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What Constitutes Inclusion?

**A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Views of Young People
Identified as Falling Within the Autism Spectrum, their Parents
and their Learning Support Assistants**

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ABSTRACT

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A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Views of Young People Identified as Falling Within the Autism Spectrum, their Parents and their Learning Support Assistants

Inclusion of young people identified as having a disability has recently become a much debated issue both internationally as well as locally in Malta. This gave rise to the move from special schools to mainstream schooling for all young people to have a quality education. Moreover, the idea of what needs to be done to cater for the diverse needs of all young people to thrive in a serene and welcoming environment is greatly discussed. This thesis will examine what constitutes inclusion to different stakeholders, more specifically what constitutes inclusion to young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, parents, and learning support assistants (L.S.A.s). A qualitative approach will be adopted for this study, involving six young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, six parents and six L.S.A.s. The research adopts a qualitative methodology, using participant produced images, semi-structured interviews and critical discourse analysis. The theoretical framework that underpins this research is that of social constructionism. Six young people identified as falling in different spectra of the autism spectrum were chosen and given a camera. They were asked to take photos of what they like and dislike at school. This was followed by semi-structured interviews for the young people who responded verbally and discussions using social stories for young people who did not respond verbally. Semi-structured interviews were then carried out with the young people, parents and L.S.A.s. Carla Willig's six-step methodological approach to critical discourse analysis was adopted to analyse the interviews. The research gave insight on various aspects of what constitutes inclusion for different stakeholders including inclusion as relational and inclusion as *one-size-fits-all* as two examples. The study indicates that different stakeholders viewed inclusion differently. Lacunae were also found such as, for example the lack of *voice* that young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum have, and the need for more training programmes to equip L.S.A.s and other teaching professionals with the necessary skills to cater for the diverse needs of such young people.

STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

I, the undersigned, there by declare that the research work presented in this thesis is authentic and has never been submitted for any degree in any other institution.

Supervisor: Dr. Anthony Williams

Randee-Ann Gauci

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DEDICATION

To

*Nanna Frida for all her
love and support*

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Abbreviations used:

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
L.S.A.	Learning Support Assistants
N.C.C.	National Curriculum Council
N.C.F.	National Curriculum Framework
N.M.C.	National Minimum Curriculum
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Every child is a different kind of flower and all together make this world a beautiful garden

(Unknown, n.d.)

As a newly qualified teacher I was eagerly awaiting to start my first year of teaching whilst believing that I was prepared for the situations that I would encounter. Little did I know that teaching was much more than what I was taught during my undergraduate course at University.

Before going for my first lesson in a new school I prepared a number of ice breaking activities to kick-start the lesson, not knowing that a number of students in front of me did not respond verbally to questioning. I was not prepared to handle such a class and felt guilty about it. It is quite interesting to note that this episode is quite contradictory to the school ethos. This is because the school I teach in, the school where the research will be based has a strong ethos on inclusive practices. In fact the present headmaster strongly believes in a community built on mutual respect, in which parents, administrators and teaching staff work hand in hand so that the students will be participating and responsible adults in society (Bondin, 2014). The aim is for the school to set its students off on the right foot in order to make sure that they achieve their potential to the full. However, the school and the Maltese educational system still seem to have lacunae when it comes to supporting inclusive practices. This is what motivated me to research the issue of inclusion and what it means to the different stakeholders.

This chapter aims to outline the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that will underpin this research and give a brief overview of what will be discussed in the following chapters. This qualitative research was conducted in a Maltese

government secondary school and explored what constituted inclusion for different stakeholders in this context. The subjects selected for this study were six young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents, and their learning support assistants (L.S.A.s). The research was conducted using a social constructionist approach.

The rest of the chapters cover the following areas:

- Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to social constructionism, disability and social constructionism, the relationship between discourse and power, autism, inclusion and inclusive practices both globally and locally.
- Chapter 3 explains the methodology used to investigate the research questions and the rationale behind this choice of methodology. A qualitative approach focusing on critical discourse analysis was adopted as a research methodology. Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum were given a camera to take photographs of what they like and dislike at school. These were then followed with semi-structured interviews with the young people, their parents and their L.S.A.s.
- Chapter 4 contains an analysis of results and summarises the main findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted in the study.
- Chapter 5 follows with a discussion about the significance of the results in light of the current literature on inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum.
- Finally Chapter 6 presents the main conclusions of the study, its limitations as well as recommendations for further research in order to enhance inclusion in mainstream schools of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum.

1.1.1 Why delve into this research?

So many questions started coming to mind when I was immersed in school life.

- How do you give a voice to people who lack words?

- How do you cater for the diverse needs of young people at school in particular those identified as falling within the autism spectrum?
- Mainstream versus special schooling? Which one is the best solution? Who decides where the young person will be placed?
- Why are so many young people put in mainstream and given a curriculum that is beyond their ability?
- How are policies enabling or inhibiting inclusive practices in mainstream schooling?

I start by stating my positionality in this research. During my time both as a student and as a teacher in secondary schools in Malta, a positive move towards giving a quality education to all young people to succeed irrespective of their disability was prevalent. In my opinion, one major change towards achieving this goal was the introduction of a learning support assistants (L.S.A.s) that gave the opportunity to young people identified as having a disability to remain in mainstream schools with additional help. However, inclusion was and still remains a very broad term, with people having different views of what they believe it should accomplish (Jorgensen & Lambert, 2012; Lindsay, 2007; Norwich & Kelly, 2004).

I believe in the notion of inclusion and that improvements have been made to the current educational system to move beyond segregation. However, much more needs to be done, as merely placing young people in a mainstream setting is not what I believe inclusion is (Ravet, 2011; Pitt & Curtin, 2004). Having a classroom with twenty-five students all with different abilities makes it very difficult for the class teacher to cater for all the diverse needs of the young people in front of her. Even if in the policy documents there is written that the teacher needs to cater for all her students by “the use of pedagogies that are inclusive in nature and cater for diversity” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012, p. 31), the practical impact of such statements are much underrated. How can I finish the syllabus, a syllabus that is not fit for all young people, as we cannot work on a *one-size-fits-all* mechanism, whilst catering for the diverse needs of all the young people in front of me? When I started teaching I had very little idea of

what it entails for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to attend mainstream schooling. It was my frustration in not knowing how to handle these situations that prompted me to delve more and continue researching this area. I wanted to gain more insight, as I felt guilty that I was not being the teacher that these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum deserved.

A very important issue that needs to be discussed is 'what does it mean to include different young people in mainstream classrooms?' (Simpson, Mundschenk & Heflin, 2011; Kasari, Freeman, Bauminger & Marvin, 1999). Including a young person with a physical disability in mainstream classrooms requires physical arrangement to the building, but what about the inclusion of young people who have been identified as falling within the autism spectrum? What barriers are present and what can be done to eliminate them? Unfortunately as stated beforehand it is very difficult to implement policies into practice. We cannot use a *one-size-fits-all* approach because young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are all unique and one approach will be suitable for one young person but not for another (Davies, 2011; Murray, Shea & Shea, 2004). I ask, do teachers have the time, expertise, and the resources available to be able to implement what the policy documents state? Moreover, is what is written in the policy document really what the stakeholders view as being inclusion?

Over the last 30 years studies concerning disabilities have focused on researching the ways that these young people will face the risk of being excluded from different everyday life activities as a result of their disability (Watson, 2012).

1.2 Theoretical Framework of Inclusive Education

The theoretical framework that will run through this research is that of social constructionism. I wanted to delve into the role of language in the construction of inclusion. Social constructionism is the result of an epistemological approach that challenges the previous psychological constructions of “mind”, “self” and “emotion” as socially constructed processes that need to be positioned within the realm of social discourses (Gergen, 1985).

Social constructionism views discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artifact of communal interchange. Both as an orientation to knowledge and to the character of psychological constructs, constructionism forms a significant challenge to conventional understandings.

(Gergen, 1985, p. 266)

A number of disciplines have influenced social sciences including philosophy, sociology and linguistics giving it a multidisciplinary approach (Burr, 2015; Witkin, 2012). Social constructionists insist on the need to take a critical attitude towards “taken for granted ways of understanding the world” (Witkin, 2012, p.148) including ourselves, challenging the idea that “conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world” (Burr, 2015, p. 2).

Depending on the ways we look at the world and interact with each other, we construct different versions of knowledge, and consequently construct the same world differently. However we must keep in mind that we live in a world, which already presents to us categories, and conceptual frameworks that we get accustomed to. There are many questions to be asked and answered, such as in the case of this research: Who decides who is entitled to an L.S.A.? Who decides whether a young person is to attend mainstream or special education? Who decides what curriculum the young persons identified as falling within the autism spectrum will follow?

The perceived learning difficulty a young person suffers from can be viewed as a product of the construction that emerges when parents, teachers, L.S.A.s and the young person interact together. I believe that schooling is geared towards catering for the majority, with those lying at the ends of the learning spectrum encountering difficulties. This notion was acquired due to my struggle during my teaching years with trying to cater for the diverse needs of the young people in front of me, with the curriculum, time constraints and a mentality that is still geared to a *one-size-fits-all* scenario acting as impeding forces towards tailoring the teaching to the young people in front of me.

Language is at the heart of the construction process (Vygotsky, 1978). It gives us

a way of constructing our experiences of the world (Vygotsky, 1978). When we talk about inclusion we are constructing it, giving it specific functions and want to achieve particular purposes when interacting with each other - such as the feeling of welcomeness within mainstream settings. Social constructionists incorporate practice and language into discourse (Fairclough, 2000). The different forms of language presented are not only limiting factors, but also strongly channel how we think and what we say (Willig, 1999). Thus, as Foucault (1972) put forward “discourses are practices which form the objects of which they speak (Foucault, 1972, p. 49).

Different discourses on inclusion will believe that inclusion means different things. Different stakeholders including parents, teaching staff and young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum will put forward what they believe inclusion means to them (Reupert, Depper & Sharma, 2015; Allen, 2008). One needs to ask whether the result of these different beliefs is the universal truth about what inclusion means and moreover what does this imply in practice. Any version being put forward will have the potential for a social practice and when this happens it is marginalising alternative ways of acting (Kozak & Kozak, 2013).

Social constructionists are thus interested in analysing forms of social inequality including disability and inclusion (Anastasiou & Kaufmann, 2011; Goodley, 2011). Traditional psychology can be seen as inadequate since it takes for granted certain assumptions (Gergen, 1996) thus, social constructionism may offer a better way to experience and observe the world around us. New practices of scientific enquiry will help our understanding of how the knowledge that is produced through traditional paradigms is a function of the power in balance between the researchers and the object of their study (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Disability is not only socially created but is also maintained by the different practices, which will benefit those who have the power and are the dominant groups in society (Leiter, 2007; Makin, 1995). What is looked at as natural is also seen as normal many times (Makin, 1995). In my experience when a young

person identified as falling within the autism spectrum exhibits atypical behaviour in the classroom, like for example standing up during the lesson, it causes a disruption because of the fact that his peers are not aware of the reason behind the behaviour and get easily distracted from the lesson. Also we are used to a school system with rigid rules and thus any behaviour that deviates from the norm is looked at as inappropriate.

In order to obtain access to support and services for their children, families have to represent their children in explicit disabling ways (Goodley & Runswick- Cole, 2015). This puts forward the question – what conditions does the young person need to have to be classified as disabled, and what does that infer on services that the young person is entitled to? This points once again to the socially constructed character of inclusion (Barton, 2004). At times, parents have to pathologise their children in order to be able to access resources for them (Goodley & Runswick – Cole, 2015). This poses a struggle to parents between fighting for the rights of their children whilst being professional and emphasising the deficiencies within the child. This will label their children but at the same time allow them to have access to support and resources (Goodley & Runswick- Cole, 2015). Hoya (2011) who has been identified as falling within the autism spectrum also puts this forward when stating that

But in our society, I use the word disability. In fact, I use it quite often. And why is that? Because if I need to advocate on behalf of Autistics in order for us to receive needed services or supports, or for systemic changes to be made to benefit Autistics, I have to use the word disability to get attention, to be taken seriously, and to effect those changes.

(Autistic Hoya, 2011)

1.3 Inclusion

In recent years the discourse of inclusion has been a major issue both locally in Malta as well as internationally (Marshall & Goodall, 2015; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014, 2012, 2005, 1999; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO, 2009, 2005). There have been a lot of discussions, and new policies have been put forward on the notion of inclusion, why it is important and what can be done to achieve an inclusive environment in schools. Disability as a category will cause difficulties when it comes to inclusion in education since it constitutes an abstract and

generalised concept (Anastasious & Kaufmann, 2013).

As Goodley (2014) put forward, for many people the world inclusion is

synonymous with the education of children with impairments, disabilities and special educational needs.

(Goodley, 2014, p. 3)

whilst UNESCO (2005) views inclusion as

a dynamic approach of responding positively to pupil diversity and of seeing individual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning.

(UNESCO, 2005, p. 12)

This implies that the change towards more inclusive practices is not just an organisational or technical one, but rather it has to be a move with a clear philosophy. The basis of inclusive education is the need and right of a quality education, as declared in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1984, where Article 26 stated that “everyone has the right to education” and that this will be free at least for the primary and secondary levels of education. Moreover it also declared that education should be “directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and the fundamental values of freedom” (Article 26, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1984). Furthermore, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action in 1994 asserted that mainstream schools which had an orientation towards inclusive practices were the most effective at combating discrimination whilst creating a welcoming environment and building an inclusive society that aims at achieving a quality education for all (Article 2, Salamanca Statement, 1994).

But inclusion is such a wide category that it is difficult to have one clear-cut definition to describe it. Barton (2004) argues that inclusion is not a natural but rather a socially constructed process, where removing one single factor can have an effect on the inclusive process. This in turn leads to the constant need of conceptual analysis. Inclusion is set to fulfill the concept that all young people need to be valued and looked at for their unique abilities and included in all school community activities. Inclusion is regarded not as a place but more of a way of thinking (Alberta Education Inclusive Education Policy, 2015-2016;

Ballard, 2013; Nutbrown & Clough, 2013; Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Moving young people from special educational settings to mainstream schooling is merely the first step towards inclusion for all (Nutbrown & Clough, 2013; Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008; Clough, 1998).

Research suggests (Dunne, 2008; Graham & Slee, 2005; Vlachou, 1999) that the struggle for inclusion is a discursive one, where the linguistic and ideological dimensions of what inclusion means models the way it is enacted in schools.

With Asperger's, as a classic Asperger's child, I couldn't relate to people. My idea of making friends was thumping people. I was just odd. Everybody was saying I was odd.

I have come to a conclusion with Asperger's that it is not too bad. Obviously, there are different degrees. You can learn. But, I still say stupid things sometimes. I really drop myself in the crap.

(Madriaga & Goodley 2010, p. 126)

This very descriptive reflection again gives the idea of a homogenised idea of what dominates the talk of academics and practitioners who study young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Education and schooling have had a long history associated with emancipation and equality (Madriaga & Goodley, 2010). These are a result of a number of factors, which includes the emphasis of a free and open education for all learners, and the linking of schooling to society together with the need of education in modern societies (Madriaga & Goodley, 2010).

Moreover as in line with the local Maltese National Curriculum Framework Towards and Education for All (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) being identified as having a disability does not necessarily imply that young people qualify for special educational provisions. In order to qualify the young person must have both a disability and an educational need that stems out of this disability. However there is still a debate about what type of resources and benefits the young person becomes entitled to once he has a statement declaring special educational needs that has been approved by the Statementing Moderating Panel for Additional Educational Needs in Malta. After going through the

Statementing Board in Malta, a young person will be entitled to the support of a learning support assistant (L.S.A.), with the L.S.A. being either shared with another student in class or full time depending on the needs. The statement also entitles him or her to additional resources and the creation of an Individualised Educational Plan (I.E.P).

The I.E.P. is defined as a written statement stating the educational programme that has been tailor-made for the individual needs of the young person in the classroom. A representative of the senior management team (S.M.T.), parents or guardians, the young people themselves and other important stakeholders such as an educational psychologist when needed, will be present when determining the Individualised Educational Programme. Every recipient of special educational services should be in possession of an Individualised Educational Plan as this will serve as the guiding tool on how he or she will be catered for in mainstream schooling.

Harris (2000) states that social constructionists come to the conclusion that if there were no social barriers young people identified as having a disability will no longer have this disability. However many argue that this is a utopia – can a barrier free world be achieved? And if so will people with impairments be problem free? This research explores what barriers for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are present at school. The research will also delve into what parents and L.S.A.s believe are the barriers to inclusion of these young people into mainstream schooling.

This also links to the debate of whether young people with a disability should attend mainstream or special schooling (Moran, 2015; Allen, 2008; Buckley, Bird, Sacks, 2006; Archer, 2006), which has long been an area of research and discussion (National Autistic Society, 2013; Theoharis, 2008). In fact, in 1986 Brisenden argued that special schooling “contributed not only to their physical incarceration, but they have also contributed the incarceration of their capacity to take the same risks and seek the same rewards” (Brisenden, 1986, p. 120).

However, a number of researchers argue that removing special schools will

negatively impact the life of young people identified as having a disability rather than promote a more inclusive and serene environment. This can be seen in the work of Anastasious, & Kaufmann (2011) who argue that special schooling might be a better educational placement than the present mainstream schooling notion.

We have to contemplate the fact that great will be our sin if we eliminate a good institution such as special education, replacing it with an ineffective, inappropriate and uniform education for children with disabilities.

(Anastasious & Kaufmann, 2011 p. 380)

They argue that this stance against special schools is lacking because it does not:

- “Identify the complexity and multidimensionality of disabilities.
- Recognise the multiplicity of ways that social justice in education can lead to a common aim- appropriate social inclusion that is also consistent with the most effective instructional practices”.

(Anastasious & Kaufmann, 2011, p. 380)

As stated above inclusion is a general philosophy that puts forward the idea that all young people attending local schools are engaging in fruitful learning. However different philosophies underlie different disabilities thus including young people identified within the autism spectrum requires a number of strategies to cater for their diverse needs. Danermark & Conviavitis Gellerstendt (2004) argue that there are not only differences between people identified as having different disabilities but also between those who have been identified as having the same disability (Danermark & Coniavitis Gellerstendt, 2004, p. 344).

Critical disability studies “start with disability but never end with it” (Goodley, 2011, p. 15) as they try to productively critique the achievements of working through the modern paradigms of disability, including the social constructionist mode of disability where, as stated before, disability is no longer viewed as just a medical or physical problem within the person but rather as it having roots which are socially constructed (Goodley, 2011; Shildrick, 2007). These studies are viewed as a platform through which researchers can gather data and relate to as well as engage with one another against forms of oppression and discrimination that unfortunately are many times linked to disabilities (Ferguson & Nusbaum,

2012; Lash, 2001).

Some theorists believe that the involvement in research of young people identified as having a disability indicate that these construct their personal truths with their own perception and interpretation and thus no one better than them can give a clear picture of their likes and interests (Bailey, Boddy, Briscoe & Morris, 2015; Farmer & Macleod, 2011; Barners & Mercer, 2012; Beazley, Moore & Benson, 1997. Barners, Mercer & Shakespeare, 1999). Haack (2003) argues that a personal truth cannot be taken for public knowledge. It is essential to investigate the different ways that different people with disabilities construct their view of inclusion. One person's view is not necessarily the same as another, thus we cannot generalise one's personal truth as public knowledge. Opposing this viewpoint, Holman Jones (2005) argues that one's own truth can be the window to a public knowledge. Tierney (2010) also puts forward the idea that one needs to understand the specific context of one's life if he or she is to understand in turn the larger economic and social conditions.

1.3.1 Malta's local policy framework

The notion of inclusion has been espoused both internationally and nationally in Malta, and this resulted in causing distorting effects when it comes to policy making in schools (Davis & Watson, 2001). The term 'inclusion' has become what Graham & Slee (2005) define 'portmanteau word' meaning it is a word, which can encompass within it a wide range of meanings.

In Malta, there have been a number of policies that aim to promote inclusive practices in mainstream schooling. These include the National Minimum Curriculum (N.M.C., Ministry for Education and Employment, 1999), the current National Curriculum Framework: Towards an Education for All (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012), the Managing Behaviour in School Policy (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015a), Addressing Bullying Behaviours in School (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015b), Inclusive and Special Education Review (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2005) and Inclusive Education: Policy regarding Students with a Disability (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2000). The 1999 National Minimum Curriculum

Principle 1 (Ministry for Education and Employment, 1999) states that all young people are entitled to a quality education where they can develop their potential to the full. Principle 2 states the need to respect diversity, including gender, race, ethnicity and disability. Moreover, Principle 8 focuses on inclusive education, where there is a commitment from the educational community to first and foremost acknowledge individual differences and secondly to implement inclusive policies. The implications of this principle move beyond education. Society has a moral responsibility towards diversity. I believe that it is the obligation of everyone to defend the basic right of the young person in his or her continuous struggle against all barriers that can hinder the development of his or her potential. For me, it is essential to safeguard and strengthen the social and cultural fields to promote a serene and welcoming environment for all young people to succeed. In Malta we have been enacting the new policy, the National Curriculum Framework: Towards an Education for all (N.C.F., Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012), as of the 2012-2013 scholastic year, which consolidates the previous N.M.C (Ministry for Education and Employment, 1999). Here again, the focus on inclusive education is evident. Outcome 1 once again emphasis the need of developing the maximum potential of the young people as lifelong learners and learners who hold values of democracies and social justice, whereas Outcome 2 focuses on the learners being capable of entering the world of work and live a full and independent life.

The local N.C.F. (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) promotes the development of fundamental values and attitudes towards a holistic education that is relevant for life. This document acknowledges the growing cultural diversity and affirms that all young people can learn, grow and experience success if we respect diversity and promote an inclusive environment by ensuring that policies and practicies address these specific differences. In order to do this as stated in Principle 6 of the N.C.F. (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) there needs to be professional support for teachers, as they need to be equipped with the necessary skills to support and cater for the diverse needs of the students that are in front of them. Moreover national strategies, including the need for education for diversity and more inclusive practices are also highlighted in this document.

Education for Diversity promotes an inclusive educational culture and respect for diversity, allowing individuals to function across cultural divides, and offering a platform for children and communities to assert their culture and individuality with confidence.

(Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012, p. 56)

Another important aspect of the N.C.F. (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) is the focus it puts on parental interaction with schooling as an important factor that will promote educational development for all young people in the classroom (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012). This issue has also been of concern to me during my years of teaching, leading me to question what is the role that parents have in the education of their children. In the N.C.F. (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) parents' role is highlighted and said to be of crucial importance. The parents are encouraged to participate in their child's development and communicate essential information to the stakeholders involved at school (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012; 2005).

The N.C.F. (Ministry of Education, 2012) also affirms the need for a curriculum that does not aim for a *one-size-fits-all* mechanism but allows the teacher to work with the strengths and weaknesses of each of her students to help them access the curriculum in a way that enables them to use their potential to the full. The paradigm shift "away from a prescriptive curriculum towards a framework based on learning outcomes" (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012, p. 8) in the National Curriculum Framework: Towards an Education for All (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) shows the belief that every young person is entitled to a quality curriculum that allows him or her to reach the highest level of attainment that s/he can achieve. Moreover, there is a move towards student centred learning where all young people are on a continuum of ability and not failure. Ultimately, diversity is looked at as a means for all young people to be encouraged to work at their highest potential in a welcoming environment which encourages all students to succeed (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012).

1.4 Problematic Situation in Malta

Keeping in mind that inclusion means different things to different stakeholders, the focus of this research will be on **what constitutes inclusion to young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s?**

This research sought to shed light on various factors related to the positive inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Through a social constructionist approach, I will be carrying out a critical discourse analysis in order to explore the notion of inclusion. The study asks, how do young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s construct inclusion? Are their views the same or do they differ? What is the current approach with respect to inclusive practices in Malta and is this in line with the views stakeholders have on inclusion?

Unfortunately, in my experience, there seems to be a contradiction between what is taught in the education undergraduate courses and what is being experienced in schools. Mainstream schools need to provide support and expertise in order to be truly called inclusive rather than just having physical integration (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014; Byrne, 2012; UNESCO, 2009; Desmond & Elfert, 2008). Ultimately, the move towards young people identified as having a disability being taught in mainstream schooling can be viewed as a result of two interlinked factors: the rise of inclusive education (Farrell & Ainscow, 2002) and the realisation that grouping young people in special schools may not be the best solution for them (Graham, Van Bergen & Sweller, 2016; Connor, 1999; Vlachou, 1997).

1.5 Conclusion

The universal claim of inclusion by placing them in mainstream schooling is not honoring the claim that we are catering and providing a serene and welcoming environment for all young people to succeed (Bailey, 2014; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014). From my teaching experience in these past nine years I believe that more effort needs to be put in order to better cater for the diverse needs of these young people identified as falling within the autism

spectrum in the best way possible. Keeping in mind that inclusion is a word, which can encompass a wide range of meanings depending on the perspective of each individual, after reviewing the literature, and through the journey I undertook to carry out this research I have my own understanding on the notion of inclusion. I believe that inclusion should accomplish the task of offering young people a serene and welcome environment where they will be able to thrive, use their potential to the full, be given the same opportunities as all peers their age and ultimately leave school being able to enter the world of work and live an independent and full life in their future. Putting policies into practice is not an easy task but it is our responsibility to ensure that we do our utmost so that all young people have equal opportunities to learning by having a curriculum that is flexible and teachers, which are knowledgeable and committed towards inclusive practices.

To investigate this further four research questions have been formulated which will be asked and answered in this thesis. These are:

- 1. How do young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum construct and give meaning to inclusion?**
- 2. How do the parents of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum construct and give meaning to inclusion?**
- 3. How do the L.S.As of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum construct and give meaning to inclusion?**
- 4. What are the implications of these views for the school policy development and inclusive practices in the school?**

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a postmodern paradigm which not only makes researchers rethink what social science means, but also queries the type of research that should be conducted, what questions should be asked, and what researchers are aiming to discover (Elder-Vass, 2012).

‘I don’t live in the truth, but I live in possibilities that together we can create’ (Yang, 2011, p. 132). Living in a post modern world, people can no longer understand the world around them by appealing to just one overarching system of knowledge (Burr, 2015, p. 8). There have been a number of theorists who had a sociological influence on the view that knowledge is a product of the thoughts of human beings and not just based on an outside reality. When it comes to discovering issues, this implies gaining an insight into a phenomenon through a different perspective, but moreover it could also mean a reconstruction of a particular issue being delved into as in the construction of inclusion.

According to Gergen (2011) social constructionism asks practitioners two major questions:

- How and for whom is the research useful?
- What implications both politically and socially will arise if we take this kind of reality seriously?

When people and communities interact together in a social system, they will in time create mental representations of their actions. These representations will in turn become habituated and create roles which are acted out by the people in relation to each other (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Each stakeholder in an educational setting will have his or her own role to fulfill, such as being a student, a teacher or a headmaster. These roles are thus regarded as being institutionalised within the educational setting, and are also available to other members of society

to enter into and be part of (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Thus, during this process of institutionalisation, meaning is created within a society resulting in knowledge and conception of people to start to become part of the institution in society.

The subjects that social constructionists are interested in are those, which anthropologists define as culture, whilst sociologists describe them as society (Gergen, 1985; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Owen (1995) defines these subjects as the shared social aspects of everything that is regarded as psychological. Obviously different social constructionists will have their own version of what social constructionism is, and thus they will emphasise different aspects of the same theoretical framework, with some emphasising the complexity and the inter-relationships of the various aspects of people living in the wider community (Goodley, 2015; Billig, 1991). Thus, social constructionism may lead a researcher to conclude that life as we know it exists as a result of the social and interpersonal influence people have when they interact together (Gergen, 1985).

Knowing that both genetic and social factors are at work together, social constructionist theorists do not deny that genetics does have an influence on individual life, however they decide that they will focus on investigating the social influences on a person's life (Owen, 1995).

Social constructionism aims at making us think critically about the things around us, which are normally taken for granted, this also includes our perception of ourselves and of the world around us (Mungwini, 2008). What determines 'is' is a concept, which is constantly evolving and thus will continually change throughout the years. When we as teachers state that a particular student in our class is disruptive, challenging or careless we are giving categories, which we as teachers apprehend, however these are not necessarily real divisions but are categories that the teacher has constructed to place her students in. This should make us reconsider these categories, and ask how they were constructed and enacted, whom do they benefit, and what is their impact on the young people. A young person's behaviour needs to be understood within a social, historical and cultural realm, building on to the idea that humans are not only a reflection of the

context they are in, but are continuously constructing it (Galbin, 2014; Andrews, 2012).

Research has also shown the damaging effect dominant constructions have on a young person's mind (Walkerdine, 1988). Social constructionists see human beings as individuals who are constructed through cultural, political and historic evolution in a given social and temporal setting (Owen, 1995; von Glaserfeld, 1995). These social practices begin and are recreated in a particular spatial time, and thus will eventually come to an end. Thus, the inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in schooling will only take place whilst they are of school age, once they reach fifteen years locally this social practice will end and another social practice will come into effect.

Culture defines what is normal and what is abnormal, what should and should not be accepted, and who is conforming to what is expected. Thus research questions that arose in this study were 'what type of behaviour is expected in mainstream classrooms?' and 'what happens when young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum behave differently than what is expected as typical behaviour in a classroom?' (Ashburn, Ziviani, Rogers, 2011).

Ultimately, social constructionism does not eliminate any notion of truth, truth with a small "t" (Yang, 1999) but instead states that there is not just one idea, which is "the" truth but that any idea is only "a" truth. People view the same reality with different perspectives, which results in a number of truths, as no experience is value neutral (Yang, 1999). Uttered statements are value loaded since they encourage certain ways of life whilst discouraging others.

2. 2 Discourse

A discourse is defined as a way of providing reference to how we interpret the world and give meaning to objects around us (Gergen, 1982). Discourses are "practices which form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1989, p. 49).

A discourse is not looked at as a reflection of the world around us but rather as a reproduction of the exchange between people who interact together. When a

person is in the presence of others, they speak amongst themselves and acquire information about him. In doing so they are portraying information that he already possesses (Goffman, 1956). Through discourse the phenomena of the world around us are constructed, so different discourses will in turn create different constructions of the world. Each discourse will claim that what it is saying is the truth.

When people talk they are inevitably constructing the world around them. Thus, when different stakeholders talk about inclusion, they are constructing the notion of inclusion in a certain way through their discourses. These discourses will have an implication on what we can do and what we are expected to do (Kang, 2009; Karlberg, 2005; Philips & Hardy, 2002 & Hall, 1997).

Discourses are closely related to social practices in institutions that will in turn have an effect on how we behave in everyday life. Education as an institution will have a set of discourses that shape and give substance to the daily lives of all whom are part of that institution. Education as an institution will also give categories such as educated and uneducated. This notion of education is seen to be put into practice when young people attend lessons or play truant.

