEND developed and changed through life. One participant who had more than one family member identified as having SEND, and who was urged by her family to respect those who were different, has had no SEND teaching experience due to lack of self-confidence, whereas another participant with extremely limited contact with, and understanding of, those identified as having SEND when younger, has made SEND teaching the career of choice.

One participant also told of her experiences of her possible placement in a special school as a pupil when she was younger, and how this affected her and her family at the time, with Armstrong (2003:16) reporting that some parents are concerned about the social stigma of special education, especially the ‘isolation and segregation’ of special schools, and although this experience was several years ago, it could be argued that the portrayal of special schools then and now, is not always in a positive light, and I know from my own experiences that many people react negatively when discussing special schools, usually down to ignorance of what a special school is, the different types of schools that exist, and the needs of the pupils.

All participants also commented on the negative terminology often attributed to those individuals identified as having SEND that most heard, but didn’t necessarily use, as all felt uncomfortable with this language. Some of the participants had experience of being victims of this language in both early and later life, but all used it as a catalyst to ensure that they were able to champion more positive life affirming terminology in their future careers.

6:3:3 Later Life Experiences.

This period in the lives of the participants did bring about a greater awareness of SEND, but it was often their own personalities and the need to discover and learn that led them to this awareness, and not any specific outside influence. It could be argued that the media may have been an influence, as well as a societal shift towards what I believe could be termed a more ‘accepting’ society, especially during the lives of the more mature participants. This manifested itself in environmental changes such as accessible buildings, including toilet facilities, and designated parking, all designed to illustrate the positive ‘well meaning’ view of society, when actually many adaptations were un-fit for purpose.

 My own personal experiences relating to taking children identified as having SEND into the community would very often involve; meeting the personal care needs of a pupil on a dirty toilet floor due to lack of a changing bed within a designated ‘disabled’ toilet, finding a ‘disabled’ access blocked by boxes, and parking a distance from our destination as all ‘designated’ spaces were taken by vehicles without a blue badge who had ‘only popped in for some milk’.

However the participants who self-identified as having SEND, were because of their own needs, more aware of the needs of others, and also seemed to have a greater awareness of their ‘position’ in society as they became young adults. As with early life experiences, little influence was found within the stories, of later life experiences influencing future careers. Bullying was however experienced by some participants who identified as having SEND, especially those who were educated in a mainstream environment, and research by Prunty, Dupont and McDaid (2012:34) reported ‘stark accounts of bullying’ towards young people identified as having SEND.

This view is supported by Fredrickson, Sims, Evans and Soulsby (2007:106) who believe that placing a child identified as having SEND in a mainstream school can lead to ‘rejection, bullying and victimisation’, aspects which lead the participants who self-identified as having SEND to a more empathetic view towards pupils identified as having SEND in their subsequent teaching.

6:3:4 Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development.

It has been my intention throughout this research to be open and honest about my own personal views, and to this end I will share one of my initial views, which was that societal influences were one of the major factors in influencing the career decisions of teachers relating to SEND, in line with Gavish (2017:154) who believes that the views and ideas of trainees are shaped before they enter formal training. However after analysing the stories of the participants and reviewing the relevant literature, I now have reservations about this view and would now argue that the initial training that teachers receive, followed by their continuing professional development has a significant influence on their career decisions, specifically their views on teaching in a special school.

This does not however mean that ITT and CPD is not shaped by societal views and ideology, which influences policy makers, educational institutions, and ultimately the pupils. Nonetheless I do hold the view that SEND in ITT and CPD, was, is, and appears to continue to be deficient, and can only be successful when it is fundamentally built into ITT courses as a whole and not as an ‘add-on’ (Ekins, Savolainen, and Engelbrecht 2016:246), as was discussed earlier in terms of university prospectuses.

In research conducted by Husband (2015:238) on the continuing professional development of teacher trainers in higher education, it was found that whist they believed their own ITT had not satisfactorily covered SEND, few had actively engaged in any CPD that was related to SEND, albeit that this was the area they highlighted as needing the most development. The experiences of the research participants reinforces this situation, and it could be argued that ITT is not going to improve unless the training of the trainers is addressed, with some participants viewing this as a priority. This improvement would need amongst other things, a review of ITT curriculum content, and a review of the standards by which OFSTED inspect the institutions.

It appears from the stories, and from my own personal experiences that most SEND input relates to theory not practice, the identification of ‘types’ of SEND, and offers little opportunity for misconceptions to be challenged. This point is argued by Nash and Norwich (2010:1478) who believe there is ‘more elaborate planning of the professional studies sessions about knowledge and understanding about SEN policy and practice than about practical learning of teaching’, which can lead to trainees ‘painting an imaginary world of SEND’ (Gavish 2017:154).

This could be addressed by offering specialist provision placements as ‘compulsory not voluntary’ (Richards 2010:114), as special schools can ‘make a profound impact on trainees by offering fertile learning contexts’ (Peter 2013:131). He goes on to state that a special school placement can ‘uncover a passion and open eyes to career possibilities’, and that whilst the placement may not conform to present ‘tick box checklists’ the impact on the trainee can be ‘considerable’.

West and Hudson (2010:64) put forward the idea that ITT programs should be co-constructed with early career teachers who ‘regularly participate in the work’ and should therefore be ‘empowered’ to bring about necessary changes, which is especially important in areas such as SEND. Deng, Wang, Guan, and Wang (2017:416) argue for the validation of teacher/student competences in relation to the teaching of pupils identified as having SEND and inclusive practice, which should be introduced to assess competency, and it is my view that both these notions would greatly benefit ITT in the area of SEND, to enable it to become embedded in the practice of all teachers.

It could also be argued that the voices of those being taught should be heard in relation to SEND in ITT and CPD, with young people like James and Rachael willing and able, as are so many individuals who have been identified as having SEND. They would be able to share their views and perceptions on the teaching they receive, in order to eradicate ‘teachers feeling uncomfortable’ in relation to their experiences with those identified as having SEND, and provide ‘valuable insights on service provision’ (Palikara, Lindsay, and Dockrell 2009:76).

It is also my view, and that of many others, that education including ITT and CPD is orientated towards a ‘standards driven’ agenda (Fuchs and Fuchs 2010, Ingleby 2010), and as such the training and development offered to teachers centres very much on aspects such as; achievement, progression, results, testing, league tables, and professional mobility in later life. This is an agenda that ‘pushes for the inclusion of children whose academic attainment is considered low’ as it ‘sits uncomfortably alongside a marketised education system’ (Mallett and Runswick-Cole 2014:111).

Wasburn-Moses (2009:14) argues for further research into the roles of teachers and educational change linked to SEND, and believes there should be a link between ITT, induction and CPD, brought about by collaboration with higher education providers, schools and policy makers. It is my view that by adding the voices of teachers, and most importantly the voices of those identified as having SEND, we may begin to create a system whereby all teachers are both confident and competent at teaching all children.

As I was completing this study I was approached by a neighbour who knew I was a teacher but didn’t know about this research. She has an 11 year old son who has been identified as having ADHD and autism, who started secondary school 6 months ago. She was concerned about his progress and behaviour and asked for my advice. Her initial conversation which she wanted inserting into the study when she realised my research focus, was as follows:

 *‘I’ve been wondering do teachers learn how to teach pupils with special needs? Is it just teachers in special schools who get training? If they are trained what are they trained in? Do they understand all conditions and how to deal with them? One or two of my son’s teachers really ‘get him’, they know how to deal with him, and he responds and makes progress. But most of them just shout at him, so he kicks off, and then they shout more so he reacts, and then he gets kicked out of the classroom. At parents evening the work they showed me was awful, when I got home I asked him why his work was so bad when I knew he could do better. His response was that the teachers think he’s thick and can’t do much so he doesn’t bother trying. If they are happy to accept second best then he is happy to provide it’.*

These questions are troubling, and reiterate the fact that there are teachers who for whatever reason, are finding the teaching of pupils identified as having SEND difficult. On a more positive note it also seems that some teachers are competent and understand the needs of those identified as having SEND, and that in one educational setting the training, expertise and attitudes of teachers vary greatly. This isolated example does illustrate the need for ITT and CPD in SEND, and one wonders how many other parents and carers are experiencing the same problems.

6:3:5 Teaching Experiences.

It appears from the stories that the participants who have, or have had experience in either mainstream or special schools of teaching pupils identified as having SEND, undertook the role with little or no experience and training, which relates back to the previous section regarding ITT and CPD. In some cases they became pro-active in their own professional development, and undertook further qualifications in order to enhance their knowledge, and some are passing this on to the teachers of the future as they themselves have become teacher educators.

Many participants reported a lack of knowledge on practical issues such as working with teaching assistants and other professionals, or writing individual education plans, whilst one participant highlighted the problems that had to be faced as his school endeavoured to become inclusive. Teachers who had self-identified as having SEND believed that their own life experiences had help inform their teaching of pupils identified as having SEND, more than any training, and they were particularly concerned with the social and environmental aspects that these pupils experienced.

6:3:6 Career Decisions.

It could be argued that workload pressures, depressed pay, and the challenges of supporting children identified as having SEND are fuelling the attrition of many experienced SEND teachers. However, the cause may well be that many trainees and new teachers do not to feel equipped to work with children identified as having SEND, due to the lack of access to appropriate CPD and to experienced colleagues, highlighting once again inadequate training and experience.

Pearson (2008: 96) states that many SEND teachers have to learn ‘as they go along’, a view echoed by Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, and Harness (2001: 549 ) who believe that SEND teachers have to learn ‘on the job’, with both these views echoed by the research participants. Thornton, Peltier, and Medina (2007:233) argue that the shortage of SEND teachers is a ‘national epidemic’, and the only way to counteract this is to ‘elevate the professional status of special needs teachers’, an aspect I am in total agreement with, as I have highlighted the negativity often attributed to special schools and the teachers who teach there throughout the study.

However, all the research participants hold a positive view of SEND, and have either taught in a specialist provision, or have been responsible for coordinating SEND in a mainstream setting, with just one participant not having this experience, but more than ready to do so. Some of the participants recognised maturity as a factor influencing a career in special education, as they believed that greater confidence was required to teach pupils identified as having SEND, and that this confidence came later in their careers.

I personally believe that this view may be indicative of a larger number of teachers than those in the sample for two reasons. Firstly my experience has shown that when recruiting, special schools do appear to attract a high number of more mature teachers, and very few newly qualified or early career teachers. Secondly if we are to believe that the quality of provision of ITT and CPD in SEND, is inadequate across teaching training, then it could be argued that teachers do need to gain expertise, knowledge, and confidence before they embark on a specialist school career.

However, irrespective of the time in their career that they chose special education, they are all positive about this role using terminology such as; worthwhile, rewarding, inspiring, satisfying, and exciting, to describe their roles. There are of course many factors which affect teachers’ decisions regarding the reasons as to why they join, stay or leave the profession, with Rivka (2015: 109) citing one reason as the fact that special needs teachers work under ‘more difficult, more intense, and more demanding conditions than those in mainstream’. This however does not seem to be the view of the research participants, with most stating that it is mainstream education which brings about these stresses, and they feel more valued in special education, with Gavish (2017:160) stating that although SEND can be the ‘unknown’ it can also bring ‘endless’ career satisfaction.

6:3:7 Present Day Views and Beliefs concerning SEND.

All participants hold very positive views and beliefs concerning SEND, and indeed it appears that very few have held any negative views across their life experiences. They all still criticise the lack of ITT and CPD in their training and careers, and do feel that their career paths may have been different if this had been more adequate. They also state that by using their SEND experience they have been able to help their mainstream counterparts, by suggesting pedagogy, resources and behaviour management techniques, to support the learning of those pupils identified as having SEND, and indeed those without this label in mainstream provision.

 Apart from one participant none had a career plan as such, but none believed that this to be detrimental. Most had used their lack of knowledge and training in areas such as SEND, on which to base further study and training, and described their present day views of working in a specialist provision as*; ‘*having the freedom and fulfilment I never had before’, ‘having a love and passion for all things SEND’, ‘realising I am a special needs convert, and ‘I feel it is so worthwhile championing the SEND cause’.

6:3:8 Summary of Research Findings.

Maybe it was fate, but my research participants some of whom I had never met before, had an incredibly positive outlook on those individuals identified as having SEND, albeit not as positive about aspects such as training, societal views and the terminology that they had encountered in their life experiences. It would be an heartening experience to find that all teachers held this positive view, although the teachers who took part in research carried out by Richards (2010:114) unfortunately believed that anything to do with special needs was ‘superfluous to their role’.

My initial views have however modified in line with my findings, and after taking a social constructivist approach to the research study, it is now my view that while I do believe societal views and values play a part in the career decisions of teachers, I appreciate that this factor is not as significant as I first believed, with initial teacher training, professional development and personal experiences all playing a part.

 Through the participants’ stories I have also come to the supposition that a ‘polarisation’ of views regarding whether or not to teach in a special school, is too strong a belief, and that many views taken by teachers, change over time and circumstance, and that only the very few who hold extreme misconceptions could be said to have a polarised view. My personal and professional experiences have included teachers who have very strong, sometimes ill-conceived ideas about teaching in a special school, but this was not found in this study and may not have been experienced by others working in education.

What however has been a predominantly reoccurring theme throughout the research study, is the deficit found in the quality, content and delivery of ITT and CPD relating to SEND that is accessible to trainee teachers and teachers in England, that this is not a contemporary problem, and indeed it appears it may also be a future dilemma. This was a factor I had anticipated as it mirrored my own experiences, and that of many of my peers, and I do believe that the longevity of this deficit can be found in societal views and ideals whereby anything to do with SEND is ‘othered’ and becomes the poor relation in terms of status and economical value. Magnusson (2016:157) states that special education is an ‘artefact of the inability of education as a whole, to adapt to the diversity of needs among its clients’, and Thomas and Loxley (2001:76) argue that special education is the construction and management of ‘difference’, both of which represent a negative view of special education which is not it appears, being addressed in either ITT or CPD.

This longevity is also it seems, based on SEND history where ‘non-disabled children’ have been exposed to different cultural ‘scripts’, that represent those with a disability as the ‘others’ the ‘abnormal,’ and that views ‘need to be challenged’ (Shah, Wallis, Conor, and Kiszely 2015:267). The ‘stigmatisation and discrimination’ brought about due to different educational opportunities (Powell 2006:578), highlights the fact that we have not learnt from history in respect of SEND, and ‘concrete steps’ have yet to be taken to improve SEND policy and practice (Cook, Landrum and Tankersley (2014:2).

To conclude it would also be pertinent to mention, that at no time throughout this study has any mention been made by the participants, of any serving teachers identified as having SEND, other than the three participants. It could be argued that a teacher identified as having SEND would be an excellent role model, especially to young people identified as having SEND, and would be beneficial in reducing the ‘divide’ between ‘white, monolingual, middle class able bodied teachers and the students they teach’ (Robertson, McFarland, Sciuchetti, and Garcia 2017:35).

6:4 Implications for Policy and Practice.

Long has been the argument about who actually formulates educational policy (Yettick 2009, Didaskalou and Millward 2002), and how it translates into practice, and as discussed in the literature review the current Code of Practice for SEND uses vague and ambiguous language, identifying ‘problems’ but giving no indication how these can be addressed. Lacey, Ashdown, Jones, Lawson and Pipe (2015:20) argue that the current Government has no real commitment to challenge the status quo of the provision and placement of children identified as having SEND, whilst Tisdall and Riddell (2006: 363) argue that while ‘policy frameworks shift, practices remain the same due to inertia and resistance to change’.

Coffield, Edward, Finlay, Hodgson, Spours, Steer, and Gregson (2007:732) believe that the majority of teachers do not engage with policy and guidance but rely on dissemination on a ‘need to know basis’ often due to an ever increasing workload, and whilst the current code promised extra funding to train ‘specialist teachers’, and ‘talented support staff’, it did not offer funding for professional development in SEND for existing teachers.

It is my personal opinion that the current SEND policy does not address the needs of pupils identified as having SEND, and I would pose the same question as Gedge (2015: 6) ‘Do we have an education system that fits only the privileged few?’ Norwich (2014: 417) expresses the view that much of what is proposed in the policy is not radically new, and unresolved issues have not been addressed, with the code ‘not fit for purpose’. I also believe that we should heed the words of Sikes, Lawson, and Parker (2007:360) who consider the notion that it is the ‘agency’ of teachers which determines how policy is ‘formulated and re-formulated in practice’.

Armstrong (2014: 741) argues that policy makers must be persuaded prior to policy formation to engage in dialogue with researchers of SEND, and I would argue that this dialogue also needs to take place with all stakeholders to include; pupils and young people who are experiencing or have experienced the system, parents and carers, teachers, schools, children’s services and institutes of higher education who provide initial teacher training, and agree with Carpenter and McConkey (2012:252) who suggest that pupils identified as having SEND should influence both policy and practice.

6:5 Contribution to Knowledge.

I appreciate that I am not the first researcher to explore teacher’s lives and careers, special education teaching, or the delivery of ITT, but as every story is different I do feel that I have conveyed contrasting aspects. I also believe I have ‘connected previous studies’, and ‘opened up new areas’ (Guccione and Wellington 2017:137). I am also in full agreement with the view of Sikes (2005:91) who states that we should not be naïve as to believe that an awareness of a subject leads to a ‘change in attitude or practice’, but that ‘ignorance certainly does not’, and with this in mind I feel that the study has been beneficial. I will now discuss what I consider to be my contribution to theory, practice and policy and the originality of the contribution.