Foucault (1989) states that theoretically all discourses can neither be bad nor good; the outcome depends on the way the discourse is used and in what context. Foucault (1989) puts forward the idea that general education for all was created concurrently with the creation of democratic institutions, and that power through discourse can act by shaping the subjectivities of those it moulds. Discourses are inevitably linked with institutions and social practices, which will have an effect on our personal life, how we live and what we can and cannot do. It is essential to point out that the relatively powerful groups will decide many times which discourses are looked at as the truth. Discursive constructions will in turn keep people in a state of unknowing oppression because power relations do not remain transparent (Brown, 2012; Venanzi, 2004; Foucault, 1979). Our thoughts will be affected by the wider socially shared concepts of the community around us (Billig, 1998).

Deconstructing texts can enable us to construct our experiences of the world around us. We can then look at how they represent the world in a particular way and moreover enable us to challenge it. In this thesis what constitutes inclusion to the different stakeholders; that is young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s was explored by deconstructing the discursive object inclusion presented by them in the text of the semi-structured interviews. Gergen (1999) & Gergen & Gergen (1997) argues that the way we negotiate and construct ourselves in relationships and with each other will in turn bear the mark of the other, earlier relationships we have formed. Conflicts will arise when we try to construct and negotiate our identities as we enter a struggle to put forward or resist what is made available to us through discourse (Goffman, 1956).

2.2.1 Discourse, knowledge and power

The relationship between discourse, knowledge and power is a very close one. The power to decide which practices are permissible and which ones are not establishes the idea of normality and abnormality, what is defined as abnormal is commonly a result of not being part of the dominant group's discourses (Foucault, 1979). Thus, any version of an event gives the social actor a chance to act in one way instead of the other thus favouring a particular type of behaviour.

By giving a definition and presenting something in one particular way we are producing one aspect, which becomes knowledge, and this bring power with it (Crowe, 2000). What is defined as normal is a product of who had the power to say what could and could not be done (Molloy & Vasil, 2002; Foucault, 1975).

One can conclude that the struggle for control and power will thus underpin how social texts are created and propogated as they offer a discursive cue to power relationships. So by analysing these texts one can study the power implications as well as the way the texts can create different constructions of social identity (Phillips & Hardy 1997).

2.2.2 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis focuses on how language effects power relations, but it is also concerned more widely with the ways in which discourses are used to produce subjectivity, such as through positioning (Burr, 2015, p. 150). Social constructionists look at the notion of objectivity as an impossibility since each one of us looks at the world from his or her own perspective, and the questions we end up asking about the world around us are a reflection of that perspective. Social constructionists theories and hypotheses are also a product of the assumptions that are embedded in our mentality (Jorgensen & Philips, 2002). Thus research using this theoretical framework is empowering as it offers opportunities to find ways of improving scientific problematic social situations including the notion of inclusion (Galbin, 2014; Willig, 1990).

Even though there are a number of different approaches towards discourse analysis they all share some common characteristics. These include discursive psychology, Laclau and Mourffe's discourse theory, and critical discourse analysis, the latter being used in this thesis. However, these approaches use data coming from unedited text and talk that occurs naturally and give a lot of attention to the structure of language. It also focuses on the local as well as international context of discourse. Ultimately discourse analysis will be used in this study to look at the ways that the different members of a social group give meaning and construct different social situations in relation to inclusion (Burman & Parker, 1993; van Dijk, 1997).

However research will then vary in focus and methodology by being either descriptive or critical (van Dijk, 1997). Whilst descriptive analysis focuses on the discursive processes of social constructions, critical analysis is more interested in the focus between the reproduction of power relationships and how these have a direct effect on inequalities including disability (Wodak & Meyer, 2012; Fairclough & Wodak 1997). Thus, social texts will serve as the data that enables the researcher to discuss issues in relation to disability.

2.2.3 The construction of social identity in discourse

Discourse constructs social identities by defining the groups, interests of these groups, their position in society, and the relationship that these groups have within the society (van Dijk, 1997; Wodak, 1996). These social identities will in turn act as an interpretative role for the social actions so that they can indicate to people what they should think about in relation to different issues (van Dijk, 1997). When people use language they are using speech and creating text not just as an individual but also as part of a social category, and thus they are constructing or accomplishing these different social identities in discourse (Brown, 2012). These constructions are not fixed as they depend on the interaction between people within the social group. This will make social identity ambiguous and open to continuous change because of the discursive, social and political influences on it (Hearns & Michelson 2006; Philips & Hardy, 2002).

Thus, from a discourse analyst perspective identity is an ongoing process that can be achieved through social interactions (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005; Burman & Parker 1993). These can include language and other communicative skills. Even though people and objects exist materially, their social meaning exists through the creation of discourse. It is not specifically internal to the object or person, but rather a social construction (Philips & Hardy, 2002). For example when researching about disability, this category is not looked at as a stable category with pre existing characteristics, but it is instead constructed and embodied through discourse. This view will in turn have an effect on the research methods since if we look at social identities as being socially constructed, then their effect on the social action is only determined by looking at the context (Benwell & Stoke, 2006; West & Fenstermaker 1995; West & Zimmerman 1987).

2.3 Realism versus Relativism

Social constructionists believe that there is no reality outside discourse “there is nothing outside of text” (Derrida, 1967 p. 158). Social constructionism denies that our way of perceiving reality is a direct effect of our knowledge. Knowledge

is produced when we look at the world from different perspectives. These perspectives will normally serve the interest of dominant groups in society. This knowledge is a partial truth as it is only one way how we can look at the world, and also because it serves the best interest of a particular group, normally one with more power. The debate between social constructionists and realists about reality and truth is grouped into a sphere called “realism-relativism debate”. However, one should note that there is no clear cut line between the two lines of thought as a number of researchers have taken the stance of naïve realism (McDowell, 2013; Logue, 2012; Martin, 2002; Marks & Miller, 1987).

2.3.1 Relativism

Derrida (1967) states, “there is nothing outside text”. This puts forward the idea that discourse forms the objects of our consciousness whether these are material, physical things like buildings, plants and books or more abstract constructs like intelligence, friendship and happiness.

Foucault (1986) rejects the idea of the nature of reality, as he states that since we cannot have access to a reality beyond discourse we cannot concern ourselves with its nature. What is a table? Who decided it is a table? What makes it different from a chair? What signifies these objects depends upon categories, which are local, and context bound by human beings. The material world exists but it exists through the forms of signification we give it. A table is a material object and is tangible, however it is called a table and has its particular purpose due to the discourse that defines it as such. It was people who constructed categories, and it is through these categories that naming different objects became possible. A relativist position, a position which I myself agree with, does not deny the fact that a material world exists, it however questions the possibility of whether we can know it and expounds the idea that reality is reflected in the way people communicate.

The continual possibility of debate and argument is, for Gergen & Gergen (1997) the ultimate value of a relativist position. If we believe that human beings construct knowledge, reality and truth, then more so we have not only the right but also the obligation to think, argue and make up our own ideas about

everything that is happening around us. Should we be passive actors of our own life? Should we leave everything to be decided by the dominant groups who have the power to put forward their ideas? Should students in class obey the teacher and ask no questions since she or he is in a position of power and thus rules what takes place in a classroom? Unfortunately it might be an illusion to believe that the teacher decides totally what takes place in class as s/he is also embedded in a discourse/power relation subject to rules decided by the policy makers in the school and the educational system (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014).

2.3.2 Realism

The exact opposite of a relativist position is naïve realism which Wetherell & Still (1998) describes as “an unquestioning faith in the reality of what we perceive” (Wetherell & Still 1998, p. 99).

Hruby (2001) on the other hand postulates the theory towards a critical reality position. Willig (1999) argues that “although our perception and sensations do not mirror reality, and although they are often volatile and changeable, nevertheless they do reference the real world in some way; they are not independent of it, produced entirely through our symbolic system such as language” (Willig, 1999 p. 95). This illustrates an understanding of critical realism where experiences and things, which are observed, are generated by biochemical, economic and social structures that are at the heart of any society (Sayer, 2002).

2.3.3 Relativism – Realism debate

Kenneth Gergen (2011) when interviewed by Yang (2011) about the relativism-realism debate puts forward a number of very valid points in favour of a relativist approach towards issues. As Gergen (2011) states many critiques against a relativists approach are based upon the nihilism effect, (meaning that they believe that there is no purpose in life as life is meaningless) or else on the fact that people argue that relativists believe that there is nothing real, so what about death, poverty and other essential life issues? If we take this idea in its literal meaning then it is correct. However social constructionists do not argue against the

existence of these things, rather they argue in favour of a world which is full of meaning and that there is not actually one reality, but rather the word reality refers to one kind of meaning that can be given to the world.

Social constructionists believe that it is not justifiable to presume that language is real and mirror images what maps reality (Gergen, 2011; Chourliaki & Fairclough, 1999; Goffman, 1976). However, Gergen (2011), states that social constructionism is 'ontologically mute' because what really exists cannot be contested.

For a number of critics, relativism is describing a position that states that all statements about reality and true are equal (Beckwith & Koukl, 1998). However, social constructionists do not argue against this position (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1966), what they propose is that there are many ways of interpreting the same thing, many ways of describing the same thing through different perspectives, and when decisions are taken there is no transcendental criteria to determine which one is better (Andrew, 2012). By doing this, the shift is towards a form of conversation, which is open to the possibility of creating something new together with the involvement of different perspectives.

Parker (1998) looks at relativism through an epistemological perspective in which he views the knowledge we have about the world as constructed through the use of discourse. He states that reality exists outside discourse, and that this provides the ground from which we can then give meaning to the world around us. Reality does not determine knowledge, but it puts forward a number of restrictions on how to construct the world around us.

2.4 Reflexivity

Through a social constructionist approach empirical research is not discarded but rather the goals of the research are different, where the outcomes are more focused on societal concerns. Its aims to challenge traditional understandings.

From this perspective it is important to keep in mind that the process of reflexivity calls for the attention of the historical and cultural context of the assumptions that will then reflect the potential to suppress or open spaces for other people to have their say in society. This issue is dealt in depth in the next chapter, the Methodology chapter.

2.5 Disability and Social Constructionism

Discourse in disability studies owes its beginning in the work of Goffmann (1963) & Zola (1982) and later Striker in 1999. In recent years studies on disability have taken an interdisciplinary endeavour (Grue, 2016). As will be discussed in the methodology chapter, critical discourse analysis can be a very useful tool to provide an analytical framework when researching about disability. Since this area is currently being put forward as an important key aspect, this methodology can offer a way of looking at how different models of disability need to be challenged.

There will be no theory, which fits exactly with every example, on the contrary it is important that it is continuously readjusted and improved as necessary. Three distinctive models, “ the social model, the minority model, and the gap model have become effective turbines for generating academic discourse” (Grue, 2011, p.544). Whilst analysing the models of disability it is essential to remember their historic significance as being effective agents of social change.

2.5.1 Theoretical models of disability

As indicated above, there is no one single dominant school of disability research, but various approaches exist that are grounded in different frameworks including literacy analysis, anthropology, sociology and Marxist political economy (Grue, 2011). Unfortunately these models have been looked at as being incompatible with each other, and this is problematic when developing theoretical frameworks in disability studies. For the purpose of this study the social model will be described below.

The analysis of disability that is found in the social model continues to be influenced by the model that originated in 1970's Britain. A group of researchers pioneered what they called the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, which was defined as a form of economic and political oppression that was put forward by the people who could not fit in to the needs of industrial capitalism (Barnes, Mercer & Shakespeare, 1999; Oliver, 1996, 1990). The idea goes back to the time when historic studies were paralled with the introduction of positive links between work and home, which in turn caused a rise in institutionalisation of people identified as having a disability (Gleeson, 1999).

The social model of disability has given valuable focus on the systematic factors that shape what disability means, in particular those that have to do with political economy. However this theory is lacking when it comes to theorising the impairment as a bodily and embodied phenomenon, which has been recognised by those who believe in this model (Oliver, 1996) as well as by those who argue against it (Shakespeare, 2006). A recurring criticism that is raised about this theory is that it has been constructed around a stereotypical 'ideal' disabled person as being a "male wheelchair user belonging to a dominant ethnic group who suffers no significant health problems because of his impairment" (Grue, 2016, p. 36).

As discussed previously, what is considered as normal or not is not a result of objective facts but is rather a construction which is formed through existing sociocultural and political interactions with their discourses (Annamma, Boele, Moore & Klinger, 2013; Peters, Klein, & Shadwick, 1998). Disability is regarded as a phenomenon that is constantly being reconstructed and negotiated (Scully, 2002). Thus, defining disability is not just simply a matter of classifying people within categories, it is a social matter ingrained in a particular culture where a number of assumptions, values and norms are put into practice (Haegele & Hodge, 2016).

According to Vygostky (1978), disability is a "social aberration" (Vygostky, 1978, p. 66) whereby young people identified as having a disability are changing through social and environmental relations. Unfortunatley, at times parent and

teachers continuously pity these young people identified as having a disability, which will in turn hinder their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) defined as the difference between what a person can achieve without being given help as opposed to what s/he can achieve if given the necessary skills and help. This will in turn cause what Rodina (2005) refers to as secondary disability (Rodina, 2005) whereby the excessive surveillance on people with a disability causes the deprivation of their independence. These people are not given the necessary skills and time to lead an independent life, which thus limits their educational experience and what they can achieve on their own as adults.

It is unfair to judge the personality of a young person in relation to his/her disability but rather it should be a mix of the social environment and the interactions the young person has with the other peers. Vygotsky was one of those who gave a lot of weight to the role of social life experiences of young people identified as having a disability (Vygotsky, 1963). This once again emphasises the social aspect in relation to disabilities and what these imply for the young person. Vygotsky (1963) stresses that interacting with peers is a very important social and cultural condition that can help in the development and socialisation of all young people, including those identified as falling within the autism spectrum.

In his work Vygotsky (1963) focuses on the ways in which a young person will interact with his or her peers, and eventually understand the cultural and social meaning of different areas of practice. This will in turn lead to the mediation between the relationship between language and cognition (Karpov, 2005). Problem solving is looked at as an ongoing process where interacting with others will help these young people extend their perceived limitations and move away from their zone of proximal development. According to Vygotsky (1963), social constructionists look at learning and development as being affected by the social environment. This will offer a context to develop mental processes. However these constructions are aided by people close to them including their peers or parents (Karpov, 2005).

Through the years social constructionism theories have had a great impact on educational practices related to children and young people (Penn, 2005). By labeling people into different classifications such as ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’, ‘having a disability’ or ‘not having a disability’ people could control society by regulating domestic and political behaviours (Burr, 2015, p. 40). In turn, the concept of disability and the word itself values self advocacy and advocacy groups which are important to promote the rights of those people who are identified as having a disability (National Council for Self Advocacy, 2016; Shakespeare, 1993; Oliver & Zarb, 1989). Self-advocacy refers to the way in which people who are defined as having a disability are actively involved in protecting their own “rights and interests” (Garner, 2009, p. 4). By defining disabilities societies could control and regulate domestic and political behaviours (Anastasiou, et al., 2011; Foucault, 1975).

When describing cognitive theories social constructionists focus on the interdependent social and personal process when creating new knowledges (Palinscar, 1998). Lawson (2008) states that describing one’s own identity and experiences as a person identified as falling within the autism spectrum can help researchers get an insight on their life experiences which is unfortunately lost when disabled people are just passive observers during interviews. Unfortunately at times interviewers are not sensitive to the day-to-day routine of these people (Oliver, 1996) and thus research has failed to involve them (Beresford, 2012). Even though it may be difficult to involve people identified as having a disability, especially children and young people in research, with adequate time and the necessary planning and resources, a lot of insight can be gained through their involvement. Notwithstanding this, more needs to be done to involve young people who do not respond verbally to questioning (Boddy, Briscoe & Morris, 2015).

However, Kaufmann and Hallahan (2009) argue that when a young person is identified as having a disability he will be entitled to special provisions, and so there is more to gain when these differences are acknowledged rather than by just stating that they are socially constructed.

If we begin to understand the origins of the various ways we understand the world, we can start to question and resist these preconceived truths. By doing this, marginalised discourses can be given the required attention and a voice can be given to those minority groups who have been disempowered by the voices of the dominant groups.

2.5.2 The social construction of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

Discourse around young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum has largely been dominated by the medical approach model (Molloy & Vasil, 2002). The label of the autism spectrum disorder in the DSM-5 Diagnostic Classifications (American Psychiatric Society, 2013) as a pervasive developmental disorder, which will be discussed later in this chapter, and the fact that the condition is positioned as a neurological impairment or disorder confirms the status of people identified as falling within the autism spectrum as a medical pathology. Unfortunately little research and discussion is available in relation to the social construction of autism as a category (Molloy & Vasil, 2002). For many years, researchers had to work within the constraints of the social beliefs of disability. This meant that ideas about the social status, acceptance and role of disabled people was effected by these beliefs (Waltz, 2013, p. 48)

One question that can be asked is whether people identified as falling within the autism spectrum do have an actual impairment or whether it is just a difference in their neurological make up. Studies on disabilities are thus an emerging interdisciplinary academic field of study where the aim is to critically examine the issues related to disability and its cultural context. To do this it is essential to critically delve into the representations and constructions of this disability as well as the political and theoretical models that draw up from social sciences (Froested & Raveneberg, 2006). This can in turn lead us to come up with research that will help in the educational field by finding out how disability, in the case of this research in relation to young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, is being socially constructed and what does that imply when it comes to institutions like schools to enact on these social constructions (Fraser & Sheilds, 2010).

It is extremely important to keep in mind that like all other diagnostic categorisations, autism is also part of a medical discourse, and through the consideration of medical discourse as a discursive repertoire its socially constructed nature can be considered. Therefore one must explore the ways in which the social construction of autism aids in the “production, interpretation and remediation of autism” (Nadesan, 2005, p. 3). What shapes our ideas about normality, and what constitutes difference is far beyond the distinct disorder of autism, but is constituted every day through the practices of social institutions and communities.

The rise of standards of normality and formalisations started producing screening techniques to identify and label young people identified as having learning difficulties including autism (Nadesan, 2005). Thus the history of autism started to be contextualised within a framework of evolutionary and transforming medical practices, together with the developments of professions including psychiatry and psychology, social work and the introduction of special education in the later years.

As discussed above, disability studies began with discussions of the social models of disabilities (Oliver, 2013; Oliver, 1990) and the move away from the use of medical language to describe young people identified as having educational needs (Garner, 2009). This model challenges the defined medical model’s view that disability is entirely a result of physical and biochemical differences. It puts forward the idea that any disability or illness is a result of biological changes in the human body. This in turn implies that medical treatment is required to cure this illness. The social model does not deny that impairments and illnesses do exist, however it also emphasises that there are indeed impairments that can be treated and that they are also partly socially constructed (National Autistic Society, 2012; Hughes, 2010; Molloy & Vasil, 2002).

Unfortunately, many times the emphasis is on a medical diagnosis rather than on the person himself. There needs to be a reframing in the sense that we need to understand that representing people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in a particular way will mean certain repercussions for them. When a

young person in class is labelled as falling within the autism spectrum he is being defined by this condition and his actions are a reflection of this definition which is socially constructed. At school we may hear the phrase 'that young person is autistic' rather than that the young person has been identified as falling within the autism spectrum, which would place the young person at the centre rather than the condition. This in turn leads to issues in relation to representations and power. Medical professionals have come up with diagnostic characteristics which they have placed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, and when a child is said to fulfill those criteria then he is identified as falling within the autism spectrum. We can ask what procedures must the young people pass through to be classified as needing additional help in school and given an L.S.A.? Locally a National Statementing Board is appointed, made up of professionals in different sectors including education and psychology, which decides the educational entitlements of the young person.

Unfortunately these defined categories that young people are placed in will dictate their identity at school, as Danforth & Glenny (1995) and Thomas & Glenny (2000) point out that

within the field of special education, research and theoretical accounts of the psychological defectiveness of children labelled emotionally disturbed have been accepted as an incontestable truth resulting in the placement of standardised and devalued identities upon their lives.

(Danforth & Glenny as cited in Molloy & Vasil, 2002, p. 662)

If a young person is labelled as falling within the autism spectrum it is very difficult for the person to detach from this label. In academic discourse it is difficult for these young people to have a voice since their voice is rarely heard and thus is not incorporated into knowledge. Empowering young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and hearing their voice can give precious information as we are outsiders to the experience. Moreover, when researching it is important to ask in whose interest is the research being conducted (Clough in Clough & Corbett, 2000).

Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are so diverse from each other that I agree with researchers who argue that you cannot classify all young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum into one category and believe that all will have the same characteristics (Sperry, Simonelli, Fukunga, 2012). Theorists will not be able to communicate with each other with clarity because assigning one name to such a heterogeneous group of disabling conditions causes confusion (Lobuz & Lienert, 2003). Defining what autism and falling within the autism spectrum entails is not easy as will be discussed in a later section, and thus it is difficult to have a predefined set of actions to cater for the diverse needs of these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum.

Even though there has been research on people identified as falling within the autism spectrum at an adult level, these do not help when it comes to educational policies and practices at schools as the information given is of an adult who does not attend schooling anymore (Willey, 1999). Thus it is difficult to understand the effect that labelling a young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum will have on the school life of the young person and how that will in turn effect his daily life. What effect does that have at school and at home? This study explores whether the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum would do things differently and whether they are given the opportunity to say what they like and dislike at school.

Teachers construct disability every day in their classrooms through their ideologies and beliefs as they teach (Linton, Germundsson, Heimann & Danermark, 2015; Collins, 2003). Kliewer, Biklen, and Kasa-Hendrickson (2006) postulate that many times at societal level people identified as having a disability will be looked at as low achievers despite the fact of evidence of their literacy. The beliefs teachers have are constructed in relation to the social values which are present in schools and societal discourses. Even though there is this push towards inclusion, teachers still lack the necessary support in implementing successfully inclusive practices (Costello & Boyle, 2013; Nutbrown & Clough, 2004).

Schools are educational institutions with their own ethos, culture and set of policies. Walkerdiner (1981) talks about the struggle between teachers and their students to position themselves in discourses, and how this has an effect on the power relations between them. Piro (2008) states that schools are institutions that create and propagate power relation, which poses the question on who has power in the classroom and what happens when there is a shift in this power (Jackman, 2014).

Yang (1999) states, that social constructionism can help teachers to adapt their classroom teaching to the best benefit of their students. If a teacher wants to better adapt for her students in the class, she can adapt by using different ways of teaching, thus changing her position in the classroom, which can in turn help to change the relationship with her students. Discourses play a central role in the everyday school routine as they denote what is considered as appropriate in a school context and how students should behave in classroom, during break time, during extra curricular activities as well as the interpersonal relationships with their peers, their teachers and the senior management team.

It is up to the teacher to look at the strengths and weaknesses of each young person and value their diversities. It is up to the teacher to come up with differentiated teaching and create a serene and welcoming environment for all her students. I consider that believing that all our students can succeed is the first step towards working for an environment in which they will actually succeed (Boyle, Blood, Coniglio, Blood, Finke, 2013). Teachers should be better equipped to teach young people identified as having a disability in order to create educational sites where disability is no longer considered as oppression. Agency, that is having initiative and control over ones own actions, is required to act against authority in order to redefine school roles and students categorisation.

2.6 Critical Stance Against Social Constructionism

A section of traditional researchers have raised a number of issues against this new paradigm shift towards social constructionism. Critics of social

constructionism state that social constructionists position their paradigm in a privileged position and make a universal claim that people, no matter their time and place in history, will construct their own worlds thus making words social (Halling & Lawrence, 1999). On the other hand social constructionists believe that through the influence of social constructionism, people will start to become more thoughtful and reflective of their current practices, and start thinking about the normally taken for granted assumptions of everyday life.

Mehan & Wood (1975), argue that the social constructionist paradigm presumes that the worlds are socially constructed and all realities are equal. They state that this is not actually true as social systems are not equal and not all people will have the same resources to deal with life in the world. Social constructionists are said to downplay the differences between people and their environment, thus minimising the possibility for change (Mehan & Wood, 1975).

Harre and Krausz (1996) claim that Gergen might be correct when stating that individuals need to change to adapt to the different contexts presented to them in this always changing world. However this does not directly imply who they really are and at times it will cause people to remain locked in a particular social and cognitive structure.

Wrong (1961), then criticises fellow sociologists because of an ‘over socialised’ conception of the human being. They do not take into consideration the fact that people are also a physical entity, thus implying that people are not only born and die but people are actually actors in their own life. He also focuses on the term of socialisation and assigns two meanings to it, one being the ‘process of becoming human’ and acquiring human attitudes and secondly their transmission of cultures, which emphasises the fact that people learn to conform to a set of expected norms within a particular culture and society.

Another critique of social constructionism is the restriction that discourses pose on practices and customs. This criticism emphasises the fact that ‘the world’ as seen by social constructionists is a place where ultimately the powerful discourse will dominate the practices of society. Hacking (1999) argues that if social

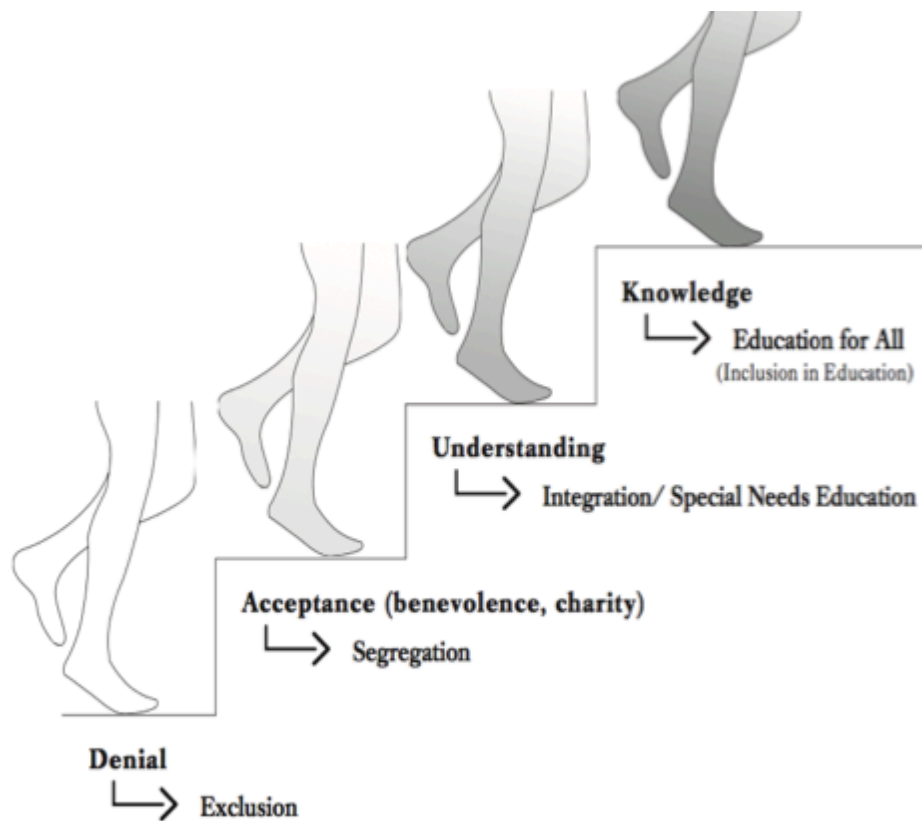
constructionists believe that the world around us is a result of our social conventions and not natural constructed then we can change them how we want them to be.

2.7 Inclusion

Inclusion has been defined as “a value system which holds that all students are entitled to equal access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their education” (National Council for Special Education, 2009, p. 7). It is linked to a “political and social struggle which foregrounds differences and identity and which involves whole setting and practitioner reform” (Nutbrown & Clough, 2013, p. 7).

It involves “a social and political struggle where individual identity and difference has prominence” (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009, p. 4), however unfortunately even though inclusive ideologies are put forward there are still “exclusive practices” present in schools (Nutbrown & Clough, 2004, p. 306).

Throughout the years there were many initiatives that put forward the need to provide a quality education for all young people (Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006). The ‘Education for All’ (EFA) movement was created in the 1990’s in response to a number of international policies under the co-ordination of UNESCO (1990) and focused on increasing access and participation within education across the world.



Steps from Exclusion to Inclusion

Figure 2:1 illustrating the steps from exclusion to inclusion taken from Guidelines for Inclusion, UNESCO, 2005, p. 24.

The concept of inclusion as it is understood nowadays originates in special education. The developments in special education is a result of a number of developments of stages during which the educational system has delved into different strategies to respond to young people identified as having a disability or learning difficulties (UNESCO, 2005). There have been two views of special education, one were it was seen as providing supplementary help to general educational provisions, whilst in the other scenario it has been entirely separated from general education (UNESCO, 2005).

Unfortunately one of the biggest challenges for the inclusion of young people identified as having a disability in mainstream schooling is that in order for this to

happen it must be accompanied by changes at organisational level which entail that the curriculum and teaching and learning strategies are adopted towards inclusive education (Garner & Forbes, 2015; Index for Inclusion, 2012). This difficulty in organisation has proven to be one of the major impediments in implementing inclusive educational policies (UNESCO, 2005).

The Salamanca Statement Framework for Action in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994) provided a framework to help us think about how we can move towards policies and practices for inclusion. This document is arguably one of the most significant international documents in relation to special education. It puts forward the fundamental right of education for all young people by stating that every young person has a right to a proper education, and needs to be given the opportunity to fulfill his or her maximum potential (UNESCO, 1994, p. 27). Moreover, 'Education for All' (UNESCO, 2000) meant that all young people are entitled to the possibility of access to basic quality education. This implies the need to create an environment in school and in educational programmes where all young people are able and enabled to make worthwhile educational progress.

Such an environment must be inclusive of children, effective with children, friendly and welcoming to children, healthy and protective for children and gender sensitive. The development of such child-friendly learning environments is an essential part of the overall efforts by countries around the world to increase access to, and improve the quality of, their schools.

(UNESCO, 2005, p. 10)

When discussing the inclusive approaches to be adopted, it is essential to keep in mind the origin of special needs discussions together with the fact that unfortunately young people identified as having a disability are still a group that remains marginalised in daily school life. Locally I believe this results in the need to change the mentality of educational stakeholders and for this to happen the engagement of local entities including a number of NGOs (Non Governmental Organisations) is needed. For teachers to be enabled to provide for diversity in their classrooms, they need to be given the necessary tools and skills. Burns, Leblanc & Richardson (2009) found that teacher training increased knowledge about strategies on teaching young people identified as falling within the autism

spectrum, and facilitated teaching these young people. These teachers with specialised training can work in a continuum of inclusive practices to ensure that the educational system is an inclusive one (Garner & Forbes, 2012).