Contribution to Originality.

There appears to be limited research with aims and objectives similar to this study, and the following examples appear to be the most similar studies from the last 20 years, albeit with differences highlighted, which illustrate the originality of this research study. In 1992 Corbett discussed a career in special education from her own personal perspective, and reflected on her own role. Whilst this study was partly auto-ethnographical it did not consider societal influences and is of course dated. Also in 1992 Singer explored the career paths of 6,600 teachers of SEND over a 13 year period. This longitudinal study did take into account some societal and family factors, but was undertaken using fixed research questions, which were re-visited annually, and was conducted in the US.

Two years later in 1994, Smith, Brownell and McNellis conducted research on the careers of special needs teachers, however the focus of this study was attrition, as is the focus of many studies up to the present day concerning teachers of those identified as having SEND (Gehrke and Murri 2006; Rinke 2008; Bruinsma and Jansen 2010). Also in 1994 Green examined the careers of those who pursued a career in special education, which highlighted professional profiles but was conducted in the US.

Moving forward to the early part of the 21st century, two studies undertaken in 2003 were those undertaken by Cook and Schirmer, and Pion, Smith and Tyler. The study by Cook and Schirmer focussed on analysing the careers of SEND teachers, whilst Pion, Smith and Tyler undertook their study in the U.S. and surveyed teachers who had obtained Doctorates in Education, to ascertain the number of those who chose careers in special education.

Gaad undertook research in 2004 which was designed to ascertain how cultural, moral, societal and professional factors affect teachers who choose a career in special education, and this was undertaken using questionnaires and interviews, but was undertaken in the United Arab Emirates. In 2005 Marks, Matson, and Barraza, focussed their research on SEND teachers who had grown up with siblings identified as having SEND, and how this had affected their career choice. Although their methodology claimed they were collecting ‘participant stories’, this was actually undertaken using fixed interview questions, and was also undertaken in the U.S.

Two research studies were undertaken in 2010 by Stephens and Fish, into what motivated teachers to pursue a career in special education. They sourced their information for both by means of semi-structured interviews, but once again these studies were U.S. based. Another U.S. based study was completed in 2011 by Kaff, Teagarden, and Zabel, which recorded first-hand accounts of 15 teachers whose careers had spanned the last 35 to 50 years. However all these teachers had pursued careers in schools for pupils with emotional and behavioural disorders, and none had taught in any other provision.

A study to collect the views of special needs teachers into their motivation and professional development was undertaken by Feng in 2012, however this was undertaken in China. A similar study was carried out by Zhang, Wang, and Losinski, in 2014 which surveyed 214 teachers who were intending to pursue a career in special education, however this study was undertaken in the U.S.

A British study was undertaken in 2015 by Lloyd and Lloyd and focussed on what special education could learn from its ‘earlier accomplishments’, including support for teachers who pursue a career in this area. They based this on their own personal recollections and experiences of working in special education from 1996 onwards, and centred their study on the changes within SEND education and their effects. A study in 2017 surveyed 156 teachers and focussed on the relationship between their self-efficacy and their expected outcomes within a career in special education. It was undertaken by Baglama and Uzunboylu but was based in South African schools.

The above examples which are not exhaustive but were chosen to illustrate a cross section of research, highlight the fact that research over the last twenty years involving the career decisions of teachers relating to special education, whilst similar in some aspects, do not actually mirror my own. Many were undertaken in countries outside the U.K. where teacher training, teacher experience, and the structure of the education system is distinct to that country and dissimilar to that in the U.K. Many used methodology which was more structured than my own, often with the emphasis on questionnaires, or interviews with fixed research questions.

Some used a far greater number of participants than in my own study, and some encompassed a lengthier time span. Motivation was highlighted in many of the studies, but few linked this to societal factors. I believe therefore that my research study does make an original contribution to theory, as it examines the career decisions of teachers related to special education within a context not previously explored.

Contribution to Theory.

The original theory proposed for the study relating to the polarisation of teachers views in respect of teaching in specialist provision, has been largely disproved. However, the theory that teachers, and initial teacher training students, hold distinct views about special education, especially in special schools, which in some cases had never been challenged, and which could influence career choices, has been identified. At the onset of the research study I fully appreciated that not all teachers hold particular views about special and mainstream education, and that my small sample would not be unable to give a view indicative of the whole profession, however I do consider that it offers an indicator of the factors which contribute to the career choices of teachers, specifically relating to a career is specialist provision.

The most significant theory relates to the pre-service and in-service training of teachers, in that the present, and certainly the past training of teachers, has not been universally robust in its coverage of SEND, and indeed in all aspects of ‘difference’ that teachers may encounter in their careers. This to some extent is addressed by individual teachers, autonomously of their formal training, through personal development to enhance their professional role.

This theory also relates to past teachers, whose career has taken them into teacher education, but who in previous teaching careers also reported that ITT and CPD were lacking in their own training relating to aspects of SEND. This has influenced their present role within teacher training institutions, where they are endeavouring to deliver a practical model of SEND, in order to enhance the pedagogy of this group.

Theory is also contributed, which originates from teachers who themselves identify as having SEND and who actively further their own knowledge in respect of the pedagogy required to effectively teach those identified as having SEND. This frequently manifests from the teachers own experiences within the education system, as they are often in a position to be empathetic to the needs of their learners.

This study also strengthens the existing theory regarding the importance of pupil voice (Coates and Vickerman 2010; OFSTED 2014; Beaver 2017) within all spheres of education, but specifically highlights the fact that many individuals identified as having SEND, are willing and able to contribute to their own education. Many are able to form clear perceptions and understandings regarding the views and beliefs that their teachers hold, an aspect which it appears not all teachers are aware of. It must also be argued that irrespective of training, professional development, experience and knowledge, all teachers should have the opportunity to teach in a diverse range of settings, and should not be deterred on the basis that they are only trained for a certain cohort or learning environment.

Whilst researching and formulating theory I have adopted a social constructivist model, and whilst the societal influences on the participants played a role in their views, beliefs, and career decisions, these were not the only factors, and the views and beliefs of teachers in regard to SEND, specifically working in a specialist provision must be considered holistically.

Contribution to Practice.

In terms of initial training and continuing professional development, this study has identified the need for standardisation across all teacher training providers, to ensure that SEND, and other areas of difference take a greater priority within training, which was a focus of the 2015 policy ‘Education excellence Everywhere, which suggested ‘quality criteria for all ITT providers’. It must also be ensured that theory is supported by practical experiences, and vice versa, which could be realised by more school based training as suggested in the 2015 ‘Teaching and School Leadership’ policy. All teachers should have opportunities to access adequate CPD which meets their needs, and in the words of the above policy should reflect ‘what works’ for teachers.

The contribution of serving teachers who self-identify as having SEND, along with pupils who are identified as having SEND, should be encouraged and enabled to contribute to theory and practice, and there should also be opportunities for students and serving teachers to have meaningful discussions with these groups to enhance understanding. Also if new teachers are to be recruited to special education, the status of SEND in society must become more positive, and it is my view that this process can be instigated by teachers who can act as ‘agents of change’ (Pantic and Florian 2015:333) in the social justice agenda. In order to facilitate this teachers need to have opportunities to reflect on their own practice, which will require them to receive the time and support to do so, within their already extended workload.

Good practice should also include opportunities for serving teachers and indeed trainee teachers to be able to access relevant information relating to a learning environment of which they have no experience, but do have an interest. This could be incorporated into the ‘one stop shop’ model suggested in the Early Career Framework (2015), whereby those with an interest in teaching can access all information, documentation and forms of application in one place, in order to commence a teacher training programme.

As education is at present is a top-down institution in terms of power and legislation it must be ensured that all parties work together to bring about these changes, ranging from policymakers and OFSTED, to schools and pupils.

Contribution to Policy.

 Policy formation in the U.K. adopts a ‘top down’ approach, and although the Government circulate consultation documents before policy formation, the actual participation of the relevant stakeholders can be lacking, as was the case with the 2015 Code of Practice for SEND. It has been argued within this study that teachers, parents and indeed children identified as having SEND, are able and willing to contribute their views and aspirations which could be considered, by adopting a ‘bottom up’ approach to policy formation. (Fullan 1994:12) argues that neither a top down or a bottom up approach is appropriate for educational policy formation, and considers that the top down approach gives the ‘illusion of control’, whilst the bottom up approach can be ‘slow and ill defined’, and can raise questions related to the skill and motivation of those tasked to formulate the policy.