Unfortunately strategies and educational programmes have not always been successful at including young people identified as having a disability and this has resulted in them being vulnerable, resulting in their marginalisation and exclusion.

There is no universally appropriate or best site for the instruction of all students with ASD. Site suitability depends on broad-stroke factors such as the student's strengths and learning needs, the capacity of various placement alternatives to meet the individual student's needs, and the perceptions, preferences, and biases of stakeholders (including the individual with ASD) who make placement decisions.

(Simpson et al., 2011, p. 9)

A number of educational programmes at present have targeted those young people who are outside mainstream schooling including specialised institutes and specialist educators (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012; UNESCO, 2001). This marginalisation or differentiation becomes a way of discriminating by leaving young people outside mainstream school, and later on in life when adults by leaving them outside the social and cultural life of the outside community (UNESCO, 2006; 1999). This ties to the influence of the wider political developments towards cultural diversity and democratic values. These reinforce the role of education in political socialisation and facilitate active democratic citizenship (UNESCO, 2001). Apart from having a wide range of talents, education needs to take into account the variety of cultural backgrounds young people come from (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012, 1999; UNESCO, 1996). Education will thus have to take up a very difficult task to make sure that diversity becomes a factor that leads to understanding between different individuals and the group.

Thus, for it to be of success educational policies need to meet the challenges of the modern pluralistic society we live in and be local and contexted (Wright

2010), whilst ensuring that everyone is given the chance to find their path in the wider community (UNESCO, 2009, 1996). The International Commission on Education for the 21st century accentuates the need that policies in the education sector are diverse and designed towards creating an inclusive environment. Thus, schools need to promote the importance of living together in a serene and welcoming environment for all the students in the classroom to succeed (Timmons, Thompson & Lyon, 2016).

2.7.1 Inclusion as a process

The concept of inclusion needs to be viewed as a continuing process that addresses and responds to the diverse needs of all young people at school (Konza, 2008). This will help young people to participate in their educational achievement and in the community, thus reducing the risk of exclusion in mainstream schools (UNESCO, 2005). For this to be possible there needs to be “changes and modifications in the content, approaches, structures and strategies” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 52).

A common vision covering all of these aspects, together with a strong conviction that it is our responsibility to educate all young people in the mainstream school system are essential to move towards inclusion (Bondin, 2014). Thus inclusion should not be looked at as a marginal issue focusing on how we can integrate some young people in the mainstream system but rather it should be about an approach aiming at transforming the educational systems and learning environments in a way that they can cater for the diverse needs of all young people (Konza, 2008). Diversity should be looked at not as a problem but rather as a challenge that will help provide a better learning environment (Ungerer, 2013; UNESCO, 2005; Noguera, 1999)

UNESCO put four key elements forward in 2005 in the conceptualisation of inclusion.

- **Inclusion is a process:** As stated above inclusion needs to be looked at as an ongoing search to explore innovative ideas on how to respond positively to diversity. It is not only important to learn to live in a heterogeneous environment where difference is present, but it is also important to learn from these differences (Simpson et al., 2011; UNESCO,

2005).

- **Inclusion is concerned with identifying and removing barriers to learning** (Nutbrown & Clough 2005, UNESCO, 2005). Information needs to be collected from different stakeholders affected and effecting inclusion in order to be able to prepare resources and create policies and practices. The use of different evidence gathered can be used to stimulate a creative environment for problem solving (Florian & Black Hawkins, 2011; UNESCO, 2005).
- **Inclusion requires that all students participate and make worthwhile progress at school.** Presence refers to where young people attend school, the idea of mainstream versus special schooling. This has become a widespread debate amongst educational stakeholder, parents and policy makers (Garner, 2009). It also points out to the frequency that young people attend mainstream. Participation then refers to the quality of their experiences in mainstream inclusive settings. Finally, achievement refers to the outcomes of all young people across the curriculum throughout the everyday life and does not focus only on examination results (McMahon, Keys, Berardi, De Paul & Coker, 2016; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012; UNESCO, 2005; Murray et al., 2004).
- **Inclusion is about involving the participation of marginalised groups who are at risk of exclusion and under achievement.** School systems have the responsibility to make sure that those young people who research has shown are at risk have to be monitored carefully, and that, when required steps need to be taken to make sure of their presence as well as their participation in the everyday school life (Sullivan-Sego, Ro & Park, 2016; UNESCO, 2005). Empathy is a skill that is essential to make sure that these marginalised young people are included not only in school but in society at a later stage in their life (Sullivan-Sego et al., 2016)

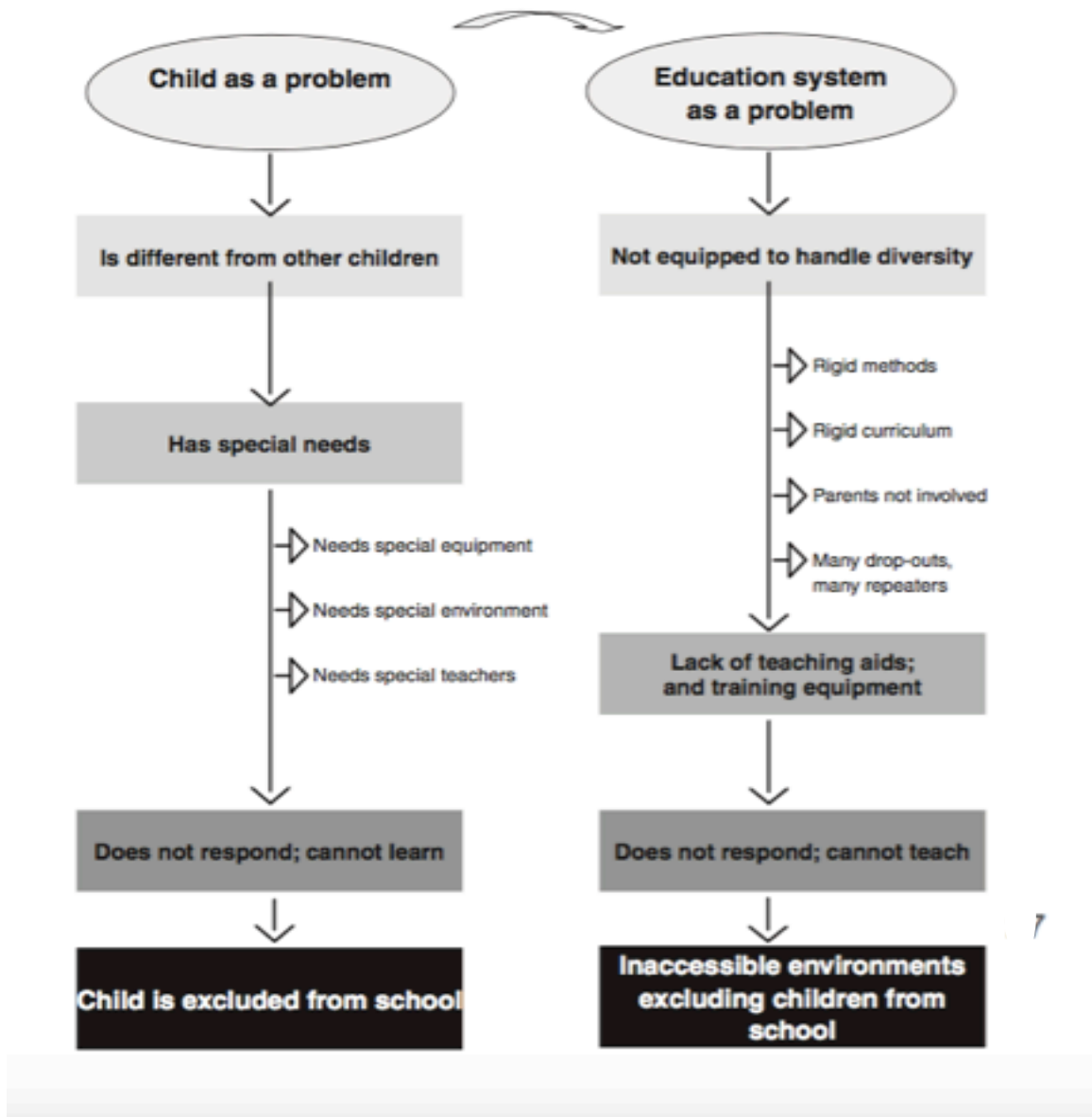


Figure 2:2 illustrating the difference between viewing the child as a problem and the educational system as a problem from Guidelines for Inclusion, UNESCO, 2005, p. 27.

I believe that the above figure not only strongly depicts the negative impact on the child when the problem is seen within them, but also when the educational system is not ready to change and cater for their needs to help them thrive. When the curriculum is a *one-size-fits-all* and teachers are not trained and given the necessary resources, the educational system will still be inadequate for these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Patrick, 2015;

Davis, 2011). From my personal experience I agree that teacher training (Reagen, 2012) and curriculum constraints (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014; Garner, 2000) are a major problem when it comes to enacting inclusive principles in the school. Research by Clough (2004) concluded that two factors which are very important in the attitudes of newly qualified teachers towards enacting inclusive practice are “university based training and the university culture of the placement school” (Clough, 2004, p.83).

2.7.2 Current situation

At the moment providing an inclusive educational setting is seen by many to be the best environmental setting for young people identified as requiring additional needs (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014; Eldar, Talmor, & Wolf-Zukerman, 2010).

Between 2014 and 2016 I had the opportunity to teach young people identified as having a disability, particularly young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and this has created in me a number of mixed feelings. Many times I felt frustrated because I did not know what I had to do to cater for their particular needs. Unfortunately as discussed in the previous chapter, very little was covered in my undergraduate university course that is related to catering for diversity in the classroom in a practical way. In fact studies have shown a general lack of training, particularly at university level (Daniel, 2016; Lozik, 2014, Ministry for Education and Employment, Malta, 2014; Carnahan, Hume, Clarke & Borders, 2009; Stainback & Stainback, 1984). Even though teachers within mainstream classrooms want to commit to inclusive practices, unfortunately many times they feel that they lack training and support to cater for their students (Lozik, 2014; External Audit Report, Ministry for Education and Employment, Malta, 2012; Black-Hawckitt, 2011; Robertson, Chamberlain & Kasari, 2003).

I believe the below quote that was put forward by Sinclair (2004) is a very important one and is very much in line with the research in this study.

I believe in differences in autism rather than disability in autism'

We need to celebrate difference (Clough in Clough & Corbett, 2000) and learn from them rather than having them cause a disparity between the opportunities that are available to young people.

Only placing all young people physically in the mainstream classrooms is not enacting inclusive practices (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009; Ochs, Kreker-Sadlik, Solomon, Siroka, 2001). Are young people benefiting from this way of enacting inclusion? (Ravet, 2011) Should special schools and foundation classrooms be removed in the name of inclusion in mainstream classrooms? (Lozik, 2014) Are the voices of these young people given the necessary weight? A number of schools still practice inclusion by merely placing young people identified as having a disability in a mainstream classroom without the support and resources needed to thrive (Levy & Perry, 2011) and one reason for this is the lack of research in this area (Levy & Perry, 2011).

An educator who promotes inclusion will believe that each student in front of him has the potential to learn and make worthwhile educational progress (UNESCO, 2006). However, one of the most difficult obstacles in society is its discriminatory attitude towards the education and learning of diverse young people (UNESCO, 2006). Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum have benefited greatly from the number of inclusive policies that have been implemented in recent years (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012; UNESCO, 2009). However, research in this area still suggests that school is a place where they will suffer from anxiety (Rowley, Chandler, Gillian, Simonoff, Pickles & Loucas, 2012; Carrington & Graham, 2001) and this will in turn cause a number of problems including lack of meaningful friendships, bullying and loneliness (Hebrow, et al., 2015; Ochs et al., 2001; Bauminger & Kasari, 2000). Their behaviour has shown to be one of the predictors for the bullying episodes (Hebron & Humphrey, 2014; Whitney, Smith & Thompson, 1994). Poor social relationships are also an indicator of increased bullying episodes (Sofronoff, Dark & Stone, 2011; Bauminger, Solomon, Aviezer, Heung, Brown & Rogers, 2008), which then result in isolation and loneliness (Hebrow et al., 2015).

The 'UN Convention on the Rights of the Child' (UNICEF, 1989), emphasises the right for a quality education for every child by emphasising that "the education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" (UNICEF, 1989, p. 9). This convention asserts the need of inclusive practices as being "predicated by a moral position based on a recognition of individual rights" (Garner, 2009, p. 23). This will then put forward the need for the promotion of inclusive principles from the early years of schooling (Nutbrown & Clough, 2005).

The Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNESCO, 2006), adopted in 2006 allowed millions of young people identified as having a disability to be entitled to services and support to cater for their individual needs. These include the above mentioned school policies, the involvement of the learning support assistants and other professionals to assist the teachers as well as funding for special resources including I.C.T. resources that can aid the teacher in the classroom to adapt for her particular students.

However one of the greatest challenges in inclusion still remains the merging of special education students in mainstream classes. In a Maltese context the local 'National Minimum Curriculum: Creating the Future Together' (Ministry for Education and Employment, Malta, 1999) focuses on the inclusion of all students to succeed in school. Young people from all walks of life should feel welcome and catered for if we want to develop the full potential of all the young people. Moreover, the current 'Towards a Quality Education For All', in Principle 2, emphasises the need to respect diversity and promote a welcoming environment (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012). Also, Principle 4 focuses on the need of a learner centred environment where material presented to the young people is one that will aid in their independent future. They should be given the necessary tools to be able to adapt to the changing world around them.

As can be seen, along the years the Maltese Ministry for Education and Employment put forward a number of policy documents to promote inclusive practices in state schools both at primary and secondary level. The 'Inclusive Education Policy' on Students with a Disability (Ministry for Education and

Employment, 2000) as well as the Implementation Plan for that policy produced by the N.C.C. (National Curriculum Council, 2002), put forward specific guiding principles to help schools adopt inclusive practices. The policy document focuses on the need to look at an approach holistically, and mentions three dimensions, which are the culture of the school, its policies and practices (N.C.C., 2002). This in turn implies that inclusion needs to be present both in the classroom but also at policy level. Having said that, at the moment we are faced with two opposite situations that are causing conflicts. On the positive aspect, policy documents are in favour of inclusion however schools are still showing instances where exclusion is taking place (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012; UNESCO, 2009; UN, 2002). This poses the question about whether and to what degree policy and practice are truly working together.

Ultimately, unfortunately research indicates that social acceptance is not always a result of inclusive programs (McMahon et al., 2016; Rowley et al, 2012; Guralnick, Hammond, Connor, & Neville, 2006; Bauminger, Shulman & Agam, 2003). Evidence still suggests that young people identified as having a disability are socially excluded in mainstream settings (Lozik, 2014; Caulder, Hill, Pellicano, 2012; Kasari, Locke, Guldsrud & Rotheram-Fuller, 2011; Ravet, 2011). Mainstream schooling is expected to give these young people a significant gain in their social and cognitive skills, however these young people show lower levels of interaction when comparing them to their classmates (Tonnsen & Hahn, 2016; Bauminger et al., 2003; Hestenes & Carroll, 2000; Guralnick, Connor, Hammond,, Gottman, & Kinnish, 1996) as well as bullying episodes (Marshall & Goodall, 2015; Humphrey & Symes 2012).

2.8 Autism

As discussed previously there is no one truth and thus autism has various current discursive articulations. However Nadesan (2005) argues that people labelled as autistic are fundamentally “transformed by that labelling and the subsequent interventions that follow, leading to what is described as the looping effect” (Nadesan, 2005, p. 90). The process of identifying and interpreting performing differences are cultural and historically specific, and autism is not outside this

symbolic sphere. It is indeed inscribed and produced within this sphere that is constantly changing (Nadesan, 2005, p. 92).

Autism is looked at as a lifelong and complex neurobiological developmental disorder (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016). Its onset is usually when the child reaches three years and continues throughout his or her lifetime. The autism spectrum disorder refers to a varying degree of a range of symptoms, skill deficits and levels of impairment. The autistic spectrum disorder is diagnosed in accordance to the guidelines presented in the International Classification of Disease (ICD10) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) (DSM -5, American Psychiatric Society, 2013).

This manual (American Psychiatric Society, 2013) classifies the autistic spectrum into five categories:

- Autistic disorder or more commonly known as the classic autism
- Asperger's Disorder or Asperger Syndrome
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD)
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder
- Rett's Syndrome

Current medically orientated research aimed at identifying autism and its prevalence show that autism prevails in all racial, ethnic as well as social groups at the same rate. However boys, siblings of children identified as falling within the autism spectrum and children who have other disorders like Fragile X syndrome and tuberous sclerosis have a greater risk of developing autism. Figure 3 represents the triad of impairments that are normally exhibited by a general framework, which is applied in the diagnosis of young people that are identified as falling within the autistic spectrum.

Triad of Impairments

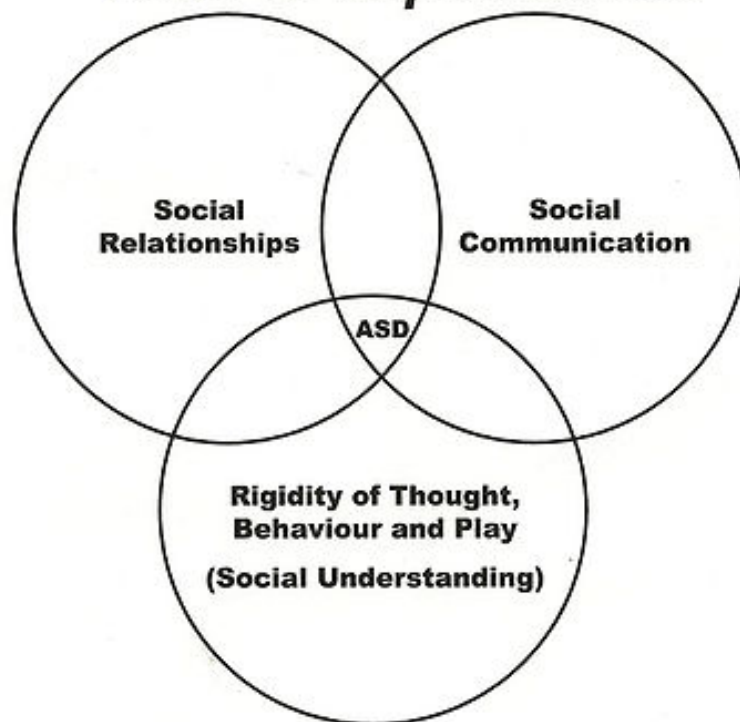


Figure 2:3 illustrating the triad of impairments exhibited by young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, DSM-5, 2013.

The following are a few of the impairments recognised within the DSM-5 (2013) as examples of the impairments normally shown by young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

- a) Continuous difficulties in social interactions and communications in various contexts.
- b) Difficulty in social and emotional reciprocity including the sharing of interests, emotions and failure to respond to social interactions.
- c) Difficulty with verbal and non-verbal cues especially eye contact and body language.
- d) Difficulty in developing and sustaining relationships.
- e) Lack of imaginative play and difficulty in making friends.
- f) Repetitive behaviour and stereotypical motor movements many times with the use of objects or speech.

(Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition, American Psychiatric Society, 2013)

Social interaction and communication is identified as a major problem in most young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. The following are a few examples:

- Failure to respond to environmental stimuli.
- Initiate play activities on their own and with a particular toy or doing a particular activity.
- Lack of emotions including feelings of happiness, anger, stress etc.

(Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition,
American Psychiatric Society, 2013)

Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum will often take much longer than their typically developing peers to reach developmental milestones like expressing likes and dislikes through non-verbal communication. This will depend on where the young person is identified to fall within the autism spectrum (American Psychiatric Society, 2013).

Other examples include the following:

- Failure to respond when their name is called or when they are called by gestures and cues.
- Do not attempt to point, show things and relate to their peers.
- Repeat certain behaviours like going round circles, tapping their fingers and looking at a specific object for a long period of time.

(DSM-5, American Psychiatric Society, 2013)

Depending on where they have been identified to fall within the autism spectrum they will tend to exhibit behaviours, which can be quite evident, like for example jumping or walking in a particular repeated way. In our school, what I have noticed is that if young people are used to this behaviour, if they are told why that particular young person exhibits that particular behaviour, then it becomes a normal routine for them. When a particular young person in my class behaves differently from what is expected in a classroom setting his peers in the class do not look confused or ask questions since they were told previously about his condition and why he behaves in that way. I think that makes a big difference, as

the young people are aware of why their peer is behaving in that way and they can give an explanation to the gesture.

There is a two-stage process involved in diagnosing young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum:

1. A developmental screening where the child is checked by a pediatrician. If a child shows signs of developmental problems then he or she is sent for further professional advice.
2. Different professionals will work together to diagnose the child. These professionals will include a psychologist and a speech language pathologist amongst others. Normally before the child reaches three years of age he or she can be diagnosed.

(National Institute of Mental Health, 2016)

Firstly parents are asked questions about the developmental milestones of their child. Being in direct contact with the child they can be of great help at this stage. Secondly are a number of screening instruments that can be used during the second stage of the diagnosis of children identified as falling within the autism spectrum like for example the Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers (M-CHAT) that has been developed by the neuropsychologists Diana Robins and Deborah Fein within the input of the clinical psychologist Marianne Barton.

These screening tools are administered by a class of professionals in the field and will give an indication of whether the child matches the criteria that identifies him as falling within the autism spectrum, and moreover the severity on where he falls within the autism spectrum. Research has suggested that far from being unresponsive, the child is hypersensitive to stimuli in the environment (Richdale & Green, 2014). Even though there has been wide progress on ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorders) it is still unclear what is the cause of ASD, even though it appears to have some genetic basis (National Institute of Mental Health, 2013). With an early intervention aided by adequate support and training, individuals identified as falling within the autism spectrum can be given the necessary skills

to live a productive and independent life (National Institute of Mental Health, 2016).

2.8.1 Strategies to include young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in the classroom

Teaching young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum presents both a challenge and an opportunity for teaching staff. It is not enough to look at factors that are considered as being within the young person, but one needs to address issues related to the classroom environment and more widely to the learning community as a whole (Guldberg, 2010). This agreement puts forward the idea that interventions need to be a two way process that adapt the communication and learning environments to the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Jordan, 2005). A number of teacher personality traits have been seen to enhance the school experience of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, these include kindness and patience as well as being concerned with social developments to help create an inclusive environment (Safran & Safran, 2001).

However research suggests that schools find it difficult to cater for the diverse needs of these young people (Stanley, Jones & Murphy, 2012; Parkinson, 2006; Davis et al, 2004). One needs to note that these criteria are far from generalisable. Each and every young person is different and will show varying degrees of a series of symptoms characteristic of the autism spectrum. Thus when it comes to talking about strategies, as I can personally say from my own experience, one needs to create tailor-made strategies for each and every individual student. This is also the line of thought of Murray et al. (2004) and Willis & Mann (2000) who argue against the *one-size-fits-all* curriculum as it is detrimental to young people in schools, as well as to what the local Maltese National Curriculum Framework (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) states where the catering of diversity through tailor-made programmes is accentuated. Simpson et al. (2011) ask what and how should teachers be teaching young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Curriculum provisions need also to include how these young people are to be assessed (Garner & Forbes, 2012).

The following quote is from an interview with a TV producer which I believe fits in exactly with my belief about what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails and the idea that generalisability is far from reality.

In every civil rights movement, there are always those battles of power," Who is deaf enough? Who is black enough? Who's gay enough? Who defines what a feminist is? You realize that people are on a spectrum — no one is ever wholly one thing. So, there's fascinating power battle inside these movements and [our story] is really no different.

(Weiss, L. 2013)

This puts forward the idea of the validity of diagnosing and categorisation. To a certain degree a physical disability is more easily diagnosed, however I still believe that generalising is still an issue. For example who decides how deaf a person can be to be entitled to special educational schooling? As explained earlier in the chapter, locally, it is the National Statementing Board who decides whether a young person is entitled to additional help and resources in school and what type of additional help will be given such as whether the learning support assistant (L.S.A.) will be full time or shared with other students.

Teachers emphasise that if inclusion is to be achieved he or she is not only to cater for curriculum related issues, but the social issues are also extremely important for the young peoples' wellbeing and learning practices (Kozik, Cooney, Vinciguerra, Gradel, & Black, 2009). As Willig (2008) emphasises, placing young people who have additional needs in mainstream classrooms does not necessary imply that learning and inclusion will actually take place.

2.8.2 School ethos and policies

Strengthening previous studies, Booth & Ainscow (2002) also found that the school ethos was crucial in determining the extent to which the school policies and practices are committed towards an inclusive education (Poon Mac Bryer & Wong, 2013). If the ethos of the school is not one that promotes inclusion, it will be difficult to enact inclusive practices and provide a quality and worthwhile education (Corbett in Clough & Corbett, 2000). I believe that when the school looks at each young person holistically and works at promoting his/ her potential, then the teacher does not feel alone and can feel that she or he can turn to others

for help. School principals will have an effect on teachers, which will in turn have a ripple effect on their students (Slater, 2012). I believe that this makes the difference between a stressful and lonely environment to a work place where everyone feels secure and welcome. This study asks whether the discursive practices in the school are those of an inclusive and motivating setting (Dunne, 2008), and what the educational discourses that govern the school ethos are. I ask, what are the discourses that educational stakeholders adopt in their classrooms, do they enrich the learning experience of the young people or do they hinder it?

Fraser and Shields (2010) put forward a number of discourses that they believe govern educational principals. One is the lay discourse, which puts people with a disability and parents who have a child with disability as living a tragedy. This in turn makes educators have the attitude that disability “is shameful, embarrassing, and too difficult to address in regular schooling” (Fraser & Shields, 2010, p. 27). Another discourse is the medical discourse, which positions disability as a medical illness, which requires a medical treatment to cure. Finally, Fraser and Shields (2010) mention the charity discourse which positions young people in schools as “ weak and powerless and in need of care and attention” (Fraser & Shields, 2010, p.28). This positions them as in need of being protected and reinforces a discourse of helplessness where young people are not regarded responsible for the way they act in class.

Fullan (2001) documented that the type of leadership head teachers give in school is a key component for successful school change. The school ethos is extremely important if full inclusion is to be implemented at all levels in the school. If the senior management team, who are in a position of power, portrays messages of inclusion through their own gestures then this will influence all the other educational stakeholders in the school (Fraser & Shields, 2010; Hasazi, Johnston, Liggett, & Schattman, 1994). Inclusion needs to be integrated with all activities that take place at school. This idea was also put forward in the work of Avissar, Reiter & Leyser, (2003) who stated that the promotion of inclusive policies is a whole school approach initiated by the people who are in a leading position.

Wong and Cheung (2009) argue that the more innovative the ideas towards inclusion are, the more they will be implemented towards inclusion. For a whole school approach towards inclusion there needs to be a close relationship between school leaders and teachers (Wong & Cheung, 2009). Notwithstanding this, school leaders will have a difficult time trying to balance policies and practices to make their schools as inclusive as possible (Poon-McBryer & Wong, 2013; Voltz & Collins, 2010). These practices can include allocating the necessary resources and providing training support programmes (Poon-McBryer & Wong, 2013; European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2012). School leaders need to put forward discourses where they empower young people and where their beliefs and values are taken in consideration, and marginalised groups in the school are given the necessary attention (Bondin, 2014).

The school mission statement should clearly indicate the values of inclusion and celebration of diversity in such a way that all young people irrespective of their walks of life can feel welcome and accepted in the school environment (Bondin, 2014; Horrok, Whites & Roberts, 2008). As discussed previously, in February 2015 a National Framework for the Lifelong Education Strategy for Malta was launched. This aimed to address the school ethos of all cycles of education starting from early years to adult learning. It aims to consolidate the local policies including the local National Minimum Curriculum Framework, the local National Literacy Strategy for All, A Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving and the Respect for All Framework (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014). These measures aim to have a school that makes sure that its school ethos will reach all students irrespective of culture, ethnicity, religious belief, gender and sexual statuses in order to improve learners' learning experiences whilst encouraging their creativity, entrepreneurship and critical thinking skills (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014; UNICEF, 2007). There are four main goals for the local National Curriculum Framework of 2012, which is at present the guiding line for teachers and educational members within the school community. These are:

- To minimise the differences in the educational outcomes between young people attending different schools.

- To support and promote positive outcomes of young people who are risking early school leaving and poverty.
- To increase the involvement in lifelong learning and adult learning.
- To raise levels of learner attainment and help towards vocational training.

(Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012)

With regards to policies, the document promotes a right-based approach to support the active participation of all learners that is in line with international agreements including the Dakar Framework for Action (2010), where Goal 1 emphasises that by 2015 there needs to be the “expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children” (UNESCO, 2010, p. 34). Moreover, goal 6 focuses on the need for clarity to be equitable and make sure that measurable learning outcomes can be achieved (UNESCO, 2010).

Local research indicated that there is lack of clarity with regards what are the rights of the learners within the current legislation (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014). This leads to an inconsistent approach to social and educational inclusion across policy sectors and documents. Even though inclusive education is high on the list at a national level this is still not always present in key documents, and is not monitored and evaluated in all relevant social policies. The demographic changes experienced locally causes a new dimension to arise. The rate of immigration has increased rapidly in the recent years. This puts forward a new question: Is the system and current schools ethos supporting the individual learning needs of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum? This thesis will delve into how inclusion is perceived by young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum their parents and their L.S.A.s.

2.9 Teachers’ Attitudes Towards Young People Identified as Falling Within the Autism Spectrum

While most educators both internationally and locally support a rights-based approach (UNESCO, 2009) towards the concept of inclusion, and argue in favour

of education for all in mainstream classrooms, there are still tensions among educators, especially when it comes to provisions to cater for young people identified falling within the autism spectrum as well as training for staff who teach them. Research by Garner in 2000 indicated that teachers in England lacked the necessary skills and experiences to cater for the diversity in their classroom.

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion have been identified as a major issue that affects successful inclusion (Boyle et al., 2013, Cassidy, 2011; Torff, 2011; UNESCO, 2009; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2005; Burack, Root & Zigler, 1997). Teachers, parents, local communities, school authorities, curriculum planners, training institutes and non governmental organisations are amongst the important actors that can be a valuable resource in supporting inclusion in mainstream classrooms (UNESCO, 2005). Teachers, can be looked at not just as a valuable resource but also as the key to support the various aspects in aiding towards inclusive practices. They need to however be willing to accept their role and promote diversity by taking up an active role when it comes to the lives of their students both within the school community as well as the outer community. I ask, are educational stakeholders willing to put forward inclusive practices? What are their thoughts, ideas and reservations about inclusion? Studies have shown that teachers' attitudes are linked to their confidence in catering for diversity, the more confident they are, the less worried about inclusion (Sharma, Moore & Sonawane, 2009) and the more positive their attitude towards inclusion (Sharma, Forlin & Loreman, 2007). This is in line with the Maltese Inclusive and Special Education Review (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2005) where the willingness of teachers to promote inclusive practices at secondary level is lower than in the primary sector due to the lack of confidence in teaching the subject, time and syllabus constraints. I personally believe that if the teacher does not believe in and value inclusion, then her practices will reflect this because ultimately regulations and policies can be present, but it is the teacher in the classroom who can put into practice these discourses, which govern inclusive principles.