 Both approaches have been discussed at length within literature (Ball 1993, 1996; Sabatier 1986, 2005; Troyna 1994; Dyer 1999), but my personal view arrived at through this study, is that in the case of policies which relate to those individuals identified as having SEND, the individuals, their families, their teachers, and those responsible for teacher training, should play a much greater role in policy formation. This however, does not mean to say that organisations such as OFSTED should not have an input, but that they too should take the opportunity to listen to stakeholders before they input into policy formation.

Summary.

 Taking into account these areas I believe that this research has made a contribution to theoretical knowledge, that is original and that can enhance future policy and practice. It is unique in the fact that there is little research that is similar, and the findings within it give an insight into the career decisions of teachers in respect of SEND, which could enhance and develop the experiences of teachers in order that the area of specialist teaching becomes more of a mainstream topic, and so attracts and retains a suitably trained workforce, in a society which it is hoped becomes more inclusive.

6:6 Further Research.

Further research into the beliefs, values and experiences of trainee and serving teachers would be of benefit, in order to further explore perceptions of SEND, and other minority groups which it has been found in this study also experience ‘difficulties with being different’. Research has been carried out in line with this focus, but the majority of studies focus on inclusion within mainstream schools (de Boer, Pijl, Post and Minnaert 2012, Nilsen 2018) and not on the direct views and attitudes of teachers relating to pupils identified as having SEND. These views could be used to construct an argument in line with my own, for the essential and appropriate training and development of teachers in the field of SEND, and how if possible this input could be transferred to be used with other minority groups.

 It is also my opinion that further research, with young people identified as having SEND as the participants, could focus on their experiences of teaching and learning, specifically the views that they believe their teachers to hold, as this could inform future ITT and CPD in SEND. Previous research has demonstrated positive outcomes from research using young people identified as having SEND (Ward and Simons 2009, Watson, Feiler and Tarleton 20012, Liddiard, Runswick-Cole, Goodley, Whitney, Vogelmann and Watts 2018), and by using a variety of ways to communicate, many will be happy and able to tell their story, and this could potentially make an impact on ‘theory, policy, and practice’ (Wellington 2013:1500).

A recent conversation with a young man, still in education who identifies as having autism, heard about my research and asked if I would research him. He assured me that what he could tell me about himself, his family, his education, bureaucracy, how he’d been treated in society, and his wishes for the future could fill a book, and listening to him speak I have no doubt about this. His life could well become a blue-print for education, teacher training, CPD and much more if it was researched, and supports my view that there are many young people identified as having SEND who could be so beneficial in contributing to all aspects of educational research.

6:7 The Future of Special Education.

Undoubtedly the debate concerning special education will continue, it terms of where certain children are placed for their education and why, if full inclusion can ever exist (Salamanca Statement 1994) and if so what are the implications for mainstream schools. If special schools and specialist provisions are untenable forms of education, a point argued by some (Norwich 2008), then why are the majority of these schools overcrowded and have waiting lists, and what effect does this argument have on teachers and the teaching profession?

Past and present policies concerned with education stress that education is for all and the SEND Code of Practice (2015) gave assurances that ‘specialist teachers’ and ‘talented support staff’ would be recruited in order for this to occur. However this assurance does not yet seem to have been taken on board in terms of initial training and CPD, which it could be argued renders teachers as one of the ‘casualties’ of the special needs debate. Irrespective of the outcomes in the future, there will always be a need for teachers who are experienced, competent, well trained, and well supported in all aspects of SEND to teach in whatever environment the future holds.

In 2018 Kauffman, Schumaker, Bader, and Hallenbeck published an article entitled ‘Where Special Education goes to Die’ in which they examine ‘myths’ which they describe as the ‘mistaken notions of what special education is, and is not’. One of these myths is that students identified as having SEND ‘should be treated like all other students’, and that special education is ‘simple and nonspecial’, a view which does little to support the acquisition of the knowledge and expertise required by the teachers who teach pupils identified as having SEND.

 Other views include those from Rock, Thead, Gable, Hardman and Van Acker (2006:2) who believe the nature of special education is ‘problem saturated’, and that ‘any attempt to speculate’ about the future of special education is likely to be ‘hindered by an imprecise and inadequate understanding of the past’, an argument supported by Cook, Landrum, and Tankersley (2014:2) who argue that policy makers have not learned from history in terms of special education, and steps need to be taken to find out what has happened in the past and take concrete steps to improve. Armstrong (2003:124) also supports this view and states that the ‘role of history is fundamental to a reconstruction of the future, and individuals identified as having SEND need to ask the question ‘What does history tell *me* about *my* own history and *my* future?’

The future of special education according to Leko, Brownell, Sindelar and Kiely (2015:39) depends on teachers being ‘better prepared’, with the need for further research being carried out jointly by ‘stakeholders, schools and universities’, whilst Cimera (2000:124) has the view that the future of SEND is untenable as long as ‘academics are still arguing the inclusion question, and whether the mythical nondisabled child actually exists’.

 Russo-Campisi (2017:193) believes that in the future researchers and policymakers must ‘clarify the ambiguous language used in legislation and relevant terminology’ in the field of SEND, whilst Norwich (2008:142) warns that the role of the special school is ‘limited’, as inclusion represents a ‘broad and significant social and political value judgement. However Kauffman and Schumaker (2018:8) believe that the notion of full inclusion is ‘dead’, and that ‘viable, vibrant special education depends on the determination to maintain full continuum of alternative placements’ to best serve the needs of pupils identified as having SEND, and will require appropriately trained teachers.

It is my personal opinion, in line with my research findings, that all the above views are accurate and are actually echoed throughout my study. I do not believe that we will see an end to the notion of SEND, or special schools, indeed I believe that the way forward is to enhance special education in whatever form it may take, and that ultimately we all need to work towards ‘celebrating difference in dignified ways’ (Armstrong 2003:195), and strive to end the ‘awkward campaign’ found in the UK, which is based on ‘ableist prejudice’ (Simplican 2017:47). The way forward therefore is to raise the profile of teachers in specialist provisions, and ensure that they are appropriately prepared for the job in hand.

However, irrespective of the above views, I believe it would be prudent to assume that any future perspectives of special education may be based on present perspectives, as it appears that history repeats itself. The present perspective is the one found in the most recent Ofsted Annual Report (2018) which reported that at present there are 1.3 million pupils in England identified as having SEND, which represents 15% of all pupils, with 1 million receiving some type of support. There are 1,000 state funded special schools, 480 independent special schools and 350 pupil referral units, in addition to 1,392 specialist units attached to mainstream provision. The report highlights the strengths of special schools which include: ‘playing a vital role in preparing pupils for adulthood’, ‘tailoring learning to pupils needs’, and ‘SEND staff having high ambitions for their pupils’, with 38% of state funded special schools being judged as outstanding, with teaching often being the outstanding aspect.

It is my opinion that SEND education at present may not be the epitome of overall good practice, but it must in the future continue, and develop, in order to effectively educate the predicted rise in SEND numbers’ (OFSTED Report 2018:51). At present a Conservative government is in power, who in December 2018 committed £350 million to support children with more complex needs and disabilities, and promised the ‘right support’ for all children identified as having SEND, irrespective of their educational placement. They also pledged that in the future every ‘SEND pupil will be able to access any school and every teacher will be equipped to teach them’.

However if Labour should come into power at the next general election, they pledge to create a National Education Service, which they intend to be one of the ‘institutions of fairness’, in line with the NHS they created in 1945. They intend to create a ‘unique learning path’ for every child, provide the education each child needs ‘at different times and in different ways’, and ‘embed SEND more substantially into training for teachers’.

 It would appear that both main political parties have some commitment to SEND education in the future, which now needs to see; government, policymakers, researchers, educationalists, teacher training institutions, teachers of both mainstream and special needs pupils, parents, and most importantly the pupils themselves, work together to establish an education system that meets the needs of all children.

This system would ideally operate without the necessity for; labelling, discrimination, and segregation, and a consensus needs to be reached on inclusion, identification, categorisation and the true value of special education, putting an end to the view that ‘special education is concerned with assimilating the most troublesome children within a society perceived to be normal’ (Armstrong 2003:90). It is also vital that ‘all teachers have a robust understanding of pupils identified as having SEND’, whether or not they intend to consider a career in a specialist provision.

6:8 Limitations of the Study.

The aim of the study, to collect and analyse the life stories of teachers has been met, but I am aware that the stories have been shaped by many other individuals and institutions, to which a voice has not been given in this study. These may well be as follows; policy makers/government departments, OFSTED, universities, LEA’s/Academy Trusts, schools/educational provision, parents, families and other agencies, who could well argue an alternative scenario.

This suggests that there are many more avenues to explore, and while tentatively offering conclusions to this study, I believe that there are many more questions to be answered concerning teacher’s views of working in a specialist provision. I am also aware that geographically all participants originate from the North of England, and also studied for their teaching qualification in this area, and whilst this factor may not have any relevance to the study, experiences of training at a wider range of institutions may have been beneficial, along with participants who experienced training routes other than a university degree. All participants of the study were university graduates, and the inclusion of teachers who had undertaken school based initial training such as Teach First, would have offered a broader example of SEND input, however the aim of the study was to collect the stories of individuals rather than generalising, and this has been achieved.

6:9 Conclusion.

Without a transformation of the structures which underpin Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development, many teachers may remain unaware of the opportunities that working in a specialist provision can bring. Along with this is the effect on pupils identified as having SEND not having access to appropriately trained teachers, an aspect which without a transformation will also remain unaddressed.

It appears that we are still a long way from being a truly inclusive society, or even what we mean by this, although individuals identified as having SEND, are on the whole no longer hidden from society. If we adopt a more bottom up approach with stakeholders such as the pupils offering relevant input, rather than top down from the government and the policy makers, we may begin to construct a system whereby education really is for all, and is delivered in the most appropriate setting, irrespective of cost, by appropriately trained teachers.

I conclude by reflecting on my thesis journey, and whilst my initial view regarding the polarisation of opinions regarding special needs teaching may have been disproved in some way, other aspects have not. My existing views on teachers and teaching have been strengthened and I continue to be awed by the resilience of teachers, their passion for what they do, and how they continually strive to offer every child in their care the best possible education, irrespective of their own lack of training, support and resources. However, the attrition rate of teachers demonstrates that this commitment is taking its toll and I hope that the concerns of teachers, some of which are highlighted in this study, will be addressed in the very near future, and that we ensure that the teachers of the future are prepared and supported to undertake their roles within an ever changing society.

**Appendices.**

Appendix 1 – Ethics Approval.



Downloaded: 05/05/2019 Approved: 15/11/2016

Annette Netherwood

Registration number: 140211670

School of Education

Programme: Ed.D

Dear Annette

**PROJECT TITLE:** 'It's like Marmite - you like it or you don't': An exploration using Life History into why teachers choose to work in special schools in the Industrial North of England **APPLICATION:** Reference Number 011413

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 15/11/2016 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

University research ethics application form 011413 (dated 19/10/2016).

Participant information sheet 1023973 version 2 (19/10/2016). Participant consent form 1023974 version 2 (19/10/2016).

The following optional amendments were suggested:

Please address these points: Approved with suggested amendments - Precision of language used for the intended research aims, section 1 Please tighten up the research questions and aims for the participants in the information sheets Ensure the title reflects what you are actually studying (and not more). Reflect on how you can ensure that your research avoids setting out to 'prove a point' Ask yourself how appropriate your sampling method is and how it can be improved.

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt

Ethics Administrator

Appendix 2 - Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if you want any points clarifying or you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

I am a student at Sheffield University studying for a Doctorate in Education. I am currently embarking on my thesis which is entitled ‘An investigation into the effects of social constructs on teachers’ perceptions of Special School education, employing a life history approach.

This research aims to identify the catalysts within teachers and student teachers lives which affected their decision whether or not to work, or consider working in a special school, and I will be employing the life history method. This method involves participants talking freely about their lives and experiences and could include family, education, training, professional development, career or any other life moments the participant wishes to share. The researcher will then collate and analyse this data in line with the objectives of the research.

Participants should be able and willing to share their stories and a representative sample will be chosen. This will include myself, exploring my own life and career decisions, and the others will be initial teacher training students, newly qualified teachers, established teachers, and teacher educators. There will be no set questions or format as it is personal choice as to what information you wish to share. The conversation will be audio recorded and written consent will be required before this takes place.

It is up to you to decide if you wish to take part and is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet and will be asked to sign a consent form. However you can withdraw from the research at any time without giving reason. It is anticipated that your involvement could be anything up to 6 months, after which you will be kept fully informed of the progress of the research and have the opportunity to view and comment on all transcripts relating to you before they are used in the study.

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for the people participating in the project, it is hoped that this research can be of benefit to those involved in teacher training, and to those with an interest in special educational needs teaching. I am not foreseeing any disadvantages or risks arising from this research process and it is my aim to be honest and transparent about my own positionality in regards to the research focus. I will not allow my own views and beliefs to interfere with either the collection or subsequent transcription of the information shared with me, and I intend to keep our working relationship on a professional level at all times, in order to protect both yours and my own emotional wellbeing.

If at any time you do have concerns about either the research or the way it is being conducted and you feel you cannot approach me directly then you may contact my supervisor Pat Sikes (p.j.sikes@sheffield.ac.uk). If for any reason the research has to be terminated before completion all participants will be informed as to the reason.

All the information collected during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and for my use only. You will not be named within the research, nor will the names of others you discuss during our conversations, including institutions. All data collected will be kept secure and will be destroyed when the research is complete unless it is used as in the following paragraph. If however matters are discussed which I consider to be of concern, for example child protection issues, then I will pass this information to the relevant third party.

The aim of the project is to collect personal stories from educational professionals and will be used within the named research. However in the future other researchers may find the data collected useful in answering other questions, and if this is the case I will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be shared, and ensure that it is untraceable back to you before allowing others to use it.

The research has been ethically approved by the University of Sheffield’s Research Ethics Committee, and is being organised and funded by myself. If you require any more information or clarification please contact the researcher:

Annette Netherwood

07811 657917

aknetherwood1@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix 3 - Two Sides of a Story.

*I was terrified. The huge heavy door had shut and I was unable to move it. The rain was beginning to fall and the sky was dark and menacing. Everywhere was quiet and panic engulfed me. Where was everyone? Would anybody ever find me?*

 I had been to the girls toilets which were at the bottom of the playground in a cold dark out-building, and returning to the school building I found I was too tiny to open the main and only door into school. This was the start of my educational journey – my first day at Primary school aged just 4. Luckily the caretakers’ wife who lived in a house in the corner of the playground came to my assistance, but from then until indoor toilets were fitted, I often sat in extreme discomfort not daring to repeat the experience.

Prior to school I had what is often termed a ‘sheltered upbringing’. I was an only child, very rarely had the opportunity to interact with other children, very seldom played out, and for the most part I sat clean and tidy in my pretty dress, ribbon in hair, reading a variety of books. On a positive note mum had taught me to read at a very early age, and as a consequence reading has been both my love, and my escape ever since. My early memories of school were happy, and because I could read at the onset I was often allowed to do more exciting things such as cleaning the paint pots while my peers struggled through ‘Janet and John’ books, a 1950’s reading scheme which was extremely sexist, very white middle class and very British!

We rote learnt most things, and were bombarded with general knowledge and ‘facts’ about the world, a learning regime which has stood me in good stead all my academic life. I was eager to please both my teachers and my parents and so worked diligently in all lessons. I remember the board rubber being thrown at speed at an unsuspecting ‘talker’ and the horror of a ‘naughty boy’ receiving the cane for misdemeanours unknown. Although I wanted to learn, these incidents certainly demonstrated that this was the best option.

When I eventually reached the ‘top’ class I was taught by the Head Master, who really made learning fun. So much fun in fact that I didn’t realise I was completing 11 plus tests, and was amazed when I was told that I had passed and would be going to the Grammar school. I don’t think many of us realised what a change this would be, and I was completely naive about what lay ahead. I had no siblings, no older friends, and indeed very limited friends of my own age who I could discuss this with.

In the summer holiday prior to starting at the Grammar school, the school uniform was purchased, and then nothing else was really mentioned until the great day dawned. There had been no preliminary visits, no open days, no meetings with future teachers, and no information as to what lay ahead. I was even more scared than the day the big door had shut on me. However after the initial culture shock I realised that I was going to enjoy this school, and was hugely impressed at the timetable which included French, all three sciences, Latin and both English language and literature.

Throughout my time at school I became intrigued and fascinated by the sixth form common rooms. The lower and upper sixth both had respective rooms, accessible through a series of doors and completely unseen by anyone in the lower forms. I had no real perception of what lay beyond those doors, but I imagined it to be very sophisticated with boys and girls mixing freely. I counted the days to a time I would enter that mysterious place through the hallowed portal, but it was not to be.

My parents had never shown a huge amount of interest in my learning, although I always strived to please. I had chosen my options independently not wanting to bother them, nor knowing why I chose what I did. I did sufficiently well in my ‘O’ levels to proceed to ‘A’ levels, but then the bombshell was dropped. My dad decided, I think independently of my mum, who was used to being told what to do, that I should leave school as it wouldn’t do me any good to stay on. He had been looking in the local paper at the job advertisements, and suggested I get a job sand blasting the exteriors of buildings.