First of all, the attitude of the teacher will have a critical role in influencing the inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in

mainstream education as their expectations will affect their students' concept of themselves as well as their academic achievement (Stomff, 2014; Alexander & Strain, 1978). Teachers who portray negative attitudes towards young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum may have a negative impacts on those young people (Hannah & Pliner, 1983) as these teachers will not promote inclusive practices in the classroom through their attitudes and practices (Walker, 2012). Royal and Roberts (1987) as well as Leblanc, Richardson, & Burns in 2009 and Walker in 2012 pointed out that contact with individuals identified as having a disability can lead to positive attitudes towards them.

Incorporating inclusion as a guiding principle in mainstream schooling required changes in the educational system which is unfortunately faced with many challenges. We need to look at and understand how different stakeholders look at change towards inclusion, including teachers but also students and local and national governments as a few examples (Goley, 2013; Cassidy, 2011). The school culture and the attitudes of the teacher need to be changed, as it is no use proposing recently developed development policies at school if the school teacher is not to enact it (UNESCO, 2005). Unfortunately I have experienced incidents where teachers purposely try to avoid teaching young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum because they believe it is a burden to them and at the same time advocate that they are in favour of inclusion. Teachers need to “become engaged in the learning process” (Goley, 2013, p. 90)

Obstacles towards inclusion often originate from the attitudes of stakeholders involved, such as:

1. Existing teacher's attitudes and values (UNESCO, 2005). These attitudes are many times a result of the teacher's concerns on how they can implement inclusive practices (Vaz, Wilson, Falkmar, Sim, Scott, Cordier, & Falkmer, 2015). These concerns include time constraints, quality and quantity of work output and limited training and support services (Vaz et al, 2015).
2. Limited understanding on what autism is and what behaviours and attitudes are expected from young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Foden & Anderson, 2011; UNESCO, 2005).

Governments are increasingly interested and investing in promoting inclusive education (Smith, 2012), however teachers need to know what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum actually means and what type of behaviour is expected from these young people. They need to be aware about how to interpret the young person's behaviour and how to deal with complex issues (Streinbrenner & Watson, 2015; Tobias, 2009).

3. Qualified personnel is needed to ensure that these young people are being catered for within mainstream (Stahmer, Aubyn, Rieth, Lee, Reisinger, Mandell et al., 2015; Hume, Bellini & Pratt, 2005; Bender, Vail & Scott, 1995)
4. Limited resources available that are needed to cater for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014; UNESCO, 2005).

Accepting change is not always easy. It is difficult to change your mentality and move towards new practices that help in inclusive education. As schools move toward becoming more inclusive the role of the teacher becomes even more important, such as through a collaborative and consultative mode of teaching (Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry, & McGinley, 2011). We want our students to learn from experience but then find it hard to learn ourselves from our own experience. Teachers who believe that they can learn in their own classroom will be more open to change and can be more successful at facilitating the learning experiences of their students in the classroom (Powell, 2011). When we reflect on our own practices we are acquiring new ideas and ways of working, and this can be influential on how we deal with different situations in our classrooms. This is not an easy task and can be stressful, but I think that one important thing we must all keep in mind is that we do not have subjects in front of us but young people!

There are a number of conceptual elements that can help toward successful changes. These include

1. Clarity of purpose: Teachers need to know the reason why they are carrying out these inclusive practices, they need to be involved both in

the I.E.P. and in other discussions in relation to inclusive practices of the students in their classroom (UNESCO, 2009; 2005).

2. Realistic goals: It is no use trying to set goals which are beyond the abilities of the young person. Unfortunately this will lead to stress on both ends, the teacher and the student (Friedman, 2015; UNESCO, 2005).
3. Motivation: preparing tailor-made activities that will motivate the young people to learn (Howley & Kime, 2003). Differentiation is required if teachers are to have the skills to help young people identified falling within the autism spectrum (Poulsen, Gharib, Abou, Cooke, Funk, Danielle et al., 2015; Davis & Florian, 2004). It is no use trying to use the same strategy for all young people, as each young person will learn in their own particular way.
4. Support and resources: teamwork is essential in order to have support and material resources to be able to promote inclusive practices in the classroom (Lindsay, Proulx, Scott & Thomson, 2014). Studies indicate that the more training and resources available the more positive the attitude towards inclusion (Forlin, Loreman, Sharma & Earle, 2009; Van Reusen et al., 2001).

2.10 Social Inclusion of Young People Identified as Falling Within the Autism Spectrum

Unfortunately when young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are taught in mainstream classrooms, both parents and educational stakeholders are concerned with cases where the provisions available at the moment are not working, and where inclusive principles are actually excluding the young people socially (Esbensen, Bishop, Seltzer, Greenberg, & Taylor, 2010; House of Commons Education and Skills Committee 2006). The social outcomes of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum both at school and after school activities are still lower when they are compared to their peers as well as when compared to other young people identified as having a disability (Ashburner et al., 2010).

A number of researchers have pointed out that young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are aware of the differences that exist between them and their mainstream peers (Humphrey & Lewis 2008). Unfortunately teacher's reports in a particular research by Guldberg (2010) pointed to the fact that placing young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in mainstream schools was not a factor that promoted positive interaction with their peers. Teachers observed that with regards to social exclusion and unwelcoming environment the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum felt uneasy within mainstream schools. This, in turn led to difficulty in academic subjects since they seemed to be aware of the fact that they were socially excluded. Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum need to be taught the necessary skills and strategies to enable them to learn with their peers (Keane, Aldridge, Costley & Clark, 2012; Guldberg 2010).

Young people identified as having a disability will already have a preconceived understanding of the social meaning of their disability and would benefit from “opportunities for the social construction of disability to become an important element of the curriculum, alongside discussions of gender, race, ethnicity and other perceived differences. The teachers reported that their peers tolerate but do not embrace students with ASD” (Biklen, 2000, p.352). This may be because of the fact that reciprocity and meaningfulness are important components for a friendship relationship for young people without a disability (Rossetti, 2015; Vaquera & Kao, 2008).

Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum will tend to live in their ‘autistic bubble’ and thus find communication with their peers in mainstream school difficult to achieve (Robertson et al., 2003; Bauminger & Shulman, 2003). From my personal experience I can relate to this idea since young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum find it difficult to interact with me and especially with their peers since each and every one of them has his or her own understanding of the world which is not necessarily how I or their peers understand it. Thus, there will be difficulty to relate in space–time dimensions during classroom and other extra curricular activities (Kasari et al., 2011). Another issue that I noticed is that many young people identified as falling within

the autism spectrum will find social interaction an anxiety provoking situation. They don't like break time (Ingram, Mayes, Troxell & Calhaun, 2007) because it is a time where their peers are socialising and interacting together. This is a trend that I noticed throughout my years of teaching young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. This in turn leads to an atypical behaviour in the classroom as they feel stressed in their school environment. Research indicates that young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum experience sleep problems which in turn negatively affects their daytime behaviour including their time in school (Patzold, Richdale & Tonge, 1998). Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum had more behavioural problems that were measurable using the Child Behaviour Checklist, which in turn had a negative effect on their daily life at school (Sikora, Johnson, Clemons & Katz, 2012). This may pose a barrier that needs to be overcome and the teacher must come up with innovative ideas to enhance the learning experiences of the students in front of her.

2.10.1 Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrums' relationship with peers

The level of social interaction that young people with development disabilities establish in mainstream schools is largely dependent on their peer-related social competencies (White, Keonig, Scahill, 2007; Guralnick, 2005). Research indicates that even young children with mild development delays will find it difficult to interact with their peers (Pituch, Green, Didden, Lang, O'Reilly, Lancioni et al, 2011; Guralnick et al, 1996) and these may become more evident in inclusive settings when compared to peers their age (Camarago, Rispoli, Ganz, Hong, Davis & Mason, 2014). Problems that have been indicated as causing social problems include conflict resolution and maintaining play activities as well as regulating one's emotions and processing social cues (Guralnick, 2005).

In a research conducted by Kalymon, Gettinger & Hanley-Maxwell in 2010, typical developing school boys felt a greater responsibility when it came to building relationships with peers who had severe disabilities. This could be a result of the need of caregiving and safety skills as well as the difficulty in communication. For typical developing peers to build friendships with disabled

peers meant that more work needs to be invested (Rossetti, 2011). Keeping this in mind it would be beneficial to discuss with the stakeholders involved, including parents and teachers on how to reach a balance in the social aspect of schooling and what needed support can be given in this area (Rossetti, 2015).

In a number of studies carried out by Saggars, Hawg and Mercer in 2011 and Sciutto, Richwine, Mentrikoski & Niedzwiecki in 2012, the attitudes of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum towards socialising with peers was mixed. Whilst some of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum preferred to be alone others liked the company of their peers. Also some were coping well in mainstreaming whilst others were finding the chaotic nature of this setting very difficult and stressful. This poses a difficulty when it comes to their social inclusion since no one young person is like the other and our ultimate role is to find the key that best suits the preferred learning environment for them.

Typical peers have been found to be willing to help young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and support communication with them in class, however this was less evident when it came to break time. Teachers felt that it was their role to facilitate the interaction between young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and their peers. (Soto-Chodiman, Pooley, & Taylor 2012; Mayton, 2004). The tendency for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to have a behaviour that is considered as different from their typically developing classmates and the difficulty to respond to social situations result in these young people to experience bullying episodes, teasing and isolation (Humphrey & Symes, 2012; Sympson & Gaus, 2010).

High rates of anxiety have been linked with bullying episodes in the school (Hebron & Humphrey, 2014). Unfortunately, limited support in schools at a personal, classroom and school level is still a problem and the system is failing the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Environmental support has been found to be very important in minimising these episodes for these young people (Marshall & Goodall, 2015; Humphrey & Symes, 2012). These include sound minimisation in the classroom, stakeholders to ensure the

continual service support, support for the transition after secondary education and assessment tasks that are adapted for these young people (Hebron & Humphrey 2014). Stanley, Mc Cann, Gardner, Reynold & Wild (2009) argue on the importance of adequate assessment in providing a curriculum that will benefit all young people within the classroom and make everyone feel equal.

Peer-mediated interventions are essential in the social aspect of inclusion and can influence their success at school (Mc Curdy & Cole, 2014; Carter, Swedeen, Cooney, Walter & Moss, 2010). It helps to promote communication and positive social behaviours in young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, thus increasing the quality and quantity of the social communicative relationships (Watkins, O'Reilly, Kuhn, Gevarter, Lancioni & Sigafos, 2015; Harjusola-Webb, Parke & Bedesem, 2012; Strain, Kohler, & Goldstein, 1996). Peer proximity strategies and using their preferred interests have been found to help when it comes to social learning opportunities as it promoted positive behaviour (Koegel, Koegel & Schwartzman, 2013). Peer tutoring has also aided in on task behaviour (Watkins et al., 2015; Locke & Fuchs, 1995). Another method of peer tutoring is the classwide peer tutoring which involves pairing all of the young people in the class. This method has proved successful in gaining fluency in reading and comprehension as well as improving social interactions between young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and their classmates (Scrugs, Mastropieri, Marshak, 2012; Kamps, Barbetta, Leonard & Deliquardi, 1994; Hundert & Houghton, 1992).

Educational programmes aiming to acknowledge, accept and accommodate for difference is essential if we are to include young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and help in their inclusion both socially and academically. Unfortunately educational programmes do not always serve this purpose (Wilkins & Matson, 2009). Ultimately all young people in the class will benefit from inclusive practices not only those identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012).

2.10.2 Student- teacher relationships

Student–teacher relationships are also a major influence of positive social inclusion. Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are aware of the ways teachers act with different students, and they use this information to come up with their own judgement about their peers’ competencies (Hughes, Cavell, & Wilson, 2001; Birch & Ladd, 1997). Factors related to teacher behaviour will have an impact on student engagement and thus instructional strategies and changes in behaviour can aid to promote engagement (Steinbrenner & Watson, 2015). A joint effort is required from the teachers part to work with other stakeholders to come up with strategies that promote inclusive practices (Steinbrenner & Watson, 2015). Studies indicate that the more positive the relationship between the adults and the young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum, the more positive the school experience (Dillon, Underwood & Freemantle, 2014; Scuitto et al., 2012)

2.10.3 Support for educational professionals

Notwithstanding the fact that a number of teachers within mainstream settings believe in the principles of inclusion, there is still the feeling that they do not have the necessary support and are not trained to teach young people identified as having a disability, more particularly when it comes to teaching young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Baker, 2014; McGregor & Campbell, 2001; Robertson et al., 2003).

One of the factors that has been found to have an effect on inclusion in the Inclusive Education External Review in Malta is the availability of resources for personnel support (Ministry of Education, 2014). Limited funding is seen by both parents (Roberts & Simpson, 2016; Waddington & Reed 2006) and educators (Lindsay et al., 2014) as the main reason for the lack of effective inclusive practices. Parents in general feel that they lack support by the school management, and a number expressed the fact that the home–school link needs improvement (Hebron & Humphrey, 2014). This is contradictory to the view of the teaching staff who believed that they are supportive of the parents (Hebron & Humphrey, 2014). Time and syllabus constraints make working as a team very difficult within the educational system locally (Ministry for Education and

Employment, 2014). At times I feel that teaching is a lonely job because it does not give you the time to discuss with other teachers what can be done, how it can be done and possible strategies to provide a more serene environment for the students in the class. Educational professionals believe that they need more collegial support to include young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in their daily classroom activities (Sansosti & Sansosti 2012).

In a research by Humphrey and Symes in 2013, both the school management and the subject teachers put forward the fact that they did not have adequate professional development opportunities and that these were essential in order to provide an environment that supports inclusive practices where young people identified falling within the autism spectrum can thrive (Humphrey & Symes, 2013). In-service training (Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012) as well as more time to implement practice (Hedges, Kirby, Sreckovic, Kucharczyk, Hume, & Pace, 2014) were all seen to be important contributors towards promoting inclusive practices. However, there were a number of teachers who believed that the extra material and resources they had to prepare because of the diversity in their classroom required a rise in pay (Yumak & Akgul, 2010).

Educational professionals believe that young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum require more support than their peers and the support they require is unique for their condition (Sansosti & Sansosti 2012). There is still however a problem when deciding on who has the responsibility for preparing this type of support and resources (Hedges et al. 2014). When teachers' had positive attitudes towards the presence of a teacher assistant it resulted in a more inclusive classroom (Emam & Farrell 2009). In secondary schools teacher assistants known as L.S.A.s' locally were regarded as the people who had the knowledge about what it entails to be identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Emam & Farrell 2009). However at times, the use of these L.S.A.s was also seen as hindering inclusion when these young people relied on them rather than support coming from teacher and their classmates (Sansosti & Sansosti 2012; Emam & Farrell, 2009).

In order to be knowledgeable about what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), stakeholders need to be trained about different disabilities and how they can be catered for (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014; Poon Mac Bryer & Wong, 2013; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012). Thus, teachers' knowledge is a crucial aspect in determining the culture of the school. An integrative approach is required to make sure that training for educational stakeholders involved in mainstream classrooms is high on the agenda in order to ensure that the pedagogies presented to young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are ones that enable them to participate and thrive in mainstream settings (González, Martín-Pastor, Flores, Jenaro, Poy, & Gómez-Vela, 2013). However, a number of training courses are still not addressing this issue and are not giving the necessary knowledge and “necessary depth and scope to produce highly qualified teachers for students on the autism spectrum” (Simpson et al., 2011, p.5)

2.11 Strategies for Academic Inclusion of Young People Identified as Falling Within the Autism Spectrum

Along the years there have been debates internationally and locally to promote consistency in learning (Forbes & Garner, 2015). If inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum is to be a success then tailor-made strategies need to be implemented to cater for the diverse needs of the young people (Parsons, Dodmann & Burrowbridge, 2013; Murray et al., 2004). A *one-size-fits-all* scenario will surely be of no benefit to these young people, on the contrary mainstream schooling will be an excluding setting. For young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to be successful in mainstream education they need to be given some degree of academic functioning (Ashburner et al., 2010). However, research has indicated that even though with adult supervision there was successful limited independence, when this supervision is removed there was increased challenging behaviour (Stahmer & Schreibman, 1992; Marholin & Steinman, 1977).

A strategy that promotes academic inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum is using visual schedules in the lesson. Visual

schedules have been seen to help increase predictability for the daily routine of young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Because of the persistence of social interaction difficulties these strategies are important in helping young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to cope with mainstream schooling. A picture book to describe the daily routine of the school helps these young people know what is ahead and be more systematic in their daily school life (Walton & Ingersol, 2013; Hall, McClannahan, and Krantz, 1995). Research indicated that the pictures of these picture activity schedules increased both the on task and on schedule responses of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Bryan & Gast, 2010; Bellini & Peters, 2008; Mac Duff et al., 1993).

Self management skills help to promote independent functions so young people no longer need the one to one aide (Carr, Moore & Anderson, 2014; Koegel, Harrower, & Koegel, 1999; Koegel, Koegel & Parks, 1992). Self management strategies include helping young people select the goals they want to achieve, their personal self observation and helping them record their own behaviours. Having less dependency on adults helps young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to gain further academic functioning and opportunities to communicate and socialise with their classmates. Research conducted by Callahan & Rademacher (1999) and also by Koegel, Koegel, Ashbaugh & Bradshaw, (2014) found that using self management skills increased positive on task behaviour and topic questioning aiding in more independent academic work. Similar researches have also seen improving social interactions and communications, as well as academic skills with the help of these self management skills for these young people (Lee, Simpson & Shogren, 2007; Mancina, Tankerlsey, Kamps, Kravits & Parrett 2000).

2.12 Preparing for Adulthood

One important aspect in the provisions of inclusive practices for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum is the help in acquiring skills that will prepare the young people for an independent living. As in line with the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004), “the

overarching purpose of special education is to prepare [young people identified as having a disability] for further education, employment, and independent living” (IDEA, 2004, p. 3). This act puts forward the need for transition services to be part of the Individualised Educational Program to help young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum develop the required skills in order to live a full and independent lifestyle after finishing mainstream schooling. This is in line with what the local Education Minister, the Hons. Evarist Bartolo, has put forward in a conference he preceeded in November 2016 where he emphasised the need for schools to prepare all young people for the world of work after schooling.

Adolescence is already a difficult time for all young people, especially for those identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Fieldman, Warfield & Parish, 2013). The transition to adulthood is compounded by the challenges of social communications they face everyday. Even minor changes in the routine and the environment for these young people can be challenging. Thus major life changes can increase the likelihood of experiencing changes in mood (Lainhart, 1999). Obviously these varying strengths and needs for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum present challenges to the school systems which need to address these individualised transitional needs which are not being met (Fieldman et al., 2013). A person centred programme can be created where young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum can design a vision for their future. This programme will aim to provide a holistic approach for the young people and encourage their involvement in the world of work (Wells & Sheehy 2012).

Unfortunately research suggests that employment rates for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum is still poor (Drexel Autism Centre, 2015; Forbes & Garner, 2015; Test, Mazzotti, Mustian, Fowler, Kortering & Kohler 2009; Billsteid, Gillberg & Gillberg 2005) where a report by the Drexel Autism Centre (2015) observed that unfortunately two-thirds of adults indentified as falling within the autism spectrum did not find employment or continued further post secondary education. Furthermore over one third of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum continued to be unemployed even over their 20’s. This underemployment could be as a result of the lack of social

skills that are required in the job industry, which is not being accommodating to the needs of these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Autism Speaks, 2012). School initiatives including career awareness and vocational training have been proven to increase employment rates for these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Test et al., 2009).

In 2004 a document was launched in collaboration with the National Autistic Society “Breaking down barriers to learning: Practical strategies for achieving successful transition for students with Autism and Asperger Syndrome”. One of the points that emerged is the need to work with parents as their “unique knowledge” (National Autistic Society, 2004, p. 4) can be important in achieving a successful transition between home and school and later on school and work. Families can be important partners and advocates to help in the meaningful transition throughout schools and communities (Hill Benson, Karlof & Siperstein, 2008; Epstein, 2001). In their research, Carter, Cooney, Swedeen, Walter and Moss (2012), helped parents by giving them support to launch a local project aiming to strengthen the capability of schools and the outside community to promote transition programmes further enhancing inclusive practices.

Unfortunately even though it has been long known that young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum grow up to be youths and young people that are part of the working world, there is limited empirical research (Friedman et al., 2013) that specifically addresses these transitions, even though we know that these young people find this transition so difficult. Thus, it is necessary to identify evidence about practices and policies related to a smooth transition. These will involve focusing on strengths and challenges that young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum face. In this way they can be given the necessary skills and possibly help towards a more smooth transition to adulthood that can lead to an independent living.

2. 13 Mainstream versus Special Schools

A key issue in relation to special schooling is in whose interest are these special schools present. A number of people have challenged the taken for granted notion

that the existence of special schools is being of benefit to the young people (Clough & Corbett, 2000).

Whilst young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are being taught in mainstream schooling, they still face a large number of barriers for inclusion. The National Autistic Society (2003) discusses the fact that the lack of understanding and provisions from educational professionals is causing young people to loose out a lot at school. Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are considered as educationally and socially marginalised and much research has been conducted on, rather than with these young people (Billington, 2006).

The current impetus of mainstream schooling for a move towards inclusive education puts the parents decisions high on the agenda. However some researchers still argue that there is little research when it comes to comparing the outcomes of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in mainstream classes versus special schooling (Smith, 2012; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). Research suggests that a rights based concept of inclusion is still being challenged by a needs based approach where special education rather than mainstream is seen as more adequate for some young people (Ravet 2011; Lawson, 2008; Batten, Corbett, Rosenblatt, Withers & Yuille, 2009; Batten & Daly, 2006; Jordan, 2005).

Research gives contradictory responses as different parents view the idea of inclusion and mainstream versus special schooling in their own different way, such as in research conducted by the National Autistic Society, Ireland in 2013 where almost one third of the parents felt that mainstream schooling was not meeting their child's needs (National Autistic Society, 2013). Grove & Fisher in 1999 indicated that there are a variety of opinions amongst parents of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum on the type of placement of their children in educational settings. Whilst some parents advocate and want their children in mainstream and inclusive settings, others prefer special school (Grove & Fisher, 1999) as they may be regarded as a better fit for the particular

needs of the young person as they offer life skills that will aid in providing for an independent future (Garner, 2009).

Leyser & Kirk (2004) and Seery, Davis & Johnson (2000) conducted research with parents of children identified as having moderate disabilities and concluded that parents were happy with the social and emotional benefits of mainstream settings, however they were still concerned with the risk of negative attitudes from the peers of their children, the quality of their academic achievement and teacher training and support. Those parents whose children were identified as having a mild disability were more in favour of inclusion in mainstream settings than those who had children with more severe disabilities.

A recent study by Falkmer, Anderson, Joosten & Falkmer (2015), where 28 empirical articles were analysed revealed that parents gave educators an essential role in the inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Parents want their children to have educators who are informed about current issues of policies and practices (Falkmer et al., 2015; Billington, McNally & Cary 2000). At societal level, parents put forward the need for funding and policies that promote a welcoming and inclusive environment for their children. Thus, policy makers need to depart from the traditional curricula and practices and work with parents and other professional to develop strategies that can improve inclusion in mainstream schools (Falkmer et al., 2015) if it is to be chosen in favour of special schools.

Moreover in another research, a number of parents put forward the fact that they had to take their child out of school for further support when mainstream schooling was chosen (Chandler-Olcott & Kluth, 2009). Dimitrova – Radojicic (2014) conducted research with pre-school and school aged parents about their views on inclusion. Almost all parents agreed that even though they accepted inclusive education they still believed that their children would be better catered for in special schools. Parents believe that mainstream educational reforms can be “both a facilitator and a barrier to the education of children with learning needs” (Rouse, 2010, p. 9).

Since the move towards inclusive educational settings has grown, parents are concerned with protecting their child from stressful environments. Also a number of parents put forward the fact that when they opted for mainstream schooling they were afraid that their children would not receive the special attention that they need and they would end up ridiculed and feeling stressed in an unwelcoming environment (Gordon, 2010; Grove & Fisher, 1999). In fact, Elkins, van Kraayenoord & Jobling (2003) found that parents expressed negative attitudes towards inclusive practices and reported that inclusion in mainstream classrooms was not an option for their child because their child's disability was too severe. This was because mainstream classrooms were not accommodating enough for the differentiated needs of their child, and thus the teacher would not be able to cater for the diverse needs of their child. The biggest concerns were on the number of students in class and the demanding situations when it comes to catering for a diverse range of students (Elkins et al 2003). This view was also put forward by Freeman and Alkin (2000) who showed that parents of children identified as having a severe disability believed that the child would be rejected socially if they had to be placed in mainstream classroom settings. Even though these parents believed that inclusion was beneficial in terms of social inclusion they still put forward the idea that young people identified as having a more severe disability would just the same be at risk of rejection.

Ultimately, mainstream provisions need to have adequate support and knowledge to be truly inclusive (Byrne, 2012) even though we need to still keep in mind that there is the difficulty to prepare educational professionals to be able to cater effectively for the needs of all young people in the classroom (Garner, 2000; Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010; Giangrec, 2010).

2.14 The 'Voice' of Young People Identified as Falling Within the Autism Spectrum

Unfortunately even though the importance to include and empower all young people has been widely recognised (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Ainscow & Kaplan, 2005), a number of inequalities are still present when it comes to the

education of young people more particularly those who are regarded as disadvantaged in a way or another. A research by Nutbrown and Clough in 2009 concluded that it is possible to investigate children's ways of looking at inclusion and moreover that giving them voice is essential in research about their perspectives. This will boost their self-esteem and give valuable insight on curriculum and pedagogical approaches that are best fit for them (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009).

Davidson (2011) stressed the importance of understanding "what it feels like" to be identified as falling within the autism spectrum rather than "what it looks like to the observer". Much research has been conducted with regards to the inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, but little of this has actually included their voice (Norwich & Kelly, 2004). I ask, what is their view on inclusion? What do they feel during their school day? In a research by Humphrey and Lewis in 2008 students were asked to write, make drawings or talk about their experience in mainstream classrooms to try and extrapolate a deeper understanding on what it feels like to be a young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum in a classroom environment. They found that there is a gap between 'inclusion rhetoric' (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008, p.139) and the reality in the classroom (Gordon, 2010; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008).

Listening to a young person's voice is not only a way of gaining insight in developing more inclusive practices but also it is in itself a manifestation of being inclusive (Messiou 2006). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) particularly Article 12, focuses on the right of each and every child to put forward his or her opinion on any issue that concerns their welfare, and moreover to have this opinion given weight in the decision making process. Moreover Article 13 affirms that they should have the freedom to express their opinion and to find any information through any preferred source available. This is also in line with the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) where the potential to engage in conversations with young people is emphasised. Here the young people are a resource to facilitate inclusion rather than being themselves the source of the problem (Messiou, 2006).

In Malta, the N.C.F. (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) aims to promote a curriculum where students' interests are taken in consideration and where they are actively being involved and have a say about their educational placement and academic involvement. Fielding and Rudduck (2002) found that young people want to have a reason behind the way things are done and have an active role in determining changes in their education. All of these will aid in promoting both their self-identity (Davidson, 2008; Blume 1997) as well as their self-esteem (Gilbert, Murphy, Krueger, Ludwig & Efron, 2013). Stakeholders are an essential tool to provide an insight into the way educational practices are enacted in classrooms (Hargreaves, 2004). This implies that the young person's voice needs not only be heard but also enacted into practice (Holdsworth, 2005).

It is important to point out that views about young person's voice have changed in the last years. Before, the opinion of young people about their educational outcomes were many times discounted as not being as important as the views of the adults (Department of Education, Melbourne, 2007; Mitra, 2004). However this idea has changed throughout the years and different views have arisen with respect to this idea. Young peoples' empowerment is now high on the educational agendas and they are given the opportunity to express their opinion when it comes to educational matters. In 2004 in the United Kingdom the National Youth Agency created a set of guidelines on participation that were written by young people themselves. These aim to help schools delve into the quality of the young peoples' participation and provide a way to plan towards improving the quality of the school life in the future.

The modern definitions of young peoples' voice involve a partnership with adults to enable the young people to have an influence on what happens at school and thus start to be empowered by having a say in their own learning and school improvement (West, 2004). The young person's voice will help to make sure that important issues are taken into consideration within the school environment (West, 2004). Studies have indicated that young people want to be engaged throughout their education (Kushman, 1997) even though their engagement in research is limited (Gordon, 2010). A survey conducted by Patmor (1998) indicated that both students and teachers agreed that students in the classroom

need to be involved in decisions about their daily school life, including decision about extra-curricular activities, which classes they should attend, as well as issues related to discipline and classroom management policies. Further studies have emphasised the link between the young person's voice and the actions that are actually taken in an educational settings (Holdsworth, 2005; Fielding, 2001).

Meaningful involvement implies that young people are given the authority to put forward their own opinions (Minkes, Robinson & Weston, 1994) and experiences to improve schools (Fletcher, 2005) thus helping them become more confident and resilient (Cruddas, 2005). This is in line with the constructivist theory of learning (Bruner, 1966) where emphasis is made on the importance of young people to be active learners at school (Busher, 2014; Jackson, 2005). This will give them social responsibilities and produce a community where values are shared through collaboration (Jackson, 2005).

Fielding (2001) identifies a number of question to evaluate the conditions needed for student voice. The following are a few questions that Fielding (2001) came up with

- “Who is allowed to speak?”
- Who listens?
- What skills are required and what support is provided for their development?
- What attitudes and dispositions are needed to transform skills into meaningful realities?
- What spaces, both physical and metaphorical are needed for participants to make meaning together?
- What are the implications for action?”

(Fielding 2001, p. 134)

I believe these questions are essential if we aim to include young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in the research process. This thesis aims at giving first hand knowledge of what constitutes inclusion from the perspective of those directly involved, that is the young people themselves. I want to give them the possibility to speak out their opinion, and will listen to what they have to say. Their response will hopefully both have an implication on the actions within the school community and begin to change the mentality of a number of stakeholders within the school community.