 We were a couple of decades away from the rise in feminism and I was appalled at this suggestion. Luckily for me he rescinded on this choice of occupation for me, but to this day I get a cold feeling when I pass a building being sand blasted. I knew not to argue about having to leave school, but was I devastated, and would now never enter the magical common room. My dad did finally agree to me enrolling at a college in Leeds to learn housekeeping and cooking in order to get a ‘proper woman’s job’. His foray into equal opportunities and feminism must have been very short lived after the sand blasting incident. This wasn’t exactly my choice but at least I could say I was going to College!

The course was basic and I found it lacking in challenge, and it was during this time that my parents separated and my dad left. I finished my course with a ‘1st Class pass with distinction’, more than adequately prepared for a career I had no intention of pursuing. Now was my chance to achieve my ambition to become a teacher. Accessing information relating to career improvement was almost impossible, but a lecturer from the college had taken pity on my circumstances while I had been there, and offered to help. Her husband lectured in a Teacher Training College and he helped me secure a place.

Ironically the college building situated in an old stately home had a huge and heavy front door, was this an omen. This new life was very different from what I had experienced. It was located miles from civilisation, I had to share a room with 3 others, and study the works of Chaucer who was only a name to me. I struggled with some of the concepts and theories, never having had a sixth form education, but did enjoy the school experiences. I loved being with the children and preparing resources and was sure that this career was for me. However, the whole experience of college life became too much, and without telling anybody I got a boyfriend to ‘smuggle’ me and my belongings out and I never went back. The college got in touch and offered support but I knew I couldn’t go on.

Back at home I had to find a job, and with housekeeping and sand blasting out of the equation, I went to work at a Berni Inn. It was here that I fell in love with the chef (who is now a teacher) and we have been married for 43 year. But we both soon realised that we needed to get ‘proper’ jobs if we were to get married, so he went into industry and I was successful in acquiring a post at the Halifax Building Society. I worked here until I left 3 months before our first baby was due and became a stay at home mum which was the norm in the late 70’s. Our second daughter was born 20 months later, and my time at home with them was precious and of which I have no regrets. When they started play school I joined the Pre School Playgroups Association and became branch treasurer, and had the opportunity to visit many different groups.

I loved immersing myself in activities with the girls, and tried hard to ensure that they were ready for school both academically and emotionally. I never lost sight of my dream of becoming a teacher, but satisfied myself that I had at least ‘taught’ my own children a wealth of things. When they were 4 and 5 respectively, a friend told me about the ‘Mature Matriculation’ scheme, which prepared more mature people with limited qualifications for higher education. I jumped at the chance, and after 12 months I went to Leeds University and passed the exam that would seal my future.

I was accepted at Bretton Hall College on a 4 year Batchelor of Education honours degree the year my youngest started school, and finally the dream had been realised, and the large oak doors of the college opened as if by magic and welcomed me. As I knew they would be, the school experiences and teaching practices were the highlights of the course, but I learnt a lot about educational reforms, the theory of pedagogy, and the Latin names of plants, but even in the 1980’s, teacher training was lacking in the ‘essentials’, of how to physically teach a class of 30 children! Our teaching practices filled some of these ‘gaps’, but I was eternally grateful that I was a mum, as this experience often stood me in good stead.

I had the opportunity to visit and teach in a range of schools, and as my specialism was ‘Early years’, I encountered all age groups from 3 to 9 years. I believed then as I do now, that to gain the most benefit from these experiences you need to paired and mentored by a supportive and knowledgeable teacher who actually wants you there! Some teachers gave me every opportunity to teach and be fully involved in classroom life, while others made it clear that I was just there to help them, and my presence and input was more of a hindrance to their already busy teacher lives.

However all these experiences served me well and after 4 years I graduated at Leeds University. I applied for a teaching position in a village primary school in Barnsley, and was successful, and started to prepare it for 20 unknown Reception age children. This of course was my ‘probationary’ year which involved an authority advisor observing my practice and giving feedback, but I passed my probationary year and stayed at the same school for another 11 years, coordinating key stage one then as Acting Deputy. The school had very high standards and the majority of pupils gained excellent results in both key stage 1 and key stage 2 tests. The children and the parents were wonderful people, many of whom had vivid memories of the miners’ strike, which had made them resilient and eager to support their children’s education. I was fortunate to access some excellent professional development, and as a result gained a Post Graduate Diploma in Primary Science, and a Post Graduate Certificate in Professional Studies in Education. I was also funded in order to embark on a Master’s Degree in Action Research.

I was half way through my MA degree which focused on parental input into Key Stage 1 SATS, that I had my epiphany. I decided to apply for a position in a special school. My colleagues were baffled, why was I doing this? I was well liked and settled in the school, I was good at it, my research was based on a mainstream environment, and what did I know about teaching in a special school? At that point I really couldn’t answer these questions, but I was going to go for it. I applied for a position at a school within the same authority for young people aged 3 to 19, and as the only special school in this area it catered for every special need and disability.

It was a new build which would see the amalgamation of 3 existing special schools, plus extra capacity for the growing population of young people who needed to access this educational provision, hence new teachers needed. This was a challenge on many levels; 4 distinct groups of staff coming together as one, 3 groups of children with diverse needs coming together, a new school to resource and set up, the integration of outside agencies e.g. physiotherapists, nurses and speech therapists, and the huge task of formulating policies, schemes of work and class groupings.

So, not only did I not know anything about special schools, but I was going to be a part of setting one up! I applied and was accepted, and when I voiced my apprehension about my lack of special needs experience the head teacher responded by saying that a ‘good teacher is a good teacher whatever the school’, and they were far more interested in gaining good teachers who they could train and support. Heartening words indeed, but it still meant I had a full term of doubts and fears in front of me before I took up the position. It is at this point in my life, I believe that my ‘other story’ starts, one that is rooted in what has gone before, and was has yet to come.

*This then is my story, or is it? Is it just about me or my relationship with others? Eisenbach (2008 p.605) believed that by sharing your own story ‘you share the stories of others’, and that the story you tell is influenced by what others might think. The notion of ‘cyclical potential’ where a story becomes a way of ‘reflecting upon reflections upon reflections’ suggested by Midgley (2008 p.16) suggests that stories are ‘more than just facts’. Whereas Muncey (2010 p.15) has the opinion that different versions of a story could in fact be conceived every day, and that if you believe you have more than one identity then it follows that you have more than one story. She also argues that the variety of situations and people we encounter lead us to believe we ‘inhabit multiple worlds’ (p.13).*

*Considering these ideas I will now tell my ‘other story’. My relationship, or possibly lack of relationships with a special group of people, and a reflection on their story. My identity that has been formed through my world of special needs and disabilities, and the belief that different versions of a story can be conceived.*

*My Other Story.*

*I was terrified. The ‘boy that was different’ had actually come into the shop where I was standing with my mum. He started to talk to everyone in turn, and got very close to them when he did so. He seemed so big and his face was different. As he got closer I realised that as well as talking, he was wanting to touch people on the arm or shoulder. My mum sensed his presence and very quickly hid me behind her and left the shop. I had not said a word but she seemed just as uncomfortable as I was.*

This is the only memory I have of a young man with Downs Syndrome who lived in our village. In fact it’s the only memory I have of anyone identified as having a special need or disability that I encountered when I was growing up. The only people in my early years who were ‘different’ were two of my half cousins, one who was tall, and one who was very short. They were brothers, one of whom had gigantism and one who had dwarfism. I had no idea that their size had any underlying reason, but remember my Great Aunt being offered a sum of money to allow the ‘small’ one to join Billy Smarts circus. She declined, and in later years he married and had a daughter.

Maybe my ‘sheltered’ upbringing was the rationale behind the fact that I never encountered anyone else ‘different’, but on starting school the status quo remained. All pupils seemed fit, healthy and ‘normal’, and the good old Janet and John books certainly supported the notion of the white, middle class, able bodied. On trips and visits to other schools, the pupil population seemed just as ‘normal’ as us, and back in the classroom it was expected that everyone complete the same work. Maybe in retrospect the poor boy who was for ever dodging the board rubber had a form of deficit disorder!

Would the Grammar school, with a large and diverse catchment area have pupils with different needs in its cohort? The answer was no! The building would have been totally inaccessible to anyone with mobility problems, and as in the primary school the expectation was, that every class member complete the undifferentiated work. It was a very sporty school, and I must admit that I often felt ‘special’ when I was unable to compete due to my tiny size. Once again collaboration with pupils from other schools mirrored our ‘normality’, and I have no recollection of anyone in our local community identified as having additional needs (we had moved from the village where the boy with Downs lived).