In conclusion I believe that further qualitative research is required if we want to gain an in depth knowledge about the episodes in the life of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum as they are not represented in research (Parsons, 2015; Carrington & Graham, 2001). Unconventional and creative methods will be important in gathering information from these young people for which standard approaches are not suitable as unfortunately there seems to be a disconnection between what is the priority of researchers and funding institutions and what are the necessities for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Pellicano, Dinsmore & Charman, 2013). In Malta, currently members of Parliament preceded by the Hons. Minister of Education Evarist Bartolo are proposing a number of initiatives in order to promote young peoples' voice at school and the inclusion of people identified as falling within the autism spectrum within schools as well as in the wider world of work.

Listening to a young person's voice should be regarded as the starting point to create more inclusive practices (Mitra, 2003; Roberts & Kay, 1998). However it is no use to ask their opinion if then in practice nothing changes. Their ideas should challenge the school to change policies and practices, in simple words to act towards developing better school environments.

2.15 Conclusion

"We Are Not An Expense, We Are An Investment - We Are Citizens of This World."

(Special Session on Children, UNICEF, May 8th 2002)

I believe the above quote should be the guiding principle in research. Here, children are pointing out that they can be an asset to their education and development as they are not the problem but rather can be the ones who can give insight on how to cater for their diverse needs. They want to be actively participating in society.

In reviewing the research literature and in light of my own personal experience this research will delve into what constitutes inclusion for six young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s through a social constructionist framework. I believe that more research needs to be present that directly involves the stakeholders of inclusive practices, which will hopefully be of aid when it comes to creating policies locally. A critical discourse analysis will be adopted in order to focus on the construction of inclusion through the perspective of these three stakeholder groups and whether there are similarities or differences in these constructions.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the methodological approaches that I undertook to answer my research questions. A critical discourse analysis will be adopted in order to delve into what constitutes inclusion for six young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s.

This chapter will include information regarding my epistemological position, the research design including how participants were chosen, the data collection procedure, and the time frame of the research. Limits to critical discourse analysis, ethical considerations and quality of the research will be also discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Epistemological Position

Keeping in mind that the theoretical framework that underpins this research is social constructionism, a qualitative approach using critical discourse analysis will be adopted. A relativist view will be emphasised, meaning that there is not just one objective truth (Slife & Richardson, 2011; Potter, 1996). My concern is on how people construct knowledge and understand it in different ways, thus creating shared meaning in society.

As Reicher (2000) explains, when the concern is on the role that language has in constructing reality, a social constructionist perspective is adopted. My concern is about the role that language has in the construction of the discursive element inclusion for the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s. Critical discourse analysis best fitted this qualitative research, as through a social constructionist epistemology it focuses on language as not just being a mirror image of the world, but rather discourse as being central in constructing different ideas and processes that construct the social world (Nikander, 2006). The role of language was critically delved into as in

critical discourse analysis the use of language is viewed as a “form of social practice” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 68). All social practices are situated in a particular context and are a way by which social relationships can be reproduced. My aim was to investigate the social phenomenon inclusion and how it is constructed in the texts of the direct stakeholders within the school community.

3.2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) can be defined as "fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (Wodak, 2001, p. 2). CDA delves into the inequalities within a society keeping a critical stance to discourse, questioning the way people manage to get access and keep power within a society (van Dijk, 2001). This research will use CDA to analyse how the stakeholders involved construct inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum through their talk, and how these constructions inherent in the talk have an effect on the way schooling is perceived. The discursive practices in school include practices of the classroom, of assessment and written work, of the playground, of the resource rooms, and of the staff room. Thus, depending on the situation they will be open to conflict and struggle to weaken or strengthen these discourses.

Critical discourse analysis, aims at explaining the processes of power from the outset: how power is legitimised, reproduced and enacted in the speech and texts of dominant groups or institutions. Power can take many forms, it can be ideological, physical, linguistic, material, psychological and cultural (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Glynis o’Garro, 2005). In this research I am producing discourse when I position myself as a teacher, and as an interviewer when asking questions. There is a power imbalance because of the teacher-student relationship in the school, so I made sure to emphasise that I was not the teacher in this situation but a researcher who wanted to co-construct knowledge together. Having said this the teacher-student relationship still had an effect on the research process, an issue that will be dealt with later in the thesis. This type of analysis can be used to delve into the unclear ways that unbalanced power relationships result in the subject positions of young people identified as falling

within the autism spectrum in mainstream settings, and this will in turn have implications on their human rights (Luke, 1996).

Many social conflicts in relation to policymaking are about representation and subjectivity (Luke, 1996). I will be asking young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s about their views on the current policies and practices of inclusion, and whether they believe that they are promoting or hindering their notion of inclusion.

Thus, critical discourse analysis is a socially committed scientific paradigm and considered both a theory and a method. Critical discourse analysis varies from the other discourse analysis methodologies because its focus is not only on descriptions and interpretations of discourses within a context, but it also gives an explanation about the reason why and how discourses are acting in that way.

It is concerned with addressing social problems knowing that:

- “Power relations are discursive;
- Discourse constitutes society and culture;
- Discourse does ideological work;
- Discourse is historical”.

(Fairclough, 2013, p. 280)

Ultimately, power is partly discourse and discourse is partly power: they are different but not discrete, they flow into each other, discourse can be internalised in power and vice versa (Fairclough, 2013). Equal statuses are a chimera. People rarely have the chance to contribute equally with regards to discourses and pragmatic rights and obligations. I ask, are young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum given the chance to voice their opinion on current inclusive practices? And if yes, are these views taken into consideration in practice? Are parents given a say on what is happening in the school life of their children? And are L.S.A.s given the necessary freedom to put forward inclusive practices that they deem best fit their students?

Educational researchers aim to extend knowledge on an issue within the educational research (British Educational Research Association, BERA, 2011). Educational settings are very much involved in the developments affecting language in relation to power. Critical discourse analysis can be a useful tool for people to cope with the difficulties encountered because of change that is generated as a result of consent through ideology (Fairclough, 1992). Schools as educational institutions construct their ideological and discursive subjects. Schools impose a number of ideologies and constraints upon those who qualify as subjects, in the case of this research young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s (Fairclough, 2013).

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Carla Willig's CDA framework

For the purpose of the research question, Carla Willig's (2008) CDA methodological framework will be adopted. Applying a methodology is a theoretical process, which constructs an object of research for the research topic bringing it to bear on it relevant theoretical perspectives and frameworks. Methods are selected according to how the research object is constructed (Fairclough, 2013). Using Willig's framework will enable a systematic analysis of the research questions, and offers a compatible method to answer what constitutes inclusion for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.As. This is because using Willig's framework, the discursive object inclusion will be deconstructed from the text of semi-structured interviews that will be carried out. These will then be further explored in relation to the different subject positions they produce and what these imply in terms of practice and subjectivity. I opted for Willig's methodological framework because it was the one I felt more comfortable working with, as I found it to be structured, systematic and every step gives detailed analysis of the discursive object inclusion.

The following are the stages for analysis based on Carla Willig's (2008)

framework

3.3.1.1 Stage 1: Discursive constructions

Sociologists have come to the conclusion that representations are a result of what people do in practice. Since discourses are social cognitions they can be, and actually are, used as ways to represent social practices in text (Van Leuwen, 2008). Thus it is possible to reconstruct what constitutes inclusion for the different stakeholders from the texts that are produced by them on it. Text is active as it is all the time being produced.

Stage one of the analysis focuses on “the ways in which discursive objects are constructed” (Willig, 2008, p.115). The discursive object depends on the research question. In the case of this research the discursive object is ‘inclusion’. Thus, the first stage involves identifying the various ways that inclusion is being constructed in the texts. Both implicitly and explicitly all references need to be taken into consideration. That is, all instances where inclusion is referenced have to be taken into account in the first stage, which will produce a number of constructions. The “search for constructions of the discursive object is guided by shared meaning rather than lexical comparability” (Willig, 2008, p.118).

3.3.1.2 Stage 2: Discourses

When all instances in the text that have contributed to constructing the discursive object, in this case inclusion, are identified the next stage aims to focus on the differences between the constructions. Thus, here, the analysis aims at placing the discursive constructions of the object that emerged in stage one into wider discourses. From all the discursive constructions that emerge through stage 1 (Refer to appendix 6 for a sample of the analysis) four wider discourses have been identified that will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

3.3.1.3 Stage 3: Action orientation

This stage involves a “closer examination of the discursive contexts within which the different constructions of the object are being deployed” (Willig, 2008, p.115). The basis of any social practice is a set of actions that are performed in sequence. These social practices may be fixed to a certain degree however may allow for choice of actions.

Important questions to be asked in this stage are what will be benefited by constructing inclusion in one way and at that position in the text, what function will it have and how does that relate to the constructions that are produced in other parts of the text? Questions asked will help the researcher get a clearer picture of what the different constructions of the discursive element inclusion can achieve within the text. In this case action orientation focuses on how the discursive object inclusion is positioned by the different social actors through their action orientation.

3.3.1.4 Stage 4: Subject positioning

After the different constructions of inclusion within the texts have been identified and these located in the wider discourses, the position of different stakeholders within the discourse were located and identified (Davies & Harre, 1999). This identification is called subject positioning. Subject positions offer a discursive location from where to speak and act (Willig, 2008).

3.3.1.5 Stage 5: Practice

This stage focuses on the relationship that exists between discourse and practice. In this stage, “exploration of the ways in which the discursive constructions and subject positions open up or close down opportunities for action is carried out” (Willig, 2008, p.119). It is important to note that non-verbal practices also form part of discourses. When stakeholders construct a particular version of the world, they are limiting what can be said and done.

Different social practices can be regarded as being regulated to a certain extent depending on the traditions that influence it (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 2005). Social practices need a set of participants who will take up different roles. An example of such roles is a mother who positions herself as rightfully concerned, and will go to school to discuss her problems with the headmaster. The term eligibility conditions refers to the ‘qualifications’ that a person must have in order to be eligible to play a particular role in society in relation to a social practice. To be eligible to take up the role of a young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum, the young person needs to fulfill a number of criteria according to the DMS V (American Psychiatric Society, 2013). The L.S.A.s and the parents will also have to fulfill criteria to be regarded as fitting in what is the ‘norm’ in

society.

Social practices will take place at more or less definite times. An example of which, is the social practice of going to school for the first time, which takes place when a child is aged five in many countries. The young person will then need to adapt to the school routine, as the daily life of school will be prone to changes in the normal routine of these young people.

3.3.1.6 Stage 6: Subjectivity

The last stage of this analytical framework investigates the relation between discourses and subjectivity. When people portray different discourses they are making available one way of seeing the world and one way of being in the world (Willig, 2008, p.119).

Discourses construct social and psychological realities. It looks at the consequences of taking up different subject positions from the “participants’ subjective experience” (Willig, 2008, p.119). This stage asks questions related to what can be said and done within the various discourses that have been put forward. The concern at this stage is about feelings, thoughts and experiences from within various subject positions. The aim is to explore what the participant wants to make us feel when reading the text.

3.3.2 Selecting and gaining access to the school

This research was conducted in a state secondary school where I have been teaching for the past eight years. For more information on the school policies and practices refer to Appendix 7. The reasons why this school was selected for the research were two-fold. Being part of the school community, the young people knew me and I hoped that they would trust me and feel more at ease whilst talking to me. I specifically emphasised more than once that for the duration of the research I was not to be seen as their teacher but that I wanted to gain an insight into their views, and that they were free to express whatever they were comfortable to say. Having said this, my presence might still have affected the research, as I was still ultimately a teacher in the school. This is dealt in depth in the self-reflexive stops in the analysis chapter.

Also, the headmaster and the senior management team (S.M.T.) were very helpful in allowing me to conduct the research in the school. I could carry out passive observations of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum during the daily school life, and knew how to interact with them as I had taught them previously. I could also monitor the data collection process more closely since I was in close proximity to the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. This is also true for the L.S.A.s. I had previously worked with them in a classroom setting and had a good communicative working relationship, which helped both of us in helping the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to take photographs (discussed later in the chapter) and with the interviews later on in the research process. Moreover due to time constraints, conducting the research in my workplace made the participants involved more accessible since we were both in the same place. This proximity also helped me interact with the parents, since they already knew me, and the school was more accessible to them, thus they were more willing to accept to participate in this research.

The school ethos where the research was conducted focuses on ownership of the school for all stakeholders involved. The head master believes that if the stakeholders at school feel ownership, they will work towards providing a serene and welcoming environment to the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, since they feel valued and appreciated and know that their ideas do matter (Bondin, 2014). This is in line with what Mitra & Frick (2004) argue in their research. Giving the possibility to young people to say their own opinion and listening to what they would like to change helps the teachers realise that young people possess a unique knowledge and perspective about their learning which an outsider can never have. Their research also indicated that the school environment is positively impacted when the school management team and teaching staff listens to the experiences of the young people, more particularly to those who are struggling in their daily school life.

3.3.3 Participants

Before contacting the participants, ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Education in Malta and the University of Sheffield. Moreover, the headmaster was contacted and I was given the go ahead to conduct the research in the school I teach (Refer to appendix 1 for copies of ethical approval from the Department of Education in Malta and the University of Sheffield). I ensured that throughout the selection and recruitment of participants, data collection and writing of the thesis I follow the ethical guidelines for educational research that have been put forward by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011).

As in line with the ethical guidelines for educational research (British Educational Research Association, BERA, 2011) all steps were taken to ensure that all the participants were given the necessary information about how they will be involved in the research, how will the data be disseminated and to whom.

All participants were given a formal consent form with detailed information about the research project and what participating entails. I also had informal meetings with the participants, giving them a brief overview about their participation in the research. All participants were free to stop at any time and strict anonymity and confidentiality were ensured (BERA, 2011). For this purpose, all names mentioned in the research are fictitious in order to maintain strict anonymity (BERA, 2011). For young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, a power point and social story was provided in order to explain what the research would entail for them ((Refer to appendix 2 for a copy of the consent forms and appendix 3 for a sample of the power point and social stories). My mobile number and email address was given so that they could phone or contact me any time they wanted for further questioning.

For the purpose of the research question six young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s participated in the research. Prior to starting the data collection process, thirteen young people identified as falling in different areas of the autism spectrum were identified. I had previously taught all of these young people as I wanted to make sure that the

young people knew me beforehand and did not feel threatened by my presence. Young people identified as falling within different areas of the autism spectrum were chosen on purpose as I wanted to have the views and responses of young people identified as falling within different areas of the spectrum. This posed a difficulty as two of the young people did not respond verbally to me. This will be discussed later in the data collection section.

Not all parents or young people who were contacted wished to participate, and that is why a larger group of possible research participants was identified at the beginning. I did not delve into why they did not want to participate, as I did not want to impose or intrude in their personal life. Having three different stakeholder groups meant that the data collection process would be more time consuming, however I opted to involve the three stakeholder groups as I wanted to delve into what constitutes inclusion, primarily to the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum but also to their parents and their L.S.A.s, who were very much involved in the daily life of these young people and whose views have an impact on their lives.

After all consent forms were handed in duly signed, an informal meeting was carried out with both parents and L.S.A.s in order to explain the research study in more detail and answer any queried they might have. For the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, a power point was prepared so that I could explain again using visual methods what was expected from them. (Refer to appendix 3). For the young people who did not respond verbally and used social stories, a simple social story was prepared to explain what they would be doing. Each young person was handed a camera and asked to take photos of what they liked and disliked at school. I explained to all teaching staff why the young people would have a camera during a staff meeting at break time. I did not want the teachers to feel that the young people are intruding in the lesson and I thanked all for their patience and collaboration in allowing them to take photos during their lessons. Fortunately there were no objections from any of the teaching staff.

The young people were given no rules; they could take photos of anywhere and at

any time in the school day within the two-week period that the camera was handed to them. These photos were later used as a way of eliciting information in the second stage of the research, when carrying out semi structured interviews.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 The aim of the interviews

For the purpose of the study, following the photography sessions that the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum carried out, semi-structured interviews were carried out with all three stakeholders group. The aim was to investigate what constitutes inclusion to them. Interviews were used as an instrument to understand a social issue from the perspective of those involved (Edwards & Holland, 2013), and how they made sense of the notion of inclusion in their day-to-day interactions at school (Yanow, Schwart-Shea, 2008). Through the interviews the researcher and the researched are creating new knowledge together. This is in line with the philosophical approach of social constructionism.

I purposely chose to use semi-structured interviews as I wanted a flexible and less structured mode of asking questions (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Interviews are used as they can expose intimate matters (Atkins & Silvermann, 1997). The semi-structured interviews allowed me to have an interactional exchange dialogue on what constitutes inclusion, whilst keeping the perspective to knowledge situated and in context (Mason, 2002). It also gave me the possibility of exploring unexpected issues that developed during the interview session. I observed that parents were more open to explore what constitutes inclusion to them, they were eager to answer questions and were happy that someone was taking interest in their child. One parent even brought material she had gathered through the years to give me proof of what she was saying. L.S.A.s participated willingly however the enthusiasm of the parents was much greater, as was their eagerness to share information. On the other hand young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum found it more difficult to express their opinion, and the use of photographs proved to be essential to trigger questioning. I purposely wanted to

take an emancipatory perspective to the research and allow young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to be given a voice. The aim is to work collaboratively with and give control to the stakeholders involved rather than to the researcher alone (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

A convenience sample was used, meaning that the sample was available by means of access (Kowalczyk, 2015). I was fortunate enough that all three stakeholders agreed to participate in the research, and that gave me the possibility of approaching the research holistically. Having said that, the aim was not to delve into case studies, but to examine what constructs of the discursive object inclusion emerge from different stakeholders. The semi-structured interviews were held on a one-to-one basis, as I wanted the participants to feel free to express their views more liberally.

3.4.2 The design of the interviews and developing interview questions

When designing the interview schedule I always kept in mind that I wanted to learn from the people who were giving me a response (Refer to appendix 4 for a copy of interview transcript from each interviewee group). Elicitation was used for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum by means of images to help facilitate talk during the interview (Harper, 2002). Creating this data through photographs during the research process is referred to by Harper (2002) as tacit knowledge. Jorgenson & Sullivan took a similar approach in 2010 when they asked young people to take photos of family members working or playing around with technology and then explored their meaning through interviews.

When I was designing the interview the number of questions to ask was a difficulty that arose. I did not want to ask a lot of questions because it would be both time consuming and tiring for the participants. I was not looking at the quantity but at the quality of the data collected. I wanted to investigate how they construct inclusion. I chose important key concepts in relation to inclusion and asked questions with regards to them. However, for the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum the questions varied depending on the number of photographs they took, and the different issues that emerged through

their photographs. I asked why they chose to take that particular photograph and prompted further questions where an important idea emerged. I must say that there were instances where I would have liked to delve deeper into what the young people told me, but as soon as they looked restless, I stopped further questioning immediately. I did not want to cause stress to them in any way. For those young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum who did not respond verbally to me a social story was adopted whereby they pointed at a picture of a happy or sad face to explain whether the photo was taken to show what they liked or disliked at school. Here non-verbal communication was essential as they put forward their ideas mostly through this mode of communication. I must say that the L.S.A.s were essential in this step of the research as they were very helpful in reminding the young people what they had to do and answering any problems that they had during the two week period where the young people had the cameras.

As explained earlier, for the parents and the learning support assistants (L.S.A.s) the questions investigated central issues around the notion of inclusion in a Maltese context. The main areas included the following:

- What was their opinion regarding the current inclusive practices? In what mental state does their child arrive at school?
- What were the parents' feelings when their child was at school?
- What were the L.S.A.s' feelings of their present situation at school?
- How was the relationship between the different stakeholders in the school as well as with the senior management team? How did this effect inclusion?
- Did parents have a say in the decisions taken about their children? And what about the young people? Are their voices heard and valued?
- Mainstream versus special schooling as a big dilemma?
- What would different stakeholders do differently if they had the opportunity?

3.4.3 Conducting interviews and the interviewer's role

The interviews were conducted in the school playground since this was considered as a neutral place. The fact that I was a teacher in the school already posed a power imbalance between me and the young people identified as falling

within the autism spectrum because of the teacher-student relationship, thus I wanted to minimise this as much as possible and choose a place where the young people felt more at ease to express their opinion. The place was explicitly distant from buildings in order to ensure confidentiality. The interview site itself produces micro-geographies (Elwood & Martin, 2000) of social and spatial arrangements and this reflected the meaning of the relationship that exists between the researchers and those participating in the research. Thus choosing an adequate research site is of utmost importance (Elwood & Martin, 2000).

A number of characteristics that an interviewer should have, have been put forward by Valenzuela & Shrivastava (2013) in order to ensure a successful interview session. First and foremost I had to be **knowledgeable** on the topic of inclusion. Through extensive review of the literature I had knowledge of what the literature has already said and what I wanted to find out through my own research. The interview was **structured** as I outlined the procedure beforehand, explained in detail what was expected from the participants and gave them time to ask any questions that they had. All questions were **clear and easy** to understand and I tried as much as possible to instill a **serene and welcoming environment** during the interview so that the participants felt free to give their own opinion. Even though there is an asymmetry of power during the interview (Kvale, 1996), the power is in the respondent's hand as well when he has to answer the questions that are posed to him/her (Hoffman, 2007). I asked whether they had any questions that they wanted to ask before starting off the interview and that they could stop me at any time they wished. I wanted them to feel engaged and to share their experiences of inclusion at school with me. **Steering** was essential as with the enthusiasm of the parents at times we went out of topic so I had to set back the conversation to the aims of the interview. I was attentive to delve **critically** deeper into questioning when an important theme emerged during the session, as this would enable me to gather more rich data for analysis later on. I always kept in mind the well being of the participants and in no way intruded or asked more than what they were willing to tell me. Ultimately all interviews were recorded and later transcribed so that all data was **remembered**. I used a portable recorder so that I could listen to the participants and keep eye contact without worrying that I had to remember what I was listening to. It also ensured that the

tone of voice would remain accessible. Ultimately, even though the voice of the interviewee is central in all interviews, nonverbal communication is also an important asset. It gives a way of attaining deeper shared meanings of what is being said (Kelly, Barr, Church, & Lynch, 1999). I made sure to write any field notes of expressions and gestures right after the interview so that I could remember them when it came to the analysis stage.

3.4.4 Reflexivity during the interviews

Social constructionists regard objectivity as an impossibility since each one of us looks at the world from their own perspective (Burr, 2015; Calcutt & Hammond, 2011). The questions we ask and the theories and hypothesis we put into practice are also a result of the assumptions and perspectives that we have of the world. Thus it is essential that as a researcher I acknowledge this subjectivity and my own intrinsic involvement throughout the research process. The results of the research can be looked at as a co-production between the researcher and the people they are researching (Heaten, Day & Britten, 2016).

This puts forward the idea of reflexivity as an essential point in my research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, Bourdieou & Wacquant, 1992). To do this as a self-reflexive researcher I need to ask a number of questions including the following:

- The role of the researchers in the analysis process.
- The degree that the research analysis and results are shared with the participants?
- The relationship between knowledge and power and how reflexivity affects it.

The reflexive process includes three aspects: that of participatory construction of the research design, reciprocity, and turning back the analytic frame back on the researcher (Collins, 2001). The use of the cameras ensured that the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum had an active role in the research process, as the questions that were asked to them were totally dependent on the

photos they produced. Also, in all interviews the transcripts were handed back to the interviewee to read, add or delete, as they felt necessary.

Many times, as in the case of this research itself, educational researchers are researchers who have an educational background. Since I come with my own baggage of experiences that are related to the school community, it will be important to acknowledge this throughout the research process. Being myself an ex-member of the school community as a student, and at present a member as a teacher, I, like other teachers, bring with me baggages of participation. Failing to acknowledge this will not do justice to the research. Fairclough (1992) refers to this baggage as 'members resources' whilst Gee (1996, 1992) describes it as 'cultural models'.

Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999) put forward the idea that through reflexivity the researcher in a position where he is part of the language practices that they are studying. Thus a researcher needs to think about his claim to knowledge, the baggage the researcher brings with him, and again the extent to which the researcher turns the framework of the study on him both methodologically or theoretically (Forbes, 2008). This is because our own participation in school rotates around our beliefs, assumptions and values within the educational context. I am not detached from the research because I am part of the school community myself (Collins, 2001). For example, Collins in his study in 2001 researched how teachers take up or resist the discourses of educational standards and the ways in which these standards are an echo of the much larger socio-political educational reform. He positioned himself in the research both as a text analyst but most importantly also as a member of the educational community where he was conducting the research and as a parent himself who has children attending mainstream schooling.

When researchers did not locate themselves in the research, reflexivity was not being carried out (Fox & Fox 2002; Johnson, 2001; Chourliaraki, 1998). I am both the text analyst and data collection instrument in this research and it is essential to acknowledge that (Hinchman & Young, 2001; Hughes, 2001; Corson,

2000). Moreover I know the participants of the research because I taught the young people and am a colleague of the L.S.A.s. Thus the tension that arises between distance and closeness within a research setting is blurred in this case of educational research (Rogers et al., 2005, p. 382). During the research I must ensure a balance between what I am aware of because of my baggage and my theoretical position and what is being said to me during the interviews.

As said previously, I emphasised that I was an interviewer in that setting and my aim was to explore their construction of inclusion. Keeping this in mind I need to account for the fact that during the subjectivity stage of the analysis, my own theoretical position and assumptions did at times influence my subjective view. I acknowledge that my background, involvement and participation in the research affect the analytical process. In my self-reflexive stops in the analysis chapter I account for this and discuss my subjectivity and how it shaped the data collection and analytical process. I also acknowledge my positionality in relation to the research. As Bucholtz (2001) emphasised, there is the need of an increase in self-awareness in discourse analysis. She explained that reflexivity is important at each step of the research process. Each choice made by the analyst needs to be visible and accounted for as part of the investigation within the analytical process. The use of reflexivity enables me to bring rigor and validity in this type of qualitative research. It helps me to make sure that there has been no bias or ambiguity in carrying out the research. It also gives the possibility to gain insight into what and how knowledge has been constructed (Jorgensen, 2003; Pillow, 2003). Moreover I ensured that I was true to Carla Willig's framework and did not infer extra information that was not in the text because of my knowledge.

In order for the researcher to claim that the research is valid and an accurate representation of reality, the data must be triangulated; the data is checked with the participants, participants are engaged in peer reviews and a written documentation is kept of the theorising and analytical moves. (Rogers et al, 2005). This will be dealt with in more depth in the last section of the chapter when discussing quality in qualitative research. However even though these points are very important they are still problematic in the sense that in a critical discourse analysis frame work the view that an objective and neutral science can exist is

rejected.

3.4.5 The use of photographs

Photographs have been used as a methodological tool to encourage participants to tell their stories (Harper, 2002) and empower their voice (Strack, Magill & McDonagh, 2004). In my case, apart from that, the photographs helped young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum who did not respond to me verbally to be able to express themselves in a different way. Photographs can help produce a deeper response when compared to a conventional interview (Furman, Langer, Davis, Gallardo, & Kulkarni, 2007).

Due to the social interactional difficulties of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and because two of the young people that participated in my research did not respond to me verbally I had to identify different methods of communication in order to try and capture their feelings and attitudes towards the notion of inclusion. This is not easy and it required a large amount of time for me to get to know the young person, to get to know his way of doing things and his own way of communication. In doing so I could start to understand what the young person is trying to communicate and use this to cater for his diverse needs.

Using social media for research might benefit participants as it allows for tailor-made approaches to reflect their preferences and interaction modes (Nind, Wiles, Bengry-Howell, Crow, 2012). Being so diverse in characteristics, it is essential for the researchers working with young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to take the approach that best fits their different personalities in order to make the research more accessible to them. Participation in research will empower participants to express their voice in a way that best fits them (Nind et al., 2012).

When dealing with human research, ethics and respect for the welfare of the participants are extremely important (BERA, 2011). Since the line between public and private can be blurred in this case, it is essential to ensure that all ethical issues are taken into consideration (Nind et al., 2012). At no time will the photographs taken be published or used rather than for the purpose of the

research, and all photographs were shown to the stakeholders involved for their permission to be used during the research. In addition, ethical issues surrounding data and image storage or destruction were meticulously taken into consideration. Researchers must be diligent in removing all research material when their project is completed and their ethics approval ends. All photographs will be destroyed after the research. Also, participants could decide to withdraw material from the research whenever they wanted, as in line with the ethical guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2011).

Ultimately, photographs could be taken by the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum at any time of the school day. The use of photographs for young people falling within the autism spectrum enabled me to produce richer data as they could express themselves in a way that they were more comfortable with (Refer to appendix 5 for a sample of photographs taken).

3.5 Limits of Critical Discourse Analysis

Using critical discourse analysis I wanted to investigate the construct of inclusion through the talk of the three stakeholders grouped involved. However ontologically, critical discourse analysis does not say anything, as it is interested in the way that language is being used. Positivist argue that how the world is conceptualised through critical discourse analysis has a major downfall as there is no finite definition of what is true. This makes the “relationship between discourse and the material world difficult, and critics against critical discourse analysis argue whether there exists anything beyond discourse” (Burr, 2015, p 83-105)

Moreover subjectivity is quite speculative because this type of analysis only explores language. It is important not to over interpret the data that the researcher acquires through preconceived ideas, but to just analyse the text in front of you. This was a difficulty that I encountered during the research. Being part of the school community I could extrapolate information about the situations that the participants were putting forward, and so it was essential for me not to put in my

own knowledge about the situation and to only analyse the text the participants presented to me.

Hammersley (1997) explores this issue when saying that even though critical discourse analysis is realistic and pragmatic, researchers still have the tendency to over interpret the data in front of them and interpret the results 'according to their political implications as much if not more than their validity,' (Hammersley, 1997, p. 253). If this happens than he believed that we need to answer the question to whether CDA can be a valid way to produce new knowledge.

Another difficulty that I encountered was to have the purely elicited voice of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum as they needed guidance from their L.S.A.s during the data gathering process. Thus adult interference needs to be accounted for. Also the difficulty in language expression encountered by the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum was a factor that effected the data collection process for analysis using critical discourse analysis.

3.6 Quality in Qualitative Research

The real issue is how our research can be both intellectually challenging and rigorous and critical (Silvermann, 1993) at the same time. Attention is required when it comes to examining the social, political, cultural and interpersonal aspects of critical discourse analysis. Moreover it is essential to investigate how the researcher will be implicated within these relationships.

Quality in qualitative research has no one clear-cut definition, however a number of principles have come to play that help make qualitative research of high quality. Tracy (2010) puts forward eight criteria that make excellent qualitative research. I will discuss each of the criteria in relation to my research.

i. Worthy topic

For a topic to be worthy it needs to be relevant, timely, significant, interesting and evocative (Tracy, 2010). Inclusion in education for young people identified as

having a disability has long been an area of study and is still so locally. In fact, in Malta a Special Inclusive Education Review was conducted in 2014 to delve into the current practices in our Maltese State schools. Moreover the National Curriculum Framework (N.C.F., Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) that currently underpins our teaching methods strongly promotes the notion of inclusion and expects teachers to practically include everyone in the classroom through diverse teaching methods. Thus the research I adopted is high on the agenda of educational stakeholders especially now that we are trying to move all young people away from special schooling to mainstream school settings. The research aims to question the taken for granted notion of inclusion and asks, particularly the stakeholders involved, the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s, what it means to them and how it is effecting their daily lives. The aim is to point out interesting and divergent ideas of what is commonly regarded as good inclusive practices to intrigue the reader and make him think on what is going on in this situation. It also aims to trigger educational stakeholders who read this thesis to discuss and critique the present notions of inclusive practices in the belief that it will give rise to new practices that better fit the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum.

ii. Rigour

This implies that the research has applied appropriate research tools to meet the objective of the research question. A number of questions need to be answered to ensure that the research was rigorous. These include whether the data is enough, whether the researcher spent enough time to gather the data, whether the context is appropriate, and whether appropriate procedure were adopted.

In order to make sure that the research is rigorous, data collected involved six people in each stakeholder group, and the six young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum were chosen from different areas of the autism spectrum. Being new data, a small sample size is considered enough to have a valuable contribution (Scarduzio & Geist-Martin, 2008). The data was analysed line by line so several lines of transcript were produced from the interviewee

schedule making it rigorous (Martin, 1990). Passive observations, photograph and interview sessions ensured that ample time was spent gathering data. Interviews were conducted meticulously, and my role in the interview was accounted for as explained in the previous section. All data was transcribed verbatim and the analysis was conducted systematically, following Carla Willig's framework for critical discourse analysis, as it gave me the possibility to look at the different constructions of inclusion through a social constructionist approach.

iii. Sincerity

This implies that the research is transparent and honest. One way to achieve this is through self-reflexivity as discussed in the previous section. Moreover transparency applies to the clarity of the research process. Each step of the data collection process was explained to all participants thoroughly and documented. All data was recorded and transcribed, and details of the research process disclosed. This applies also to the analytical stage. All stages were meticulously carried out and documented whilst participants could have a copy of their transcript should they want to read and amend (Refer to appendix 6 for a sample of the analysis stages).

Moreover transparency also means that “credit is given where due in terms of author order and acknowledgements to participants, funding sources, research assistants, and supportive colleagues” (Tracy, 2010, p. 842). I cannot thank enough the headmaster and senior management team for their co-operation in allowing me to conduct the research in my school. They allowed me to be flexible and were supportive throughout the whole research. All participants took their time and enthusiastically participated in the research gladly and kept contact with me even after the research. I also have to acknowledge the major role the L.S.A.s had during the data collection stage, as without their help and support the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum would have found it difficult to carry out the photography sessions. Ultimately this research was possible thanks to the financial support of the Malta Government Scholarship Scheme who funded three years of my studies and this again needs to be acknowledged as in line with the ethical guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2011).

Coherent refers to the best fit between the philosophical perspective and the research question. Since I adopted a social constructionist framework in my research, a critical discourse analysis was chosen to investigate the construction of the discursive element, in this case of what constitutes inclusion for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s. I opted for Carla Willig's framework as it offered a systematic and clear way of analysing the discursive constructions and I felt comfortable working with it. It allowed me to deconstruct text and come up with the discursive constructions and wider discourses that emerged through the different stakeholder groups. It also gave me the possibility to delve into the various action and subject positioning, and later on make my inferences of what they want the reader to understand in the last stage, the subjectivity stage. Ultimately, it offered a way of producing rich analytical data by deconstructing the texts from the semi-structured interviews.

The aim was to give voice to their personal perspectives, and using interviews it enabled me to get a consistent and complete description that would later be analysed using critical discourse analysis. Triangulating the data from these three stakeholder groups, I could get a wider picture of the discursive element inclusion and how it is constructed in these three stakeholder groups.

iv. Credibility

Credibility refers to whether the research is trustworthy (Tracy, 2010). One important way to establish credibility is through thick descriptions. All interviews were transcribed and a rich data source was produced, as a vast number of pages of transcripts were available for analysis. The data was textually analysed word by word in relation to the discursive element inclusion, thus producing four wider discourses as will be explained in the analysis chapter. Having triangulated data using three stakeholder groups, a number of constructions were made available that were then analysed using Carla Willig's framework. Moreover diagrams and tables were used to give the reader a more fluent and visual way of looking at the data analysis. Multivocality was achieved by having three stakeholder groups interviewed and using that data to textual analyse. Thus the social action is analysed through the eyes of the direct stakeholders involved. Using three

stakeholder groups also gave me the possibility to compare the constructions of inclusion that emerged.

Moreover there was collaboration with the participants in the research. The participants were asked to reflect so that a shared dialogue with them could be achieved that helped in further enhancing the quality of the research. After the interviewees' answers were transcribed, each participant was given his or her transcript so that they could go through them and make sure that they reflected the true meaning and understanding of what they wanted to put forward.

v. Resonance

Resonance focuses on the way the researcher is open and receptive towards the potential meaning within the text. The text is presented with clear and indicative steps. Tables and colour-coded diagrams enable the reader to move step by step, and examine all data analysed. The research is transferable in the sense that the story being told overlaps with the situations that we are living in. Another parent reading this thesis might put himself in the shoes of one of the parents that have participated in the research. The reader is given the chance to make his own unbiased intuitions. The aim is not to generalise across different cases but to generalise within them.

vi. Significant Contribution

Questions that need to be asked in relation to the significant contribution of the research is:

- Does the study extend knowledge?
- Improve practice?
- Generate ongoing research?
- Liberate or empower?

(Tracy, 2010, p. 845)

I strongly believe that this research has answered all the above questions. First and foremost a critical discourse analysis on the views of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s' in a Maltese

context had not been carried out previously. Inclusion is a priority area within the Maltese educational and government system and this thesis will surely add knowledge and help to improve current practices. This is referred to as practically significant (Tracy, 2010) as it helps shed light on the present problems of inclusion within a Maltese context.

Recommendations have also been put forward on further research that can follow the present research. This is known as heuristic significance. The research aims to “bring clarity to confusion, make visible what is hidden or inappropriately ignored, and generate a sense of insight and deepened understanding” (Tracy, 2010, p. 209). I hope that the research will create catalytic validity, which is defined by Wolcott (1994) as the way those participants in the research will change mentality and want to act to change the present situation. It also puts forward the idea that the results obtained through the research will be a catalyst to make changes to the current situation. I hope that policy makers will use this thesis to put forward innovative methods that can aid in a better inclusive environment for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum.

vii. Ethical

As explained before hand, being a sensitive subject all ethical considerations were high on the agenda and all steps were followed to ensure ethical approval.

Procedural ethics refers to the way that all participants are safeguarded from the exposure of any of their personal data (Tracy, 2010). All characteristics of participants were situationally fictionalised to make sure that readers could not extrapolate whom I am talking about in my research. As explained above, all photographs will be discarded after the research is finished and all faces were pixelated. Consent from the headmaster was obtained in terms of data protection agreements, and I was ensured that all young people in the school had permission to have photos taken so that I could use all photographs that the young people as identified as falling within the autism took for research purposes. All photographs were saved in a password-protected folder on my laptop so that other people would not have access to them during the analysis process and would only be used for research purposes. This applies also for the audio recordings, transcripts

and all data collected.

Situational ethics takes into consideration any reasonable considerations taken with regards to the context of the specific study (Tracy, 2010). I paid attention to make sure that the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum did not feel pressurised to participate in the research. I had daily reports from the L.S.A.s to make sure that everything was proceeding as it should be, and as stated above I repeatedly told the young people they could stop whenever they wanted. I purposely chose young people who I already taught as I wanted them to see a familiar face, and I carried out passive observations since I was aware of the daily routine of these young people, thus I tried to intrude as little as possible.

Lastly, in such studies exiting ethics need to be taken in consideration. This refers to the ethical considerations that need to be weighed after the data has been collected. Keeping in mind that I have no control on who will read the research, and what they will understand from it, I made sure that no information would be divulged apart from the research thesis itself (Tracy, 2010). Moreover, I emphasised to all participants that if they had any queries or wanted to discuss any issues after the interviews were conducted, they were free to contact me any time they wanted. I really appreciated all the time and effort all participants put into the research, as without their commitment my thesis would not have been possible.

viii. Meaningful coherence

The last issue that should be considered when thinking about the quality of the research is meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010). This includes whether the research has achieved what it has stated out to do at the beginning. Through a critical discourse analysis the discursive element inclusion was deconstructed through the talk of the stakeholder groups involved, and very interesting discourses emerged on how they construct inclusion. Through a social constructionist approach critical discourse analysis was found to be adequate as it allowed me to research the power of language, and how inclusion is constructed in the texts of the different stakeholder groups. I ensured that I researched literature extensively, and critically explored the available studies so that when I

started the actual research myself I was aware of the current views, the literature available, limitations to the methodology and what I wanted to explore through my research.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter sought to look at the methodological approaches used in answering the research questions. The next chapter will now use Carla Willig's (2008) critical discourse analysis framework to analyse the data collected.

Chapter 4

Analysis Chapter

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will analyse the data gathered via the semi-structured interviews conducted with the three stakeholder groups, that is young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s. As explained in the methodology chapter, photographs of what young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum liked and disliked at school were taken by them and preceded the semi-structured interviews. Social stories were used as a means of communication with the young people who did not respond verbally to me.

A critical discourse analysis of the interview transcripts will now be analysed in order to view the different constructions these three stakeholder groups have of inclusion. The following chapter will be adopting Carla Willig's six-step process of critical discourse analysis.

Stage one of Carla Willig's critical discourse analysis framework involves identifying discursive constructions. This first stage is concerned with the ways in which the discursive objects are constructed. During stage one all the transcripts were analysed keeping in mind the discursive object 'inclusion'. For each interview group I went through the transcripts and took note of all instances where inclusion was being constructed whether through a direct reference or not. It is essential that both implicit and explicit references of the discursive object inclusion are included in the analysis (Willig, 2008). This will give an authentic analysis of the transcript data.

4.2 Stage 1: Discursive Constructions

Figures 4:1 to 4:3 illustrate all the various ways that the discursive object inclusion is being depicted by the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s. The discursive constructions are colour coded so as to make it easier at a later stage to come up with how these are

located within the wider discourse. A sample of the analysis can be found in Appendix 6.

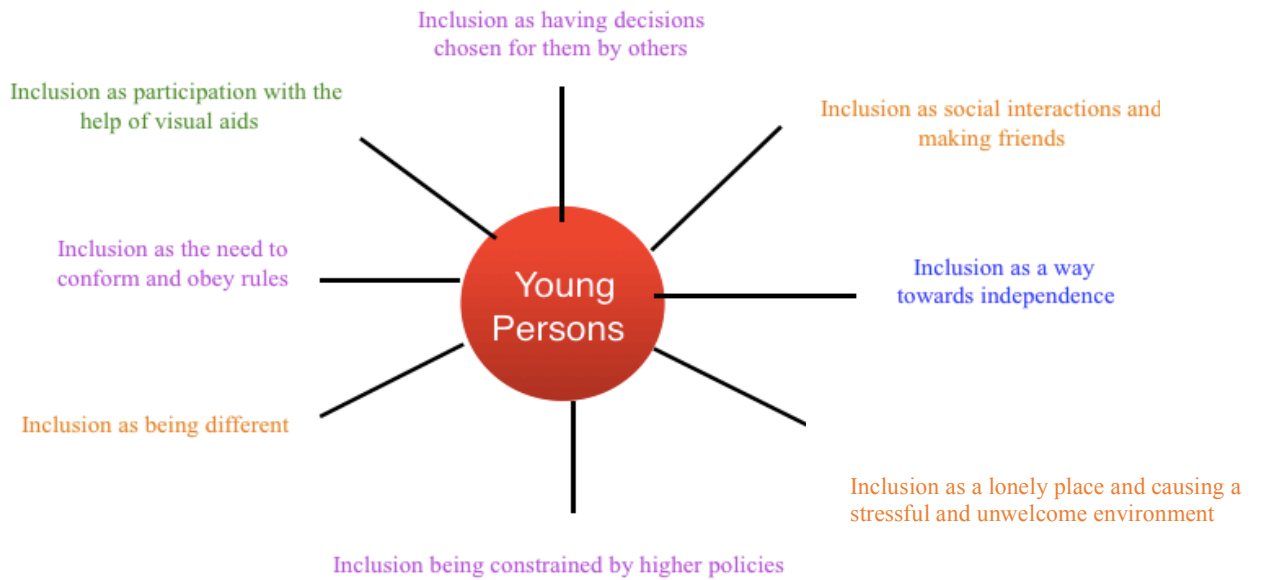


Figure 4:1 illustrating the ways in which young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum construct the discursive object ‘inclusion’.

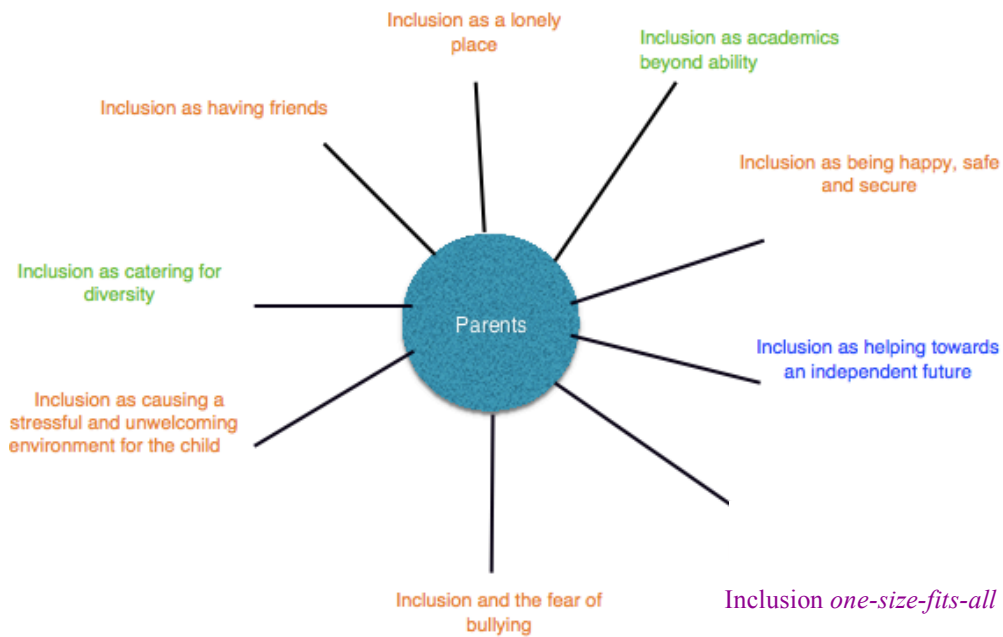


Figure 4:2 illustrating the ways in which parents construct the discursive object ‘inclusion’.

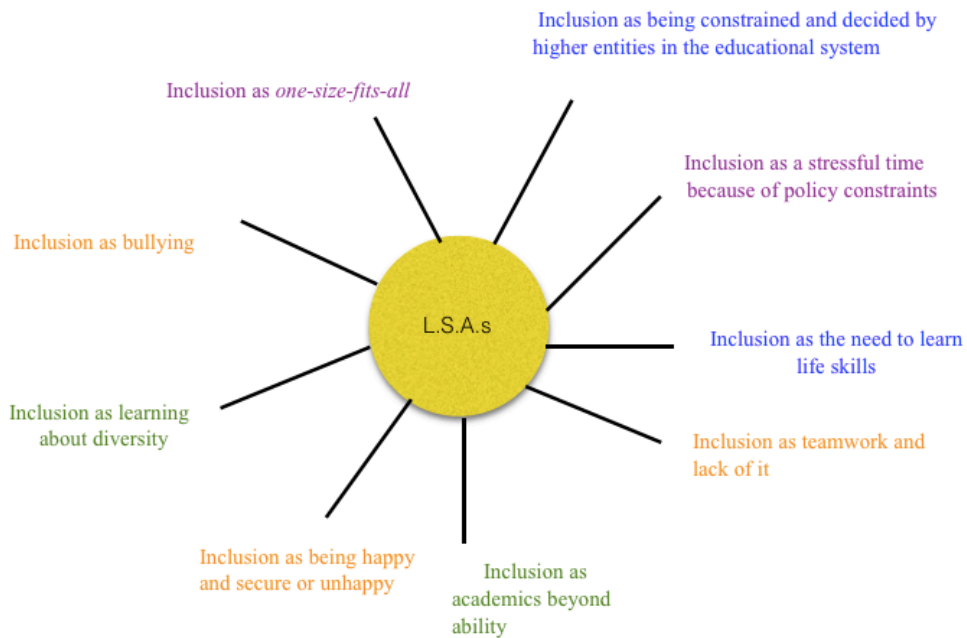


Figure 4:3 illustrating the ways in which L.S.A’s construct the discursive object ‘inclusion’.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter self-reflexivity is essential in critical discourse analysis. Reflexive points will be present throughout the whole chapter to put forward thoughts and feelings that I had as I was carrying out the analysis and what consequences might these have had on the analytical process. It also enables more transparency and makes sure the reader is aware of all the steps that have been carried out during the research.

Self-Reflexive Stop

In this stage I acknowledge that my judgment shaped the implicit and explicit references to the concept of inclusion. I was meticulous, clear and read word-by-word the transcripts to find any reference to inclusion. However my social constructionist approach and the way I look at inclusion being a teacher in that school has shaped which references I account for. Having said this, the transcripts were read more than once and care was taken to re check for instances of reference to inclusion that I might have missed. For example, Timothy says in his interview ‘Then when the bell rings I say break’. He did not explicitly say that he does not like break however his tone of voice and facial expressions made me realise that break is a distressful time in his school day. I was very careful to make sure that I took note of any gestures and change in tone of voice to detect any of these instances as these young people find it difficult to communicate verbally so these underlying hints need to be taken into consideration.

Another example is when Alice talked about the progress reports the parent had to fill in. At first I took little notice but when reading again the transcripts I realised that she was pointing out that the reports she gave to teachers were a way to try and promote the fact that the parent does not want her son to attend subjects beyond his ability and that decisions are chosen by higher entities that is policy makers in the Department of Education.

4.3 Stage 2: Wider Discourses

The second stage of the analysis involves “locating the various discursive constructions [of inclusion] within wider discourses” (Willig, 2008, p. 118). As stated above, the various discursive constructions were grouped together and linked with four wider ways of talking about inclusion (discourses). Refer to Appendix 8 for a table summarising the steps undertaken to conduct and analyse the data.

- Inclusion as relational
- Inclusion as accommodation
- Inclusion as the need to assimilate in pre-existing policies
- Inclusion as a way towards an independent living



Figure 4: 4 illustrating the four main discourses about inclusion that emerge through the first stage of the critical discourse analysis of the transcripts.

Self-Reflexive Stop

When all the constructions of inclusion were pulled out of the transcripts I grouped the different constructions that emerged into four wider discourses in relation to the concept of inclusion. I believe that these four wider discourses represent how the different stakeholders have constructed inclusion in their responses. It was my decision to put them in these four groups as I believe that they are representing the four major constructions that the different stakeholders wanted to put forward in their talk. Having said this, possibly other researchers could have grouped them in different ways depending on their conception of inclusion.

When I started grouping the wider discourses I came up with more than four wider discourses however on working on them more in depth I realised that a number of constructions could be grouped in the same wide discourse of inclusion as relational. Also, as I was going through the transcripts at first I was not sure were to put inclusion as being different however when reading over and over again I realised that the realisation of being different was in relation to their interactions with their peers and thus decided as putting it in inclusion as relationa.

Having said that, I also account for the fact that a number of constructions do fit into more than one wider discourse as the one described above. For example L.S.A.s point out the discourse of inclusion as teamwork, which I fitted in inclusion as relational. This is because their aim is to collaborate and work together to promote a serene environment. However this idea of inclusion as teamwork fits also in the wider discourse inclusion as accommodation as the need to work as a team is essential if the L.S.A.s are to accommodate for the diverse needs of the young people. The analysis showed that a very evident dominant discourse is inclusion as relational. All three stakeholders spend a big part of their interview talking about inclusion and the relationships they build in school.

4.4 Young People Identified as Falling Within the Autism Spectrums' Stages 3 and 4: Action Orientation and Subject Positioning

Self-Reflexive Stop

To make it easier for the reader the analysis of the following stages will be presented per interview group. I purposely chose to analyse per interview group rather than as case studies as my aim was to investigate the discursive constructions of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s as a group.

Moreover I believe that it will make it easier for the reader to follow the discursive constructions when reading per stakeholder group. Keeping this in mind I must say that if I had to analyse per case study it would have produced a more holistic view of the different stakeholders. However that was not my aim as I was interested in identifying wide discourses that emerges from young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s talk.

4.4.1 Introduction

The discursive constructions listed in figure 4:1 that have been identified in the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum discourse are presented to examine the associated action orientations. Stage 4, subject positioning is presented alongside stage 3. The discursive constructions are presented with verbatim quotes from the transcripts to help illustrate the action orientations and subject positioning stemming from the discursive constructions.

As explained in the methodology chapter pseudonyms will be used all through the research for confidentiality purposes. The following are the pseudonyms that will be used for the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s.

Young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum	Parent	L.S.A.
Timothy	Dorothy	Sera
Andrea	Jack	Mia
Ian	Sandra	Rose
Samuel	Sonia	Sophie
Jake	Dayna	Alice
Ben	Lucille	Berta

Table 4: 1 showing the pseudonyms that will be used for each participant in the research.

As seen in figure 4:1, there are 3 identified discursive constructions that emerged from the texts of the young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum, which have been grouped together within the discourse of inclusion as relational. Textual examples of each of the discursive constructions that collectively are recognised as constructing the wider discourse inclusion as relational are presented below. The following wider discourses will follow subsequently

- *Inclusion as accommodation,*
- *Inclusion as the need to assimilate into preexisting policies,*
- *Inclusion as a way towards an independent living.*

One has to keep in mind that in this section, fewer transcripts are available because of the communicative nature of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Both Andrea and Ian do not respond to me verbally thus pointing at photographs and pictures was the way their voice could be elicited

The other young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum did answer to the questions, however their responses where not as detailed as the adults' ones, as can be expected. Having said that, the use of photographs and interviews did empower these young people, and a number of discourses emerged.

Self-Reflexive Stop

Here one needs to point out my interference and the help of the L.S.A.s in the photography sessions during the analysis. The L.S.A.s were of great help in reminding the young people identified as falling within the autism to take photographs and the steps that they needed to follow to use the cameras. The school management team and the teachers were also very helpful in having no objection and allowing the young people to take photographs whenever they wanted and in any place of the school.

I discussed many times with the L.S.A.s to give them total liberty on what photos and when they could take them. Having said this I still have to account for the interpretation from the side of the L.S.A. when helping Ian and Andrea who do not respond verbally. Even though social stories were used, there was still the elicitation of information from my part and from the L.S.A.'s part so it was not purely the voice of young people alone. Moreover Ian and Andrea had physical help to use the camera from their respective L.S.A.s. Still we tried to ensure that they had minimal interference as much as possible.

4.4.2 Inclusion as relational

4.4.2.1 Inclusion as social interactions and making friends

A major discourse that emerged through the research is inclusion as relational and the way these young people communicate and interact within the school community. Mixed views emerged in relation to interacting and making friends. Whilst some of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum did search for interaction with their peers, even though their communicative skills sometimes made it difficult, others were passive observers in their school life. Some of them were happy just watching their peers play, being on the outside of activities rather than by participating themselves. This is a contradictory issue that emerged through the different stakeholders talk. Parents positioned their children as happy or not depending on their interaction with their peers, however

for example Ben willingly decided to stay out of activities and spend time on his own. It is quite interesting to compare different discursive constructions emphasising the different dimensions inclusion takes in the different stakeholders' discourses, as will be discussed later.

Jake positioned inclusion as interacting and making friends. He took photos of the school grounds where he was able to interact with his peers. This contradicts his mother's talk, who emphasised the difficulty she had every morning since he was reluctant to attend school. Jake positioned his friends as facilitating his inclusion, as being the reason he enjoyed attending school.

And I like staying in the playground. Because we go walking, we play football, in the ground emm, that's it.

(Jake, lines 11 -13)

He also continues further by talking about the circle of friends he has at school, and that they are also part of his outside community as they meet up even outside school. This gives an indication of the depth of the friendship relationship, since they are not just school friends but also meet up during their free time.

Yes and we meet up outside school, in Birzebbuga and we go for bicycle rides.

(Jake, line 57)

Possibly getting the insight of his peers' views could give an indication of how they perceive their friendship. This would be useful in order to compare the depth of the relationship.

The friendship idea is also explored in Ben's photographs however it is quite interesting to note that Ben actually took photos of break time and out of class activities however when asked in which activities he participated in he said that he did not participate in these activities. When I delved into why he does not participate he responded that he prefers to observe his friends playing rather than go play with them. He is quite neutral to the participation factor in his way of perceiving friendships.

There is my friend in the ground during the break, they are playing.
(Ben, line 32)

On a very positive note, two other young people, Andrea and Ian took photos of their small circle of friends from their classroom. Both choose the smiling face in the social stories to depict the positive interaction with their friends and sometimes leave their L.S.A. during P.E. and go interact with their peers. This is a very positive attitude when one considers that both young people do not respond verbally to anyone and have very strict routine schedules. One should note that both Andrea and Ian have friends in their classroom that they knew from primary school. These peers know what type of behaviour to expect from young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, and thus are very helpful and co-operative during activities.

4.4.2.2 Inclusion as being different

Another construct in the discourse inclusion as relation is the realisation of being different. In his very interesting and mature transcript below, Timothy positions himself as being different from his peers, as having a lower I.Q. than his peers and that that is why he needed additional support and is also the reason why he behaves out of the norm at times.

My I.Q is low, I am different, that is why emm I need to pay more attention, for example not talk for 10 minutes and I pay attention because I get bored. So when I do like this (shows a dazing face) I need someone to tell me Eyy Timothy.

(Timothy, lines 85-87)

Timothy positions his peers as not understanding his behaviour and ways of acting and so he did not want them to be part of his “project” (photography session). They are positioned as unaware of the reason behind his atypical behaviour. When the bell rings and he has to go back in the classroom he does not enjoy it.

During a free lesson the miss (referring to the L.S.A.) when it is sunny, normally during P.S.D because that is free many times, the miss takes me and Robert and Tim (fictitious names) to do homework we have left and then let’s say we have 10 minutes to talk we stay talking about GTA

(computer game) so that I explain to him what to do to get more money, I like talking to him. Then when the bell rings I say break (with a sad tone).

(Timothy, lines 104-108)

This talk is quite contradictory to normal peer talk where young people enjoy break time since they have time to spend with their friends. On a positive note Timothy does interact minimally with his peers who have additional needs and are entitled to a learning support assistant as evident in Timothy's text above. He discusses the computer game with them helping his social interactional skills.

4.4.2.3 Inclusion as a lonely place and causing a stressful and unwelcome environment

Emm, emm, they do not tell me and don't think will let me participate.

(Ben, line 14)

Even though Ben has a few classmates which he considers his friends, he positions his other peers as having an authoritarian role since in his talk he says that they don't ask or let him participate in extra curricular activities or activities during the break period. He ends up not participating even though he would like to. He positions himself as a passive actor in his school life as he does not willingly ask them if he can participate in the break activities.

Emm because the friends try to make fun of me and laugh at me and I tell them pff I am a kid why are they laughing at me. Then I said they stay laughing at me and I take pictures of them? No emmm not fair!!! I tell them why are you laughing?

(Timothy, lines 95-97)

Again the above quote is a very strong transcript where Timothy blames his peers as those responsible for making fun of him and positions himself as the victim of these perpetrators of bullying episodes. Timothy positions his peers as not understanding his behaviour and more importantly why he is behaving in that particular way.

Timothy also talks about the senior management team (S.M.T.) and the headmaster as the reason why he still feels safe and secure at school, as being

there when needed and supporting him by first and foremost qualifying him for an L.S.A. to give him added support. This puts forward another issue, putting the school ethos and the senior management team as crucial in aiding towards inclusive practices.

emm the headmaster, he takes care of us at school, emm he gives us what we need, and etc... He helps us by giving us an L.S.A to help us, tells the teachers to help us. There are a lot of things at school that he gave us.

(Timothy, lines 4-6)

He positions the S.M.T. and his L.S.A. as a safety net for him at school. He does not like to spend time with his peers, and took no photos of them since they make fun of what he says and does. In his interview he shows appreciation towards adults because they understand him, he knows that they will not laugh at him and so tries to spend time during break with them rather than with his peers. When his L.S.A. tries to encourage him to play with his peers he does not want to.

Another young person, Samuel positions his peers as causing him to feel like an outsider in his own school.

I don't know , I don't like them. They make fun of me and shout and push me.

(Samuel, line 19)

I don't like them.

(Samuel, line 57)

Samuel understands the relationship between his peers and himself as an unbalanced one where he is the victim of bullying and his peers the perpetrators of these bullying episodes. Samuel positions his peers as one of the reasons why he does not like school, he is being shouted at and pushed in a place where he should feel serene and welcome. He emphasises the words 'I don't like them' to show that he does not want to spend time with them. When asked to elaborate more about the situation he shrugged and did not want to answer the question. Thus, I decided not to ask further questions related to this issue as I did not want to cause stress to Samuel as it seemed to be a delicate situation. His facial expressions and gestures showed that he did not want to talk about the situation.

This also indicates that this issue is troubling Samuel in his daily school life. Even though not directly both Samuel and Timothy are positioning their peers as perpetrators of bullying and themselves victims of these bullying episodes.

4.4.3 Inclusion as accommodation

4.4.3.1 Inclusion as participation with the help of visual aids

Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum have positioned the school and the use of visual aids as a promoter towards their inclusion.

He is a good teacher let's say!!! But the best part of the lesson is because he shows us videos; emm and he doesn't give us a lot of homework.
(Timothy, lines 35-36)

Because we painted and did the activities ourselves.
(Samuel, line 25)

They need visual aids to understand better, and the fact that the teacher does not only use a talk and chalk approach is of great help to them. This construction of inclusion identifies a very important point, and gives insight into the fact that the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum appreciate the different learning styles adopted by their teachers.

Moreover another point that the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum put forward was the fact that they wanted to be involved in the lesson, and not just have to listen to the explanation. They want to actively participate in lessons because they get bored when listening only to the teacher's explanation. Thus, they are positioning the teacher as the key behind whether they understand or not the explanation, whether they got bored or not and whether they have a behaviour inappropriate to the lesson because of this boredom or not.