When I started at the housekeeping college I was told there would be girls (there were no boys) from all over the country and beyond, so who would I encounter? Well, I met my first black person, a lovely friendly young lady by the name of Henrietta who had travelled from Africa in order to learn how to keep house, and Susan who had mild hearing loss. This was quite an eye opener and I felt I was part of a very diverse group. Needless to say no one else I encountered at the college was identified as having additional needs, but to be honest this seemed the norm for our area in the early 70’s.

The Teacher Training college as you might expect, demonstrated no diversity amongst its students, and again was totally inaccessible unless you were able bodied (those big heavy doors again!). In the short time I was there no mention was ever made to teaching children identified as having special needs, and the school experience I enjoyed so much involved children with no apparent difficulties. In my memory of everyday life at that time, I still cannot recall anyone with any difficulties. I have to wonder in retrospect, if I just wasn’t looking or worse still I was avoiding seeing.

The Berni Inn, a labyrinth of staircases with the restaurant on the top floor, and no disabled toilets, once again precluded many individuals from dining with the ‘trendy people’. The Halifax Building society also had huge access issues for both staff and customers, and I remember one gentleman who had to ‘park’ his wife outside in her wheel chair whilst he queued inside. However what the Halifax did have was Frank. He was the post room ‘boy’ in his late fifties who only had one hand. He was employed under a scheme to give ‘people like him’ employment that they could ‘manage’. He had a metal hook instead of a hand which came in very useful on many occasions!

In 1986 I commenced my time at Bretton Hall, ready to learn about the diverse groups of children I would encounter in my career. The term ‘Special Education’ was not even mentioned in the first year, but I remember a little girl on my first teaching practice (who was not in my class), but I was told she found things ‘difficult’. The schools greatest concern seemed to be that she couldn’t use the toilet properly. When we all returned to college after our practice our frequent conversations about our experiences never seemed to include special needs.

In our second year an announcement was made. We were to go on 2 extra placements, one to observe children of ethnic origin, and one to observe children identified as having special needs. Each placement was to be over 3 afternoon sessions, in a school chosen to highlight these two areas. We had no preparation and were duly shipped out in threes and fours to the schools. The ‘Ethnic Origin’ placement was at a school in Huddersfield. It operated just like any other school we had visited but not all the children were white. In fact most of the children whatever their origin had been born in this country, and the insight I had hoped for into the culture and religion of the pupils never happened, and the opportunity to ‘educate’ myself about this group was lost.

The much awaited special needs placement saw us once again in a mainstream school which operated in the same way as the others. The class we were placed in had amongst it a few pupils with Individual Education Plans, but none that had a Statement of Special Educational Needs. This then was identical to thousands of classes across the country, and no different to what we had already observed. We watched these children struggle through undifferentiated work (so not a good example), made notes and helped them whenever we could. After a quick debrief back at college that was it! Our special needs training was complete. No reference would be made to again to the identification of needs, or pedagogy required to successfully teach these children, and I began to wonder if the individuals who had designed the course were similar to me, in that they had never encountered children identified as having special needs or disabilities. I did ask at one point if we needed any more input in this area but was told ‘I probably wouldn’t need it’!

With the realisation that I was at last a teacher (albeit one lacking in both practical skills on how to teach, and knowledge about children identified as having special needs and disabilities!) I began my teaching career. Because of the absence of ‘practicality’ in my course, which included assessment – and how to do it, I was tasked with not only endeavouring to give my pupils a baseline, but to design a pedagogy that would meet their needs. This was compounded by the fact that I wasn’t sure if any of the pupils had special needs as I didn’t know how to identify them!

Not to be deterred, I got to know the children well and they all seemed to thrive with me and make good progress. I attended all my probationary year training (where they did touch on behaviour management) and after 12 months became a fully-fledged teacher. I moved from the Reception class to a Year 1\2 class, much more confident than I had been a year previously, and after a lot of reading on my part the fog was finally lifting on the teaching of pupils identified as having special educational needs and disabilities

During this time I had the opportunity to teach some wonderful children identified as having diverse but mild special needs. I could assess them accurately, I became proficient in filling in the paperwork associated with pupils identified by school as having additional needs, and I knew what differentiated work these children needed to fulfil their potential. But I couldn’t deliver it. I had 32 pupils in my class, yellow group were destined to achieve above average results in SATS tests, blue group would achieve the expected levels and green group had the potential but needed time and extra input. And then there was red group, all boys, and all with the ability to appear as though they were working, but certainly not achieving the desired outcomes, this was the ‘special needs’ group.

This did not sit well with my personal and professional beliefs on equality, and I raised my concerns. I was told that there would be no extra staff available to help in class, to carry on focussing on yellow and blue groups as we ‘needed to get results’, and as long as red group weren’t distracting the others then what was the problem! I used as many strategies as I possibly could; pairing yellow group members and red group members to work on a joint project (until yellow group parents complained), using playtimes and lunchtimes to offer extra input (until red group parents complained I was keeping them in), and basically trying to be in four places at one time. It seemed that this was happening in all classes in the school, and as the solution involved money, then there was no solution to be had.

It was at this point when realisation dawned that many of the pupils who were identified as having special needs, or those who were classed as under achieving, often had what one could call ‘social problems’. These manifested themselves in different ways, but all brought their own challenge. Children who came to school hungry (no breakfast clubs then), children who were unkept, children who had irrational fears, and children who demonstrated concerning behaviour, were just an example of some of these challenges. Of course on reflection I am prudently aware that every generation has experienced forms of social difficulty, but akin to my lack of contact with individuals identified as having special needs, I must also have been unaware of those around me with social difficulties.

During my time at the school I believe I began to ‘unravel’ the problems that some pupils encountered, and was able to identify more clearly those that lay under the mantel of ‘social and emotional difficulties’ and those that manifested through a range of special needs. The little boy who mimicked being a dog and dug holes in the garden, was not ‘special’ he was actually burying his glasses because he had been made fun of, and the little girl who refused to speak was frightened of what she might reveal about her home life, if she did begin to use her voice. I also became aware of the vast number of difficulties which were identified as special needs, some legitimate and supportive, some a ‘label’ to rationale either needs and behaviour, which was not beneficial for the child in question.

But unfortunately there was still red group. I realise in hindsight that some of the pupils in this group would have benefitted greatly from a special school education, or at least he resources on offer, and that many, with more emotional stability could have achieved. In my view however this was not going to happen in the mainstream setting in which I taught. Some of the targeted pupils made progress, and the resources were beneficial, but red group remained, along with their needs. I had thoroughly enjoyed the praise and recognition I had received for my teaching of pupils who achieved above average levels, but was this enough? Did I need a challenge? My mainstream colleagues didn’t understand. Was I mad? Did I know these children could be violent? Could you actually teach them things? What if they didn’t achieve? Was it the money? These are a few of the comments made, but they didn’t deter me, and after doubts, fears and sleepless nights akin to those I experienced when I started at the Grammar school at 11, I embarked on my life changing career path.

No hiding behind my mum now, I had to tackle any fears and doubts head on. The door to the special school opened automatically (now this really was an omen) and I entered a happy and welcoming environment. Because of the amalgamation, the authority had granted us 10 INSET days in which to set up the school, and this was certainly a team building exercise. We planned, wrote schemes of work and policies, we moved furniture, we collected resources, and we got to know each other. The problem was I had never met my pupils so I was planning for the unknown. My teaching assistants (they will always be mine – we are still good friends years after) had come from 2 of the amalgamated schools so knew some of the pupils, but not all. What we did know was that they had a diverse range of needs,and ranged from year 2 (7 years old) to year 6 (11 years old).

All too quickly came the pupils first day, and the first revelation, buses as far as the eye could see and not a parent in sight! My TA’s disappeared to ‘collect’ them, and in they came! In manual wheelchairs, in electric wheelchairs, on walking frames, being led because they were visually impaired, being ‘securely’ escorted as they were liable to ‘do a runner’ and some being coaxed due to fear of their new environment. It took an age to extricate them from their coats, take them to the toilet (where had my TA’s gone?) and settle them in to some form of semblance. It was time to get to know them. If I had thought that planning for 32 mainstream children was challenging, I soon realised that it had actually been a ‘walk in the park’, and any teaching strategies I had relied on before, either went out of the window or became modified beyond all recognition. I was invited back to my previous school one evening to watch a production. We had always been very ‘hot’ on productions and this was no exception. The pupils put on an amazing performance, word perfect, no prompts needed. All behaved beautifully and were thrilled to see me. I went home and felt a massive loss of conviction and confidence in the choice I had made. But I am not a quitter, and in the successive weeks I began to build my confidence and trust in my own abilities, and it payed off.