Yes I am working out questions, I am using the calculator, there is the sir helping me. I understand maths.
(Jake, lines 52-53)

Don't like to listen all the time.
(Timothy, line 71)

I like watching videos – during the Italian lesson.

(Ben, line 100)

These comments all point out to the issue that the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum want to be actively involved in the lesson. They position themselves as participants in their own learning, and want to have ownership of the activities they do.

In his talk Timothy equates a good teacher with him being an active participant in the lesson. Again Jake is positioning the teacher in a position where he or she can carry out hands on activities where he will benefit since he is being involved in the lesson. In their constructions inclusion is being equated with being involved in the lesson and in the wider school community. Samuel, who according to his mother has found this year in mainstream school very difficult, also points out to the use of paints and activities as aids that help him enjoy classroom activities, be part of the lesson and be able to do what his peers can do.

Both Ian and Andrea took photographs of crafts and activities they did during their time in the resource room (classroom where activities not linked to mainstream curricula are carried out), indicating again the importance of using visual aids. Moreover Andrea and Ben took photographs of different lessons where they used everyday resources, such as real money in a mathematics lesson.

4.4.4 Inclusion as the need to assimilate in pre-existing policies

4.4.4.1 Inclusion as having decisions chosen for them by others

In his discourse of inclusion as the need to assimilate in pre-existing policies Jake positions adults as having an authoritarian role in the decision-making processes at school. Even though he is present during the drawing up of his Individualised Educational Plan, (I.E.P), he believes that he has no say in what is being decided about his academic and social goals. This is quite contradictory to what Alice, his L.S.A. said in her interview. This is because she states that it was Jake who decided which exams he would sit for during the I.E.P. However Jake is positioning the school community as having a key role in decision-making, and

when asked about why he does attend certain lessons, he answered that he did not know the reason behind that choice.

I don't know, they did not tell me or ask me

(Jake, lines 81-82)

The other young people were not really aware of the reason behind the I.E.P. and when asked whether they attended they all said yes however were not aware of what their role was during the meeting.

The issue of having decisions taken by others on your behalf for the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum is also an issue raised by Ben. He once again positions the L.S.A. as having an authoritarian role and positions himself as having to do what she says. When asked about why he does not attend activities during break time he says that the L.S.A. does not let him. However when asked why, he did not give any answer.

The L.S.A. does not let me

(Ben, line 68)

4.4.4.2 Inclusion as the need to conform and obey rules

I took (photos) to show what plants we have in the Maltese Islands, that we cannot drink or eat in the lab, because rules are important and if we break the rules we have to go to the headmaster and we can get an exclusion from school and we end up with a yellow sheet as well as usual (yellow sheet is given for inappropriate behaviour in our school). A lot of people get a yellow sheet at school. I don't want a yellow sheet or get one for nothing.

(Timothy, lines 54-57)

One of the common traits of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum is their rigid routine structure and that is one reason why mainstream school is difficult for them as they find it hard to adjust to the ever-changing routines. Schools are institutions where these young people need to conform and obey rules. Unfortunately at times teachers and other stakeholders are not aware of the problems encountered by the young people identified as falling within the

autism spectrum and expect certain behaviour from them that they find difficult to comply with.

Timothy positions schools as places where he has to obey rules and regulations that at times he does not comprehend. Moreover at times he does not understand why his peers are not ready to obey these rules, and what the consequences are when he does not obey. Flexibility is essential in these cases. He also positions schooling as places of unpredictability and change in routine and that causes stress to his daily life at school. He does not like P.E. lessons because he has to change classroom setting. Samuel also puts this forward, when he talks about the fact that he does not like it when the S.M.T. changes the days of the 'whole-school assembly'. When asked why he does not like it he said because it changes the day but was reluctant to respond further.

Samuel also puts forward the idea that he does not like it when he has to listen to a whole lesson. He positions school as being boring and himself as lacking the knowledge to understand what is happening in class. This induces him to have a behaviour, which is not considered appropriate in a classroom setting and that ends up leading him into trouble. He positions himself as unaware of how to behave in certain situations, and that causes him to act in an inappropriate way in the classroom. Again in this construction, there is the issue of mainstream versus special schooling and what is considered as normal behaviour in mainstream schooling.

4.4.4.3 Inclusion as being constrained by higher policies

Unfortunately another issue that is being put forward is that inclusion is being constrained by policies which are issued by the Department of Education in Malta resulting in school not being given the needed autonomy to decide on their own. This issue is accentuated by all three groups of stakeholder interviews as apart from the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum it has been also pointed out by the L.S.A.s and parental discourses who put forward the idea that there are subjects which are beyond their ability.

Because I want to use the computer and the homework is difficult and I get bad marks and they laugh at me and they did not allow mummy to tell them that it is difficult. Then I end up shouting because they laugh at me.
(Samuel, line 37-39)

Here, Samuel is positioning school and academics as beyond his ability, and talks about the fact that the homework he is given is too difficult for him. This positions schooling as a stressful environment that in turn causes Samuel to feel frustrated. He positions himself as a victim of his peers because they laugh at him when he gets low grades. This is one of the reasons why he does not want to go to school. He wants to be given homeworks, which are easier to comprehend, but because he has to sit for the annual exam it is difficult because then the exam paper will be the same like all the other students. It also shows maturity when positioning the school as the reason behind the fact that his mother is a powerless actress and is not given the authority to decide for her child. One has to note that the school is in turn constrained by policies issued by the Department of Education.

Andrea took photos of homework books and when asked to point on the like or dislike face he chose the dislike face. On the other hand he then pointed to the like face when I showed him the photos he took of the activities he did in the resource room. It is important to note that Andrea does not follow all mainstream curricula and that is the reason the L.S.A. has the possibility to prepare these hands on activities for him. Thus, even though Andrea is in mainstream classrooms he is in the lower stream and does not follow any subjects that his classmates follow. Here we can note that in this instance there has been flexibility to adjust to his needs because of the above said reason. However the other young people all follow mainstream curricula and that brings with it a number of issues related to homeworks and exams.

4.4.5 Inclusion as a way towards an independent living

4.4.5.1 Inclusion as a way towards independence

...because ICT and school are important so that children when they grow up they can use it for example when they want to work at the bank or to study more to have a good job when they grow up, not a job that makes you suffer

with a very low wage and so they can't buy a nice car. I want a good job that gives me money to buy things.

(Timothy, lines 40-43)

Here, Timothy is positioning school as the key to an independent life. He wants to study and acquire skills to be able to find a job that can help him live an independent future. Timothy is the only one who talks about inclusion as helping towards an independent future, with the others focusing more on the immediate scenario rather than the future. This is quite mature and deep coming from an eleven year old. This points to Timothy thinking about his future and believing that it is through education that he can achieve an independent living in the future.

Table 4:2 gives a summary of the different social actors and the action orientation and related subject positions that are mentioned in the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrums' discourse.

Social Actors	Subject Position	Action Orientation
L.S.A.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sole provider of inclusive practices. • Active actor in the life of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. • Safety net and providing a serene environment for him. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship between L.S.A. and young person is viewed as a social arrangement where the L.S.A. is a promoter of inclusion.
Young Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victim of bullying. • Loner and not having any friends. • Happy and having friends. • Having friends even outside the school community. • Victim of the educational system. • Outsider in the school system. • Being different because of being identified as falling within the autism spectrum. • Different and not conforming to what society regards as normal behaviour. • Learning through visual aids. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship between the young person and his peers is viewed as a social arrangement where the young person is the victim and his peers are the bullies. • The relationships by other young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are viewed as a positive social arrangement where they interact and communicate with

		each other.
Peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwelcoming. • Perpetrators of bullying. • Lacking awareness and knowledge about what autism entails. • Helpful and helping towards a serene and welcoming environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social arrangement between young persons and their peers are viewed with two contrasting views, one as being the perpetrators of bullying and the other as being helpful and making the young person happy at school.
Schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritarian and powerful figure. • Needing to be flexible. • Tool to promote independent living. • Not catering for diverse needs of young people. • Constrained by higher educational policies. • Having to conform to its rules. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schooling discourse positions the school as the tool to promote or hinder inclusive practices. • Schooling discourse positions school as the tool towards independence.

Table 4: 2 showing a summary of the different social actors and the action orientation and related subject positions that are mentioned in the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrums' discourses.

4.5 Young People Identified as Falling Within the Autism Spectrums’ Stage 5 – Practice Position

What the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum do or are willing to do due to the discursive constructions and positioning within their talk is referred to as their practice position (Table 4:3).

Social Actor	Practice Position
Young Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arguing, shouting, banging on the table, refusing to go to school, restlessness. • Idle time doing nothing. • Physically bullied. • Verbally bullied. • Cooking and doing sports. • Smiling and waving to peers outside school. • Staying alone during break time. • Carrying out hands on activities.
Parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping in the homework. • Attending the I.E.P. and discussing ways to cater for the diverse needs of their child.
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letting the young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum participate in extra curricular activities. • Having rules and regulations that the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum need to follow. • Giving reports to those who do not follow regulations. • Assigning an L.S.A. to the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum that will promote an independent living for them.
L.S.A.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping by creating tailor-made activities. • Safety net and staying with the young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum to help him.

Table 4.3 showing different practice positions that emerged through the young people identified as within the autism spectrum discourses.

When inclusion is viewed as relational, it positions the subjects as social actors that are ultimately affected by the actions of those involved in the relationship. Being part of a social relationship will imply that whatever one of the parties does has an effect, beneficial or not on the other party.

Self-Reflexive Stop:

As discussed previously less transcripts were available as the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum did not give lengthy answers as the other two stakeholder groups. However rich data was still gathered even from those young people who used social stories as ultimately my aim was for them to participate and voice their opinions. The fact that they were given chance to take photographs, asked questions and have their voices heard is already an importance step forward. Timothy was very happy that he was assigned the photography task and that it was something that he was doing on his own and that his peers could see him successfully complete a task.

However I must account for my involvement because of my interpretation from my side of the non verbal gestures that I analyse and the ones that I do not take note of, of the episodes which I choose to quote because I believe to be important and those which I consider less important. Having taught the young people I could relate to the situations they were talking to me about and there were instances where I looked at the situation from a different lens and had a different view of it, so it was essential that I did not in any way put my own ideas in the analysis but stick to the information that was presented at that moment in time through the interview.

As also depicted by the L.S.A.s and parental discourses, young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum spend a lot of idle time due to academic material which is beyond their ability being taught in school. Jake, Samuel and Timothy say that they only enjoy lessons when they are doing something that interests them. In lessons which they consider as boring, they do not understand what the teacher is saying, and so end up doing nothing for the duration of the

lesson. Samuel positions school as an unwelcome place to justify the fact that he wants to stay at home playing games. He positions school as a waste of time and would prefer to be at home where he is safe and secure.

On the other hand when Sameul, Jake and Timothy are doing ‘hands on’ activities, and are actively involved, they feel ownership of their learning which helps both academically and socially. Cooking, doing sports activities and activites with simple money tasks are a few examples of such situations. This also links to the idea of inclusion as helping towards an independent living.. It is interesting to note that many of the activities mentioned by the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum relate to everyday life activities rather than academic subjects.

Another issue that was put forward is that of verbal and physical bullying. Samuel talks about the situation when he was physically picked on by his peers and called names like ‘dirty’. He positions his peers as the perpetrators of bullying episode and himself as the victim of these bullying episodes. These situations cause the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to act out and have a behaviour not appropriate for a classroom setting like for example shouting episodes. Samuel does not comprehend why his peers are behaving in that way and answers by having a behaviour that is not deemed appropriate. These situations are also evident when it comes to idle time. In their talk they put forward the problem that when they are bored because they are not being accomodate for, they end up behaving in a way deemed inapporprate for a classroom setting. This could be the result of not knowing how to express that they are bored and not understanding the lesson. Also Timothy talks about his peers as acting out by shouting and laughing at him. In turn he responds to these episodes by isolating himself and spending break time next to the L.S.A. rather than with his peers, because he does not want to interact with them.

Again as noted above, the talk of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum also point to the time they spend on their own during break time. There are two contradicting views with regards to this issue. Whilst Samuel and Timothy do not not want to play with their peers because they make fun of them,

Ben chooses not to play with his friends and prefers to just passively observe and watch the others play during break time.

Another issue pointed out through the discourse of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum is the need to conform and obey rules. When Samuel does not understand these rules he responds by not wanting to come to school and by having inappropriate behaviour. The busy school routine is not an easy situation for these young people, and they sometimes display their stress by shouting, banging on the table and acting in a way deemed inappropriate for a classroom setting.

4.6 Young People Identified as Falling Within the Autism Spectrums'

Stage 6 – Subjectivity

This section traces the consequence of taking up various subject positions on the participant's subjective experience. The subjective experiences communicated through the interview are highlighted in bold in this section to make it easier to comprehend.

Self Reflexive Stop:

I found this stage the most difficult to detach myself from the research. I was meticulous and transparent to make sure that I minimise my own subjectivity in the analysis. Having said that I still account for the interpretation of the text through a social constructionist lens with a belief in inclusive practices.

At times it was difficult to analyse only the text from the transcripts without keeping in mind the context of the situation, which I know because of being part of the school community. Moreover it was also difficult and I had to keep reminding myself that I have to keep my own baggage as a teacher, my role in inclusive practices in the school and my own beliefs aside as the analysis had to reflect the subjective positions of the different stakeholders and not my own.

For example I knew the situations that Timothy was talking about and had my view on the incidents but I had to make sure that it did not interfere with my analysis. I had to write what the text wanted me to induce and not fit it extra information that I knew from my background.

In their discourses the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are positioning themselves indirectly as **victims of the educational system**, a system that is not catering for their diverse needs. They want to put forward the idea that the *one-size-fits-all* mechanism is not working because each and every young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum has his own particular and diverse needs, and the educational adaptations that are suitable for one young person are not necessarily good for another. Thus the educational system, even though aiming at an inclusive mainstream setting, is not actually doing what it set out to do in the beginning according to these young people. Thus, ultimately they want to put forward the idea that the school **system is presently failing them** and that they are not being given the opportunity to thrive like peers their age.

Their discourses put forward their **frustration** in the educational system that is failing them because of the lack of resources and lack of time available for the L.S.A.s to cater for their diverse needs. Timothy wants education to be the key for an independent living, however at times subjects are not catering for this but instead are focusing on the academics that are beyond their ability rather than on how they can help him live an independent future. Getting older Samuel is realising that his exam marks are below average, he is realising that he is not attaining academically the same results as his peers, and that makes him feel **frustrated** because even though he tries he is not achieving goals like his peers. Moreover all point to their **boredom** when chalk and talk lessons are delivered to them. In their discourse they put the teacher as the key to their positive attitude towards the lesson.

Moreover in their talk Samuel and Jake point out the lack of tailor-made activities that at times make them feel **lost** during the lessons. Samuel knows that he is not coping with the homework given, which makes him feel **different**. Growing up these young people are starting to realise more what is happening around them and their talk point to a **sense of uneasiness** because they are in a place where they are not being understood and where their behaviour is regarded as being different.

There are mixed discourses with regards to their relationships with their peers. Andrea and Ian, who do not respond verbally, took photos of their peers and pointed to happy faces indicating that there was some kind of social interaction. They indicate a **sense of belonging** at school. Even Ben is now **happy** at school and wants the reader to know this by emphasising that he does not want summer to start because then there will be no school in summer. Jake is also **happy** that his friendship is consolidated even outside the school community where he meets up with his peers. They are happy and serene in the school environment and this is shown by their **eagerness** to attend school.

However, Timothy and Samuel positioned themselves as **outsiders**, as seeing the others play football during break time but not being actively involved themselves. Their discourses can engender **empathy** about the fact that they are not feeling

ownership of their own school. Even though the educational system claims that the school should offer a serene and welcoming environment for all the young people to succeed, the young people point to the feeling of **loneliness** and of being bullied.

Ultimately, we can conclude that through the analysis of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum talk a number of discursive constructions have been linked to the four wider discourses in relation to the concept of inclusion.

4.7 Parents of Young People Identified as Falling Within the Autism Spectrums' Stage 3 and 4: Action Orientation and Subject Positioning

4.7.1 Inclusion as relational

4.7.1.1 Inclusion and the fear of bullying

Sonia positions herself as a concerned mother. She positions her child as innocent and as being in a relationship with his peers where he is being bullied. She assumes that the other children should understand her son. This discursive construction in the discourse inclusion as relational is positioning herself and her son as victims of bullying as “they (his peers) used to tease him brown because he is a bit dark coloured, they tease him a lot” (Sonia, lines 168-170). Constructing this relationship as a social arrangement positions the people as dependent on one another and affecting each other.

Sonia understands the relationship between her son Samuel and his peers as being an unbalanced one. She believes her son is being bullied and thus she positions her son as the victim. His peers are being positioned as unwelcoming, bullies and creating a hostile environment. His peers are perpetrators of the bullying situation. She states that it is like “hell” (Sonia, line 103) whilst focusing more on her feelings and positioning herself as being helpless in this situation, worried, anxious and concerned even when it comes to exam times “as this problem of the exams is a big stress on us” (Sonia, line 103.). Her talk indicates that she is in a place with no way out.

Self-Reflexive Stop:

Being a teacher in the school I tried to minimise this aspect by staying in a neutral zone during the interviews and repeatedly telling the participants that they could feel free to ask and answer as they wanted as there were no right or wrong answers. Having said this, I still believe that stakeholders involved could have been affected by my presence when answering questions and this needs to be accounted for. Even though I was not the teacher at that instance, parents at times seemed to find it difficult to express their true opinion in the fear that I might get offended. I had to repeatedly tell them that confidentiality is a must and in no instance will their information be divulged.

Lucille asked me if it was ok to say that her son does not come happy to school. She was afraid that it would put a negative connotation to the school. I again explained that it was not a problem and she was free to express her opinion freely. However, there might still have been instances where the stakeholders were reluctant to express freely their ideas and opinions.

Sonia is afraid that the bullying episodes will not end, on the contrary she is realising that as he gets older the episodes are becoming harsher “I had a lot of problems this year, a lot of problems” (Sonia, lines 167-168). She is assuming that the other young people have to understand her child for him to be safe. The problem is that his peers find his behaviour different, and she says “you cannot treat him like any other normal child, he is not normal” (Sonia, lines 24-27) and thus his peers do not know how to connect with him. She positions his peers as bullies, as having a lack of knowledge and awareness and that makes them react in a certain way, whilst emphasising that “bullying is not just physical” (Sonia lines 167-170). On the other hand Samuel is positioned by his mother as being bullied because of the lack of understanding from his peers.

Sandra pointed out that there is not enough awareness about what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails and thus since his classmates do not

have a name to the behaviour, they find it difficult to relate to. Putting Andrea in mainstream classrooms without explaining his condition to his peers will make them “see him as awkward because they know nothing about him, if they know a lot about him they would not see him awkward” (Sandra lines 299-304). She is trying to justify the position of students, by stating that they do not know what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails and so act in a certain way towards the type of behaviour exhibited by these young people.

Sonia says that autism is a hidden disability and thus young people will find it difficult to relate to the different behavior exhibited by her child.

Even when we used to go to the swings, I mean his condition is not visible, physical features are of a normal boy.

(Sonia, lines 183-184)

Sonia is pointing out the lack of knowledge and awareness about the condition to try to justify why her child is behaving in such a way and why he has been the victim of these bullying episodes.

Sandra also positions her child as an ‘autistic child’ who exhibits a certain type of behaviour that is prone to bullying episodes. In her talk she puts forward the idea that if you are autistic then you will behave in a ‘weird’ way

They know he is different, they know he looks weird, on the other hand its better to give a name to that weirdness.

(Sandra, lines 311-312)

Special schools do not conform to the norm of what is expected as typical behaviour so it was ok if he did not behave as

He is yelling, he is screaming, he is disrupting the class, so sort of not to pass through that so I better send him in a setting (special school) where this does not matter, how much he screams sort of.

(Sandra, lines 45-47)

She is positioning her child as not conforming to what the society regards as normal behaviour, which in turn positions the social community around her as

stereotyping a certain type of behaviour as being typical, making her child unfit to this type of behaviour and at risk of being bullied.

I did not want a negative response , for example that they tell me he doesn't want to stay.

(Sandra, lines 45)

This text clearly points out the issue of categorisation and the distinction between what is regarded as normal and as not normal in our society. She was afraid that her child Ian and herself would be left out of the community and be bullied, so in order to avoid that risk she had thought it would be better to send him to a special school where this type of behaviour would be regarded as normal.

Sandra wants her child Ian to be in a situation where it is normal and acceptable to behave in a certain way. She could not imagine him “in a class setting were he is going to sit down” (Sandra, lines 20-21). She is positioning society as not accepting of a behaviour that is different because of lack of knowledge about why her son is behaving in a certain way.

I was always concerned, and that is why I looked at special schools at that time because I would have trouble from the parents, the school, the teacher, you know, because he does not want to stay in class

(Sandra, lines 41-44)

He was being picked on physically and I had to go to the headmaster. But fortunately the situation was handled very delicately from the S.M.T. and that is why I decided not to press charges for the child in question. I mean Tim is so innocent he did not really realise that what was happening was totally wrong. He just casually told the L.S.A. who immediately told the S.M.T. and me about the issue. I think that was a big deal but it calmed down now.

(Dorothy, lines 100-104)

In this instance Dorothy is positioning her son Timothy as an unaware victim of bullying, and herself as a protective mother who needs to take action because of this innocence of her child. The school senior management team (S.M.T.) is being positioned as an authoritarian figure, as someone who has power to make things change.

His ‘innocence’ (Dorothy, line 103) does not make Timothy realise when something is extremely wrong. Her discursive constructions of the discourse

inclusion as relational also give an indication of the relationship between the S.M.T. and the mother. The S.M.T. are positioned as supportive. Dorothy positions herself as rightfully concerned as Timothy is helpless (Dorothy, lines 101-103). However Dorothy still believes that both the S.M.T. and the peers are lacking insight and knowledge and that their behaviours can be improved to include more her child.

There is a contradicting aspect in Sonia's talk because in one instance she is positioning her child as an unaware victim of bullying whilst afterwards she positions him as upset and experiencing a difficult time because of the bullying.

he comes home crying. They tease him a lot.

(Sonia, line 169)

Sonia shows helplessness and frustration in her talk. The mother positions herself as being helpless whilst living in a situation that causes “ a big stress on us” (Sonia, line 109). To emphasise this she uses the very strong words “living hell” to depict the gravity of the situation (Sonia, line 103).

4.7.1.2 Inclusion as a lonely place and as causing a stressful and unwelcoming environment

Another issue that emerges in the parental discourse of inclusion as relational is the feeling of loneliness, the feeling of being the “mum of the child with special needs” (Sandra, line 233). Sandra positions herself as feeling that she is many times pointed at as the mother with the child who is ‘weird’ and that that makes her feel lonely and frustrated. This causes her to position the school community as unwelcome. Instances which have made her think this include when her child was never told to attend birthday parties and when she was not told to contribute to the present for the class teacher.

His L.S.A. said he does play during break but other L.S.A.'s said no he goes round talking to us. And honestly I think it's more this the truth than what he says. Because knowing him, maybe he tries, but he does not do it. I wish I could be in a small hole to see what he is doing. I would like someone to take notice carefully about this issue and tell me more about it.

(Dorothy, lines 44-48)

In the above transcript, Dorothy positions herself as an unaware actor in the school life of her son. She says that she would like to stay in a “hole”, (Dorothy, line 40) and see what her child is doing at school because for her school life is a mystery, as her child says nothing at home. This is a recurrent theme in all parental discourse, being put forward even by Lucille, Sandra and Jack. Their children do not say much about school life and thus they can only get little information from the people around them about what is happening in the life of their children. Her child, Timothy, is positioned as a loner, being “alone during break” (Dorothy, lines 43), as preferring to stay on his own, as lacking communication skills with his peers and as not minding this. This is also a contradictory issue however because in her talk she says that he does try to communicate and have a relationship with his peers indicating that he does mind and wants to have friends his age.

In another interview Dayna positions her child Jake as unhappy at school. At first she was reluctant to say that he is not happy at school, however after I ensured confidentiality she opened up about the difficulties encountered at school by her son.

Mmm, he doesn't come happy to school. Should I say that?

(Dayna, line 13)

Dayna positions the school system as the reason why “ he (Jake) is not managing to cope with the system and so is getting frustrated (Dayna, line 19 -20). In turn the fact that he is not coping at school is causing stress and he is not coming happy to school. The school is not catering for the diverse needs of her child. She positions her child as being frustrated because of the fact that he is not being catered for by the school as “the problem of the subjects as I explained [is causing] too much time wasted at school” (Dayna, lines 42-43).

Lucille positions being identified as falling within the autism spectrum as the reason why her son Ben is often alone, why he does not have many friends and does not like to communicate with peers because “his condition does not allow him to stay with his peers etc.” (Lucille, lines 42-43). It is interesting to note that

in Ben's talk this issue did not emerge. Sandra is also emphasising this when talking about "the fact that a hello and goodbye exists I think that is very good considering that he, emm even at home if someone comes at home he flees from the room" (Sandra, lines 173-175).

Sonia's positions the L.S.A. as a major contributor for her son's positive or negative attitude towards mainstream schooling.

The L.S.A's are not all the same. There were some who were very good, for example last year she used to do so much for him. She used to prepare flashcards for example for the Italian lesson. This year, I mean not everyone has the same character, but the thing I did not like this year about the L.S.A. is that she criticised him a lot.

(Sonia, lines 88-91).

They need to understand her child Samuel because in her talk she continues to emphasise that he is not within the normal stereotype as "he is very sensitive so one needs to be extra careful on what to say to him more than other children (Sonia, lines 94-95).

No not really I tried football but when I tried certain places I had problems. They do not accept me to go with him for supervision and he is not accepted on his own so I could not send him. So I ended up not sending him, so he is missing out on a number of experiences. There still needs to be a lot of improvement in this area. He used to go table tennis but as I said it's up to his mood.

(Sonia, lines 37-41)

Here the community is positioned as responsible for the exclusion of her child in activities outside the school. The child is the victim of an unaccepting society, a society which excludes the child from taking part in activities and thus missing out on a number of life experiences. She also positions herself as needing to be a constant part of the life of her child, of needing to attend to his diverse needs. In her talk she says that the fact that the society is not allowing him to attend a number of activities is one reason why he is withdrawing back from communication and causing her son to spend time in isolation causing stress and frustration.

Sandra wants to carry out talks on autism awareness in order to give a name to the 'weird' behavior exhibited by her son and other children who have the same condition.

Even for example when I came to do the talk on autism awareness (a talk during the morning assembly to all secondary young people) the head told me don't mention the student. I told him, why, he is there, they know he is different, they know he looks weird, on the other hand it's better to give a name to that weirdness.

(Sandra, lines 310-313)

4.7.1.3 Inclusion as being happy, safe and secure

Throughout the parental discourse of inclusion as relational is the need of reassurance, the need to know that their child is safe and protected at school. On a positive note, Lucille positions the school in a very positive way, as a caring place/institution, as one that has made a positive impact on the life of her child Ben and as being open to cater for the diverse needs of the individual children. Her child was very stressed and felt lonely at the new school but with the help of the guidance team Lucille could see a drastic change in his behavior.

My child is very closed, he does not like to confide with me. But after they (guidance teachers) talked to him thank God I have seen a very drastic change.

(Lucille, line 62-63)

She is very happy that her child Ben is happy at school, she positions school as a safe place where he wants to go. In fact he gets sad when summer approaches because he ends up idle at home, not knowing what to do and "even during the weekend he tells me I want to go to school because it's there that I enjoy myself" (Lucille, 22-24).

Jack speaks very positively about the school and positions it as one of the reasons his son has improved so much in his social skills. He positions the primary years of schooling as "a living hell" (Jack, line 19), with his child Andrea "refusing to go to school, [having] tantrums, scratches his mother, shouting"(Jack, line 20). This is opposed to the present situation where he says his son is a happy boy,

always smiling and improving both academically and behaviour wise as he “comes to school happy, then he comes home and does all the homework, it’s the first thing he does at home” (Jack, lines 28-29). He positions the school and the fact that he changed setting as the reason behind this change in the child’s attitude. The fact that the routine has changed makes him less frustrated and “his tantrums have become very rare” (Jack, line 122). Jack is happy “because [his] child is happy” (Jack, line 151).

Dorothy positions her son Timothy as a lonely boy and the only way he has to communicate with young people his age is at school. Thus the school is the only location that can help him improve communication skills with other young people, as “he has no friends outside school” (Dorothy, line 34).

Sandra’s talk points to the fact that she is aware of the limitations of her son, of the fact that “he was not the easiest child on earth” (Sandra, line 43). She was afraid of having Ian having to conform to what is considered as appropriate behaviour at school and the fact that minimal interaction is present is already very positive.

For example they tell me he doesn’t want to stay, he is yelling, he is screaming, he is disrupting the class, so sort of not to pass through that I better send him in a setting (special school) where this does not matter, how much he screams sort of.

(Sandra, lines 45-47)

4.7.1.4 Inclusion as having friends

In her talk Sandra explains that her child has communication limitations

but the fact that a hello and goodbye exists I think that is very good considering that he, emm even at home if someone comes at home he flees From the room, if the door knocks he flees to his room, I mean if there is a party he hides, he does not like people around confusion and panic. The fact that he got used to this system (school), emm I think it is a miracle.

(Sandra, lines 174-178)

The fact that he accepted , and I think he can identify his friends, when we met them outside and they talked to him he smiles, that means, and when

he had photos and I showed them to him he smiled so I believe that he is not gonna build a relationship but there is an interaction.

(Sandra, lines 180-183)

Sandra uses strong words like “miracle” (Sandra, line 178) to emphasise the fact that her child is able to communicate with his peers, she positions her child in a good place.

Unfortunately, Jake is positioned as a loner and as not having friends. Dayna positions herself as concerned, as trying to encourage interaction with other people but to no avail.

I try to encourage him to play with his friends. But he never comes home and mentions friends. He goes to religion catechism but never mentions friends neither.

(Dayna, lines 53-54).

This is also what Sonia constructs through her discourse. Her son Samuel is also positioned as a loner and as never having friends. She pictures a lonely childhood, a child growing up on his own as “in reality he never had any friends, he talks a little but there has been no friends through the years” (Sonia, lines 34-35). Sonia positions his peers as unaware of his condition and her son as not being ‘normal’ and that his peers cannot treat him like all the other classmates.

I think that there is inclusion because even his friends, he meets them at catechism and they tell him “ what did we today at school” they play with him, he plays with them, I mean he is not an isolated child.

(Jack, lines 89-92)

The above transcript from Jack’s interview very evidently show that Jack constructs inclusion as having friends and positions schooling as the place where his son can have friends and learn to communicate with his peers. He is very happy that Andrea has friends and that he can relate to them even after school.