Team working can be difficult when you are not used to it, but my team pulled me through, began to tentatively laugh at my mainstream ideas and offer more realistic ones, and helped me over the new hurdles of resources, equipment and terminology relating to special education. Years later when I delivered a university lecture concerned with the use of resources and equipment to enhance learning for pupils identified as having special needs and disabilities, the lead OFSTED inspector who was observing me said that my lecture had been an ‘awe and wonder moment’, one that he would never forget, and that I had taught him so much. I was classed as ‘outstanding’, but would always be grateful to my colleagues at school who had got me to that point.

I became a bit of a campaigner for the ‘rights’ of those identified as having special needs and disabilities, and was often shocked at what they had to deal with on a day to day basis, but it was the reaction of members of the public which shocked me most. Some well-meaning individuals ‘felt sorry’ for ‘those’ children, some spoke only to the member of staff, some voiced their opinion that we really shouldn’t be taking ‘children like that’ out, others moved away swiftly, and some stared as if trying to work out where these children had appeared from!

As a school we aimed to counteract any negativity and encouraged our pupils to embrace the community, even with all its faults. At Christmas we all proudly went to church. That is to say 200 pupils, as many staff, and a donkey, walking from the school along main roads which the police kindly closed for us, to the local church. Needless to say the reaction from motorists and pedestrians was mixed! We took every opportunity to enable our pupils to integrate into the wider community and we were always there to support.

As I became more confident in my new role, it became clear that many people (including myself in earlier times), tended to focus on the special need or disability rather than the young person. This was very apparent when someone would refer to a young person as ‘the one in the wheelchair’ or ‘the blind one’, instead of using their names, and I became very conscious of the fact that my role was to teach the child not the special need. Unfortunately they were often called far worse in the community, often due to ignorance rather than malice.

I also became aware of the various guises of the term ‘achievement’. I had been programmed to believe that this meant success relating to National Curriculum tests and other formal achievement markers, but began to realise that when a pupil identified as having cerebral palsy first manages to hold a pencil, or a pupil identifies as autistic manages to stay in assembly for 5 minutes, then this was indeed an achievement to be celebrated. I now realised that this truly was the job for me, and had the children to thank for opening my eyes to the possibilities of a world more diverse than I ever imagined.

I had the opportunity to teach all age groups from 3 to 19, I undertook training from speech and language therapists and physiotherapists, I successfully completed training on the safe restraint of pupils, I set up inter school assessment groups in order to share good practice, I visited mainstream schools and advised on their pupils who had been identified as having SEND, I organised staff training, and eventually became Assistant Head. This school had done wonders for my self-esteem. I was then asked by Huddersfield University to lecture on their Initial Teacher Training course, specifically in Initial Professional Development, with emphasis on special needs education. This was my ‘opportunity to spread the word’, to ‘sell’ special needs education to the teachers of tomorrow, who like me had probably had little contact with, or knowledge of, teaching this group. Their input on special needs was far greater than what I had experienced whilst training, and I hoped to enhance this. It was also decided that I coordinate their special needs and disability placement at my school, giving me greater flexibility in the experience I could offer. It was however during this process that I found a ‘pattern’ emerging across the student group.

With the exception of some students, the ones I identify as ‘middle ground’, those without any real preference, the others ‘fell’ into two groups. These were the ones who couldn’t wait to experience a special school setting, who wanted to gain more knowledge and had actually considered a future career in a special school setting. The others for whatever reason were, apprehensive, scared, negative, and very much against a career in special education, and would have actually preferred not to have to attend this placement.

The actual placement did change the minds of a few in both camps, but during conversations in the evaluation period, both groups offered many reasons as to why they believed as they did. The group who rejected special needs had often had upbringings like mine, or had formed negative opinions about those identified as having special needs and disabilities through their life interactions, and it prompted me to wonder if other individuals working in education, other than the students I had come into contact with, had similar views.

I remembered how aghast my mainstream colleagues had been when I had announced my attention to teach in a special school, but never really considered why. This prompted me to informally ask the question of mainstream teaching friends and colleagues ‘Have you ever considered working in a special school, and if not, why not? I received many interesting responses, with many that had been shaped by social influences, and many that were very ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ special needs teaching.

So, I conclude by considering what has yet to come. I’m a special needs ‘convert’ as are many others, and I accept that we are all different – all special in some way, with our own views and beliefs. I also believe that we are still a long way from true inclusion being a reality, and that it is unlikely that one piece of research will change some of society’s views about those identified as having special needs and disabilities. However, my story told through my thesis is only just beginning, and I hope to continue the conversation on how the life history of teachers shape their future decisions regarding their career paths.

Appendix 4 – Text Marked Story of Esme.

*I grew up with my mum, dad and brother but as a child I was scared of people, then they found I had anxiety separation disorder, then after rheumatic fever I had arthritis and hearing difficulties. I also am dyslexic. I needed access to a hydrotherapy pool which was situated in the special school. My teacher suggested I go to the special school but my dad said no as he felt I was too academic. Personally I felt there would be a stigma of going to a special school, a local girl who I was told was ‘severely mentally retarded’ went there in a taxi, and I didn’t want to be at a school with people like that. It was strange because my dad never had anything to do with my education, but he had very firm views on me not going to a special school. As I grew up, I was possibly a teenager and I went shopping with my mum, I cringe now when I think that the charity shop my mum used to take me to was known as the ‘spastics’ shop. We were happy to shop there as the proceeds went to a good cause.*

*After I got married we had 2 children and we realised the youngest, my son, is autistic. There were 7 kids in his class who were identified as autistic, 3 went to a special school, seemingly for attacking the class teacher. The same teacher said that my son was not autistic he was just copying the behaviour of the others. My son was a genius at maths so I thought* *he can’t be autistic, but there were some traits there, like him walking on his toes. He became ‘lost’ in the mainstream secondary, he struggled with the noise and the school labelled him as ‘naughty’. He was bullied and had his glasses knocked off many times, and I realised that a ‘label’ might be beneficial for him. He was finally identified as autistic just as we moved house and him schools. He was fortunate to get a placement at a maths specialist school with an autism unit attached. The new school has a really good ethos towards those with SEND, especially autism, and he has settled well, and can now say ‘actually I’m autistic’, without worrying about repercussions.*

*Anyway back to my younger days before I got married when I went to university, well I don’t recall any SEND input during my training, apart from one morning on behaviour management. I did a B.A. with QTS. Also I had very poor CPD relating to SEND. What I did have was delivered by a private company. It was very practical highlighting a medical model, with no mention of pedagogy which is what I wanted.*

*After I left university I started applying for teaching positions and I did have a tour of a special school and I would have liked to have worked there so I applied, but I didn’t get an interview. I’m sure it’s because I’d had no SEND input when I was training. I have a passion for SEND because of my own difficulties, and I could have done a good job if I had had the chance. However, I did get an interview and then a job in a secondary school and in my mainstream secondary we tended to address needs as they arose, autism, foetal alcohol syndrome. I used the experience gained from my son to help me teach SEND pupils especially autism. I enrolled on a M.A. and looked at teachers perceptions of SEND, I found that teachers were sad that they had no time or space to understand those with SEND. It was at this time that I realised that I had other special needs, OCD and dyslexia. I continued working at the mainstream secondary until colleagues gave me the confidence to apply to a university as a lecturer.*

 *I have a love and a passion for SEND. I never got to work in a special school but now I am a teacher educator I try to ensure my students can access training related to SEND. My own difficulties and those of my son have made me see how important this is. I believe all children deserve a high quality of education, and that all teachers should receive training so that they can work in whatever area of teaching they may choose.*

Key

Societal – Early Life

 Societal – Later Life

Teacher Training

CPD

Teaching experiences.

Career Choices.

Present views and Beliefs.

**Glossary of Terms.**

ACSET – Area Community Services and Training Council

ADD - Attention Deficit Disorder

ADHD – Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

ASD – Autism Spectrum Disorder

B.A – Bachelor of Arts

B.Ed – Bachelor of Education

BESD – Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties

CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

CPD – Continuing Professional development

DfE – Department for Education

EBD – Emotional and behavioural difficulties

EHCP – Education and Health Care Plan

G.P. – General Practioner

HMI – Her Majesty’s Inspectorate

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

IEP – Individual Education Plan

IPD – Initial Professional Development

ITT – Initial Teacher Training

ITTE – Initial Teacher Training Education

M.A – Master of Arts

MLD – Mild learning difficulties

NEU – National Education Union

NTU – National Teaching Union

NQT – Newly qualified teacher

OCD – Obsessive compulsive disorder

OCED – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OFSTED – Office for Standards in Education

PGCE – Post Graduate Certificate in Education

PMLD – Profound and multiple learning difficulties

SENCO – Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SEND – Special educational needs and disabilities

SENDisT – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Tribunal

SLD – Severe learning difficulties

SMT – Senior Management Team

TA – Teaching Assistant

TDA – Teacher Development Agency

TTA – Teacher Training Agency

QTS – Qualified Teacher Status

UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admission Service

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