4.7.2 Inclusion as accommodation

4.7.2.1: *Inclusion as catering for diversity*

I mean no one likes to hear negative comments about them repeatedly, even normal people let alone someone who needs constant encouragement. She used to call him lazy as well. It's not a thing to be said. He is very sensitive so one needs to be extra careful on what to say to him more than other children.

(Sonia, lines 92-95)

Sonia positions herself as disappointed with the way the L.S.A. is treating her child, calling him "lazy" (Sonia, line 94) and not helping him achieve his potential at school. She is being judgmental throughout her talk, talking of a school, which is not doing enough for her and her child, which is not ready to make a substantial change to accommodate for the needs of her child, of a school which is letting her down over and over again.

This is also emphasised in Sandra's construct of inclusion as catering for diversity when saying:

I mean, Ian, remained in mainstream, I did not fight for him to pull him out of mainstream because he was getting (benefiting from mainstream socially), I was seeing that he was benefiting, ok the class wasn't big enough but when we talked about it there were changes.

(Sandra, lines 95-97)

Sandra is positioning the school as needing to be flexible, just putting her son in a mainstream setting is not inclusion. She also puts forward the idea of the highly dependent nature of Ian on the L.S.A.. She positions the relationship between the L.S.A. and the parent as an essential one for the well being of the young person. She says that a little consideration on the part of the L.S.A. will reduce much stress to her son and herself. She had instances where Ian was ready to go to school and the school phoned to say the L.S.A. was absent. She would like to be told beforehand in order to prepare him for the change in routine

I appreciate that she sends me at 6 in the morning to tell me I woke up sick rather than having dressed him you know , very small things.

(Sandra, lines 151-152)

Sandra also positions schooling as having isolated Ian within mainstream classrooms at times because “with a lot of absenteeism and so many times they ended up just two in the class so the S.M.T. had to make a decision to join the two classes as it was not healthy for the young people to spend their school days isolated in a classroom with just two pupils” (Sandra, lines 98-100). She is positioning the school as the one that can actually enact inclusive practices. Here she is putting a positive connotation to the school and to the fact that they have been flexible enough to cater for her child and be reasonable in the decisions they made.

Sandra is also positioning herself as active in the school life of her child, always being involved like with the talk on autism awareness, an actor that is involved in decisions by the school staff. She also emphasises the fact that she believes that the teacher is a crucial role in promoting inclusive practices since she is ultimately the one who delivers the policies that are adopted by the school. It is the school policies and practices that should be changed for the child, and not the opposite way round, when it is reasonable enough to do so.

For example when they removed the foundation he had Italian and Physics in the timetable, the first things I said was these have to go. Now these have to go because foundation classroom meant free lessons and free lessons means idle time, and that means time to move around time to move, time to cry.

(Sandra, lines 284-287)

This is also evident in Jack’s interview. Through his interview it emerges that his son Andrea is very happy at school and a big part of this is due to his L.S.A. who is constantly there to support and help him in his daily needs.

Very good, definitely. When there is a problem she tells us about it and we discuss the best solution together. I mean there is no trouble.

(Jack, lines 76-77)

Jack again positions the relationship between himself and the L.S.A. as a very good communicative relationship that enables him to discuss freely what he would like his son to achieve academically through school life. A point he puts forward in his discursive constructions throughout is the need to understand that

his son has limitations. He does not want to live in a fantasy world where everything is ok and there are no differences, he wants to acknowledge these differences and work with the L.S.A. to promote the potential of his child in the best way possible.

Because with all due respect there are certain parents who have children with certain problems and they say they are normal, it's not reality, you are not living in reality. There's no use saying my child has no problems, he has a number of problems that need to be tackled and lived with.

(Jack, lines 100 – 103)

In his interview he emphasises the fact that he knows that his child has challenges because of his condition, and he is not one of those parents who will dismiss them but he wants to work to improve the academic skills that can help his son live an independent life.

Jack shows a very positive attitude towards school. He is happy that his child Andrea is finally happy and that makes the whole family happy as he points out that “there's no use if he comes to school unhappy, I mean it's not good for him and neither for us at home because after all if you have a frustrated child he will not learn” (Jack, lines 47-48).

But I repeat we saw a big improvement and we feel it.

(Jack, line 122)

On the other hand, Sonia is constantly pointing out the missed opportunities her son Samuel had to endure because of his condition and because of the fact that the society was not catering for him. She shows her anger for not being allowed to supervise her child during out of school activities but then not allowing her son to participate on his own. As discussed above, she is deeply frustrated by what society has to offer to cater for diversity and move beyond academics that are beyond her son's capability, why is nothing being done? How can she be involved to make things better? Why is she not allowed to make things better for her son? She is judgmental about a society who is not open to difference, who talks about catering for diversity but then does not act in favour of it.

Self-Reflexive Stop

Even though I chose to group the discursive constructions that emerged from stage 1 which were then grouped into four wider discourses under different subheadings these were sometimes problematic as a number of constructions fit into more than one heading.

One case in point is when Dayna talks about the idle time and the fact that her son is not being catered for as should. I discussed this issue under the subheading inclusion as catering for diversity but it fits well as well under the heading inclusion as academics beyond ability because Dayna is positioning the school as not catering for diversity and her son as finding school subjects difficult to comprehend.

4.7.2.2: Inclusion as academics beyond ability

I don't say in a special school he would have gained nothing, they would have been targeting other things rather than academics

(Sandra, lines 36-37)

Here Sandra is making an evident distinction between mainstream schooling and special schools. She positions mainstream schooling as targeting academic subjects that at times can be beyond the ability of all the young people, while special schools targeting more social and life skills. Here she is differentiating the type of skills acquired depending on the setting.

His time in mainstream is now ending, obviously he is not academically good enough to continue into mainstream like pathways etc., we did not even consider it because it would have been too much to ask because for him it is impossible because the ways how it is not adapted for him, so sort of the only option was a resource centre.

(Sandra, lines 72-76)

Sandra is positioning herself as a victim of a system where her child Ian will be given no option once he finishes secondary schooling as they are beyond his academic ability. As his parents, they have no choice on where they can opt to send him after secondary schooling. She is a worried mother who fears for the future of her child. She is putting her son in a position where he is not academically good enough to attend any of the provisions catered for young people identified as having a disability after secondary schooling. In her talk she positions the educational system as inadequate, as not offering any options for her child or any young person with difficulties like her son. She is afraid of the unknown, of the fact that once secondary schooling finishes her child will be left with no choice. She and her husband are the decision makers, as her child does not have the ability to decide for himself.

As discussed above, Dayna exposes the issue that her child is spending too much idle time at school “doing nothing, he is attending a number of lessons for subjects that are beyond him and he is taking nothing from the lesson” (Dayna, lines 27-29). She is frustrated about the fact that academic subjects are beyond his ability and nothing is being done to change the situation. Also she uses an angry tone when explaining that her word is not being taken into consideration as she states that:

Yes we talked but I mean they told me nothing. I mean he is losing a lot eh. Because I mean, I am sending him to school for all these hours but maybe he is gaining one or two hours of real work.

(Dayna, lines 31-34)

She went to school to try and change the way her child is being accommodated for and being catered for at but to no avail. She positions school staff as not considerate as her thoughts are not given the necessary weight and thus she believes her child is at a disadvantage at school.

This is quite a debated issue in the parental discourse. Sandra, Jack and Sonia are more interested in having their child accommodated for, happy and building simple interpersonal relationships with their peers. Their aim is for their children to learn skills that can help them lead an independent life. Academics are not a

major issue. They are all pro active at different degrees, coming to school, preparing talks, going to meetings to ensure that their children can get the best possible education.

For me that is what is important, that my child is happy, that's what I want for him.

(Jack, line 46)

For example, Sandra is a very proactive mother, a mother who has “talked with professionals” and discussed issues thoroughly before coming to a decision to send her child to mainstream (Sandra, lines 63 – 65).

Lucille shows great reassurance in the support Ben gets from the L.S.A.

He seems to be very happy with his L.S.A., from the first year he came he was very happy. In fact he prefers it here than when he was in primary school. He comes and finishes all his homework after school.

(Lucille, lines 6-7)

The fact that Ben's L.S.A. Berta is there to help him through the day makes Lucille feel at ease, she knows her child is in good hands. She positions the relationship between her and the L.S.A. as a good communicative relationship, and that makes it more feasible to discuss issues related to the academic progress of her son. Without that communication and the adaptations she does her son would find it difficult to cope academically with mainstream curricula.

No I think it was a very positive experience. The teachers helped a lot, the L.S.A.s have been very helpful.

(Lucille, lines 31-32)

Self-Reflexive Stop

Here I decided to put inclusion as *one-size-fits-all* under the wide discourse inclusion as the need to assimilate in pre-existing policies. I did this because I believe that this mechanism is constrained by the international and local policies that govern mainstream schools. Having said this I do believe that it would have also fitted in inclusion as accommodation due to the fact that this mechanism is not accommodating for the diverse needs of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. This can also be said for academics beyond ability which also fits well in both inclusion as accommodation and inclusion as the need to assimilate in pre-existing policies.

4.7.3 Inclusion as the need to assimilate in pre-existing policies

4.7.3.1 Inclusion as a one-size-fits-all mechanism constrained by higher policies

Sonia is positioning her child Samuel as not being catered for as he should because the L.S.A. that is assigned to him has to be shared with more than one student, and thus needs to cater for the different needs of the young people under her care as

The students the L.S.A. is shared with. He is A.D.H.D. so he has different needs to be catered for. How can the L.S.A. cope with both of them? It's difficult. He is full time but shared. Sometimes he is on his own or else sometimes a different L.S.A. helps him.

(Sonia, line 81-83)

Her son needs to fit to the present policies regarding the assignment of an L.S.A. In this text Sonia puts the school in an authoritarian position and herself as a helpless actor in the situation. She wanted her son to be given assessments instead of exams because they are beyond his ability but the headmaster did not agree to this even though she “suggested that he has assessment sessions in Form 1 but nothing happened?” (Sonia, lines 129-130). She also says the educational system puts the teacher in a difficult position because of the large number of students in her class, and the fact that this leads to difficulties when catering for

diversity. The young people are just a number in the class and she has to adopt a *one-size-fits-all* approach.

I mean certain points are difficult to carry out when you are in a class, as the lesson has to keep going. I mean they are not a very big class but they all have different needs.

(Sonia, lines 79-80)

Sonia sees herself as a stressed actor because of the examinations, which were imposed on her child from the headmaster and the present *one-size-fits-all* educational school system.

The headmaster had said that he thinks he is capable but for me its just stress, a big stress.

(Sonia, lines 192-193)

She wants an assessment-based exam as she thinks this would reduce the stress. Also she is unhappy with the fact that the I.E.P. is not reviewed and that it is only done once a year, so “my suggestion the I.E.P. that should be done more than once during the year” (Sonia, line 190). She positions herself as helpless when it comes to decision-making.

This issue of the *one-size-fits-all* situations is also discussed by another parent. In her interview Dayna positions herself as a lost actor in the school life of her child because she is sending her child Jake to school to learn, but she believes he is not gaining enough. She is a passive actor in the decisions taken for her child by the school. She positions the school as responsible for all the wasted time her child is having at school. On the other hand, she positions her child Jake as a powerless frustrated actor in this situation making schooling for him a negative experience.

Sandra talks about the issue that she has given up on the possibility that her child Ian can fit in the present educational system, as it is too much for the child. She does not believe that any minor changes can be done to make him fit in the current *one-size-fits-all* situation.

Apart from the provisions, it is not enough to have a good L.S.A., it's the mentality towards the child with disability. On the other hand, I believe that there are children that they, like when I say Ian is not good for

pathways there are children who even in their early years in mainstream they are not coping, it is not good for them because you need to change too much (to the educational system).

(Sandra, lines 80-84)

Sandra blames the attitude of people towards what inclusion means for them apart from the system, as she “think[s] there needs to change the mentality from above if we want to do more for this child” (Sandra, lines 102-103). She emphasises the fact that putting a young person in mainstream classes just in the name of inclusion will benefit no one; on the other hand it will hinder him. She believes it is the mentality that needs to be shifted.

Sandra positions her son Ian as an inadequate actor that

would never fit in mainstream because it is too overwhelming for them, the system is not adequate for them, but I think even if you change the system these children will never be able for mainstream, because you have a structure, it is very difficult.

(Sandra, lines 81-83)

In her talk she says that some young people will never be able to fit in mainstream, no matter what provisions the system might do to try and fit them in. Thus the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are positioned as outsiders, as not being able to fit in the current *one-size-fits-all* educational system and cannot assimilate in the current educational policies.

4.7.4 Inclusion as a way towards an independent living

4.7.4.1 Inclusion as helping towards an independent future

One thread that dominated the discourse of the parents is the fear of the future, what will happen to their child once they will not be able to take care of them anymore?

Jack wants his child Andrea to learn to be independent because he knows that one day he will have to fend for himself in this world.

He needs to learn to be independent because you know I'm not going to live forever, and his mum will not last forever neither. Someday he will not have us anymore, so he needs to learn to live by his own.

(Jack, lines 118-120)

He positions himself as a worried parent and wants to be proactive to make a change and try to help him be independent in everyday simple skills "he comes with me at the garage and he tells me come on daddy give me the hammer so I can help you with the nails" (Jack, lines 130-131).

For him it's a big accomplishment that he prepared some food for his dad and his dad ate it and liked it. For him it's something that encourages him. I told him again that he had to try and go on his own.

(Jack, lines 53-55)

Jack here is positioning the school as a tool in promoting independent living. The school is encouraging and helping the future of his child. The school is not only aiding in academic subjects but also in social and everyday life skills which are extremely important for the parent as even when "he (Jack's son Andrea) meets them at catechism and they tell him what they did on the day at school, they play with him, he plays with them, I mean he is not an isolated child (Jack, lines 89-92). The parents are the sole caregivers of the child. Jack is a worried actor because he knows he will not live forever and he does not want his son not to be able to fend for himself.

This issue has been a recurrent discourse for all the parents, the fear of the unknown, the fear that society will not provide for their child once they are not able to take care of them anymore. The society is positioned as only helping when it comes to the stereotypical normal child.

If you talk to him he'll get frustrated, always arguing to miss school. I try to explain to him that school is important if he wants to find a good job but it's no use I guess. I think the school should include more sports, shows on the stage.

(Dayna, lines 68-70)

Here, Dayna is emphasising again the need for schooling for an independent living. Her child Jake is positioned as a lost actor without the guidance of the L.S.A. The L.S.A. is indispensable for the school life of the child because without her he would be lost and cannot cope with the system, a system that is not helping him towards an independent living. Here there is a contradiction on the fact that she believes that the L.S.A. is needed for her child to cope at school but at the same time she positions him as unhappy, as not showing his emotions, as not wanting to go to school indicating that something is not working in this relationship.

This is also pointed out by Dorothy when she says

Sometimes I try to let him be more independent but then he ends up with missing books. Today he ended up with a copy and he got so angry at home. I believe that if it was his fault than he should have it. I check his homework but they tell me to be independent as well.

(Dorothy lines 88-90)

Dorothy is showing her worry and frustration about the fact that she would like to let her son be more independent because she worries for his future but at the same time she fears that his work will not be done if she does not help him. She also points out in her talk that she is positioning school as needing to aid in helping her son learn skills for an independent future. She is emphasising the need for her as a parent to let go of some of her worries and let her child work on his own but then if he does not do his work appropriately he will get reprimanded. In her talk she shows a level of contradictions between when she says that the school wants the child to be independent but at the same time does nothing to help with this transition.

Table 4:4 offers a summary of the different social actors and the action orientation and related subject positions that are mentioned in the parental discourse.

Social Actors	Subject Position	Action Orientation
Parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rightfully concerned mother. • Sole caregiver of her child. • Active actor in the life of her child. • Unaware, powerless actor. • Aware of the limitations of his son. • Helpless, worried, anxious and concerned. • Stressed, unhappy. • Assuming his peers need to understand the situation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal discourse positions mother as helpless and frustrated because of how society is hindering the well being of the young person.
Young Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unaware victim of bullying. • Victim of bullying. • Powerless and unhappy. • Loner and not having any friends. • Victim of the educational system. • Never fitting in mainstream school. • Not conforming to society. • Autistic young person behaving in a weird way. • Innocent boy. • Different and not conforming to what society regards as normal behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship between the young person and his peers is viewed as a social arrangement where the young person is the victim and his peers are the bullies.

Peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwelcoming. • Welcoming and helpful • Creating a hostile environment. • Perpetrators of bullying. • Lacking awareness and knowledge about what autism entails. • Need of peer mediation to help them understand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social arrangement that can hinder or improve inclusion in mainstream for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum.
Schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritarian and powerful figure. • Offering support to parents. • Positive schooling. • Lacking insight in the condition of autism. • Needing to be flexible. • Tool to promote independent living. • Not catering for diverse needs. • Needing to be more flexible. • Target on academic subjects whilst special schooling targeting on social skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schooling discourse positions the school as the tool to promote or hinder inclusive practices.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not accepting of behaviour of a child with autism. • Culprit for exclusion of the child in community activities. • Reason for withdrawal of child in community activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social discourse where the society is to blame for not trying hard enough to help the young person fit in mainstream.

Table 4:4 showing a summary of the different social actors and the action orientation and related subject positions that are mentioned in the parental discourses.

4.8 Stage 5: Parents' Practice Position

What parents are prepared to do and not do as a result of the discursive constructions and positioning within their talk is referred to as their practice position.

The wide discourse inclusion as relational positions the subjects as social actors that are ultimately affected by their actions, and by the actions of the social actors around them. The young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum will be affected by their actions and by the actions of their peers. They will also be affected by other member within the school community because being part of a social relationship will imply that whatever one of the parties does has an effect, beneficial or not on the other party.

Self-Reflexive Stop:

At this stage I was very attentive not to give my input when the parents were describing situations that happened in school. Whether I agreed or not with how Dorothy handled the bullying situation I have no right or am in no position to be able to give my opinion or have my opinion interfere with the analytical process. I tried to ensure my detachment in all the situations.

Sonia is describing how her child Samuel can be misunderstood as the “worst worst thing” (Sonia, line 156) so as to justify her action of not allowing him to go anywhere after school. Sonia works hard in the text to convince the reader of the impact this social interaction is having on her. In her discourses there is not only the mention of the feelings of her child Samuel himself, her focus is on the impact on the whole family, she is trying to give a wider picture to the school situation saying that this not only impacts his school life but also effects the family at home as it causes stress to her which in turn effects the whole family.

School has acted in Sonia's case by “giving the other child a day exclusion” (Sonia, line 145). It is the responsibility of the S.M.T. to make sure that every young person is safe at school. Sonia as a parent on the other reacted to the

bullying episode by coming to school. Sonia has a number of contradictions in the interview text. Even though she explains that the S.M.T. acted fast and excluded the young person and dealt with the situation, in another part of the text she explains that “you don’t find people to understand you” (Sonia, line 155) even though the S.M.T. did respond in a way that shows understanding. There is a mismatch suggesting a miscommunication. The school is demonstrating a degree of understanding but this does not seem to be acknowledged sufficiently by the parent.

On the other hand Dorothy is very satisfied with the way the S.M.T. acted towards the bullying episode her son encountered. In fact she explained that even though it was a very delicate situation everyone handled it with great professionalism.

But fortunately the situation was handled very delicately from the SMT and that is why I decided not to press charges for the child in question.
(Dorothy, lines 101-102)

To point out the severity of the episode she explained that she could have gone to the police but because of the way it was handled at school there was no need to do that. This shows that she was satisfied with how things were handled. Sonia also says that because her child Samuel is so innocent and does not have proper social skills it will cause him to be more vulnerable to the bullies.

That is why I’m afraid to send him certain places because he is very innocent. And sometimes other people don’t really believe in his innocence, they think he is finding excuses.
(Sonia, lines 151-154)

I think he is not managing to cope with the system and so is getting frustrated. It has always been a problem.
(Dayna, lines 20-21)

Here, Dayna is putting the blame on the educational system because of the way his son is behaving. The fact that the educational system is being positioned as not tailor-made for the needs of her child makes her child feel frustrated and thus in turn behave by having an inappropriate behaviour in the classroom. The S.M.T. did not enact her suggestions to remove subjects for Jake as they are

constrained by higher policies within the Department of Education whereby the L.S.A. is shared and thus cannot leave the other student by himself or herself. She acted by going to school to discuss the idea of removing a number of subjects that are beyond the child's ability and using the time slot for "extra time with lessons of Maths, Maltese and English" (Dayna, line 32). The S.M.T. in turn acted out by dismissing her worries of having her child spending so much idle time and leaving matters as they were in the beginning.

Jake is being positioned by Dayna as not happy at school and this makes him act out especially at home by arguing, being frustrated, having inappropriate behaviour and wanting to miss school. This has made the mum try to push him to participate in sports but to no avail. This in turn has a ripple effect on her child and he acts out by trying to play truant.

Jack also positions his child Andrea in primary schooling as unhappy so "he used to refuse to go to school, tantrums, scratches his mother, shouting" (Jack, lines 19-20). This is the opposite of what is happening now at secondary level where he then says that having him change school made him change his attitude towards school and now "my child is happy, likes school" (Jack, line 46). Andrea is no longer showing an inappropriate behaviour in the classroom. Having positioned Andrea in a happy place now means that he will want to talk about what he did at school, carry out activities that are consolidated by him and create relationships with his peers that go beyond the school grounds, as he also has a simple interaction with his peers at catechism and then "he comes and tells me what he did at school" (Jack, lines 35-36).

Moreover Jack positions himself as a caring father, thus driving his son to catechism

I have to drive him to catechism because he loves it, it's important for him that his daddy came with him to catechism.

(Jack lines 111 -112)

Sonia positions Samuel's peers as bullies that act by teasing Samuel and making fun of him especially during break. The place, which should be a safe and serene environment, is becoming the complete opposite. Also, Dorothy says her child

Timothy is a loner and thus she saw him on his own during break time the few times she visited school. However she then states that he is still attached to his primary school friends and has even gone to meet them in the previous weeks, so this shows that there was a relationship with his peers at primary level. This is quite a contradictory issue in her construction of the discourse inclusion as relational because if there was no type of relationship with his peers because he prefers to stay with adults than he would not miss his primary school friends now that he is at secondary school.

He is still attached to his primary school (student is currently in Form 2).
He misses them

(Dorothy, lines 16-18)

Dorothy puts forward the contradiction between what the S.M.T tells the parents with what actually happens. The school emphasises the need for Dorothy to leave her child do certain tasks like prepare his school bag on his own to move towards a more independent lifestyle but then he gets scolded because he misses books. So there is a contradiction between the need for independence with the fact that the school acts by scolding Timothy when he forgets something as he “ended up with a copy” (Dorothy, lines 89).

Having positioned her child Samuel as “not normal” (Sonia, line 26), Sonia implies that the L.S.A. needs to treat him in a different way. She is not happy with the fact that she calls him lazy and that she scolds him because she wants him to pay attention. She believes that when the L.S.A. notices that he is getting restless, or for example he is getting fed up, he should be given certain time out breaks. She wants the L.S.A. to change her present attitude and reinforce positive behaviour. Her child is positioned as having subjects beyond him which in turn cause him to act out by having inappropriate behaviour out of frustration, mood swings, banging on the table, shouting etc. He is showing his annoyance by these actions because he does not know how to communication his boredom in any other way.

He does not know how to communicate effectively to tell me he is annoyed. That is the problem.

(Sonia, lines 74-75)

Again having positioned her son as a loner, Sonia wanted to help her son by taking him to football or other outside school activities but he needed supervision, and she was not allowed to attend with him and so he missed out on a lot of opportunities.

But I mean how much time can he spend isolated. He tries to make friends, even though he withdraws back again. You know he has his limitations, He never had a relationship with a friend that lasts. He talks with you in a particular moment but that's it.

(Sonia, lines 175-177)

Sonia compares the actions of the previous L.S.A. with his current one, saying that the previous one had a character more adapted to her child, "she used to prepare flashcards for the Italian lesson" (Sonia, line 103) and not criticise him whilst this year it has been difficult (Sonia, lines 88-91). She emphasises his panic episodes explaining that when something is out of the normal routine he finds it hard to follow instructions and "panics a lot. Even this morning he told me can we skip school today, that he does not know what should be done" (Sonia, lines 112). The mother positions herself as not being given the opportunity to take any decisions regarding the well-being of her child at school. Even though she wanted a number of subjects to be removed because they were beyond her child's ability this did not take place. She is very involved and came prepared for the interview showing me worksheets given to her by the C.D.A.U. (Child Development Assessment Unit), showing materials she gathers from online websites etc.

She continues explaining that the fact there her child gets low marks in his exam gets him discouraged, he does not want to study, he starts to feel that he is less than the others because now he is grown up enough to realise that his marks are below those of his peers. "When he sees his marks and realises he did not pass from a number of exams he gets discouraged" (Sonia, lines 132 – 133). She positions her son's peers as perpetrators of and her son the victim. He was punched and hit in the eye three times "He used to hit him physically. Once he

gave you a punch, once three punches in his eye” (Sonia, lines 143-144). He was also verbally bullied being called names and told he smells and does not wash. They also tease him because he is dark coloured and he ends up going home every time crying which is putting a strain on how he looks at school.

I had a lot of problems this year, a lot of problems. They used to tease him brown because he is a bit dark coloured, they tease him a lot. They tease him, you don't wash

(Sonia, line 167-168)

His peers would not even sit next to him in the school transport coming back home. In return her child started banging on the table to show his frustration with what had happened.

Sandra positions herself as a proactive mum, as wanting to know what's best for her child and decide in an informed way. Thus, in her talk she describes the process she and her husband carried out to decide where to send their child. They visited special schools and mainstream. She explained that Ian “was still using a nappy, non-verbal and having tantrums” (Sandra, lines 19-20). The mother explains that all decisions were taking with a team of professionals. They would decide if he would remain in mainstream depending on how he coped because at that time he was passing through a “stage of depression and severe tantrums” (Sandra, lines 63-65).

When trying to carry out a transition to another school during the week he did not accept it and became extremely disruptive and so this had to stop.

In order for Ian to be in mainstream he would need to have a tailor-made programme for him, and in fact that is what happened. And he remained mainstream. Luckily he always had great support, when he had better support, (in different years) he did better and moved more

(Sandra, lines 28-29)

Sandra puts a positive connotation to mainstream schooling.

But in reality it served that he became contained, he knew he could not scream, he had enough support in class not to scream so he learned not to

scream, he learned not to do certain things that are not socially acceptable, even though he does them at home but at school he does not do them
(Sandra lines 47-50)

The Senior Management Team was proactive when absenteeism was hindering inclusion for Ian as he was ending up alone in class, and “S.M.T. had to make a decision to join the two classes as it was not healthy for the young people to spend their school days isolated in a classroom with just two pupils” (Sandra, lines 98-100).

Sandra explains that dumping a decision on the parent is very traumatising, there needs to be discussion between all parties involved on what has to be done

The mummy, emm, was shocked, traumatised, I don't know how it resolved but she was very bad for a couple of days
(Sandra, lines 106-107)

Having positioned the relationship between the stakeholders involved as a social arrangement, there needs to be a joint effort between the L.S.A., mother and the child. When the young person is learning a new skill like tying his own shoe lace she needs to be patient and let him try on his own and not do it herself because

I am in a hurry etc etc so he cannot do it himself, I do it for him so we hurry up , I mean if I know the teacher is working on tucking of the clothes, I, at home will stop at dressing up to help him, he must do the tucking himself so that he learns to do it at home as well. I mean also if I start a new system at home it needs to continue at school.
(Sandra, lines 126-129)

She also focuses on the need to link school with home. She emphasises that the L.S.A. and herself work together so that her child is taught about boundaries, what is acceptable and what not and how to behave in certain situations

Of course, continuation at home is very important, imagine if he comes at home and snaps and the miss (L.S.A.) at school works for the whole day not to snap, I cannot go home and say its ok nothing happens if he snaps.
(Sandra, lines 121-123)

Ian has great difficulty when it comes to communicating and instilling a relationship with others, thus the fact that through mainstreaming school his son is

positioned as acting by interacting with simple smiles, hellos and bye is already a big achievement for her. The fact that he does not flee when there are his peers around him like he used to do at home is already a lot. The other parents are on the other hand being positioned as excluding Sandra, not inviting her to activities or parties. The mother is not sure whether it is because they knew that he would not attend or whether they were afraid that he would attend. Even when gathering money for the teacher's present they would show this distinction by not asking her because they assumed she would give them a present on her own.

But they did not invite him, not even me they did not ask me listen we are going, feel free to come, feel free not to come. I used to say, but what does my child have so bad that he would not get invited.

(Sandra, lines 218-219)

even for example they are gathering money for the presents not emm they come over and in primary they would say you are going to give them a present on your own. Like you are the mummy of the child with special need so you are not supposed to contribute with the group, I tell them no I want to contribute with you.

(Sandra, 230-233)

Sandra positions her child as an outsider, but in order for this to change awareness is needed. In fact she was the one who acted by going to the headmaster to carry out a talk about autism awareness. She also told the headmaster that she wanted to name her child during the talk because his peers knew he was different, "it is better to give a name to that type of behaviour" (Sandra, line 312).

Being a concerned parent Lucille also decided to actually go to school and talk to the L.S.A. to see how her child behaves at school. She knows how he acts at home like for example when his brother teases him but at school it is a mystery. She did check the situation with the L.S.A. but she dismissed her worries. However that did not seem to calm her as she emphasises the fact that his condition "does not allow him to stay with his peers etc. I mean he likes to stay alone" (Lucille, lines 42-43). Lucille also talks about her child being anxious and that causes him to react by crying, being anxious, and "panicking a lot during the exams" (Lucille, line 51). She says that the guidance teachers handled it very well, talking to him and suggesting ways how he can deal with the situation in a

more positive way. The actions of the guidance teachers were instrumental to help Ben in his daily school life, which in turn aided in a more serene atmosphere at home. Table 4: 5 summarises the social actors and their practice position as seen through the parental discourse

Social Actor	Practice Position
Young Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arguing, having atypical behaviour, screaming, banging on the table, refusing to go to school and being restless. • Idle time doing nothing. • Physically bullied – being hit in the eye and punches in the face. • Verbally bullied – being called names like dirty. • Cooking and doing sports. • Smiling and waving to peers outside school. • Staying alone during break time.
Parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive mum – going to school to check what is happening • Powerful persuader on putting a wider picture to the school situation. • Pushing the child to participate in sports. • Not allowing the child to go anywhere on his own. • Not able to take decisions. • Working with professional. • Not being invited to parties or included in activities. • Carrying out talks about awareness on autism.
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excluding perpetrators of bullying. • Changing classes because of absenteeism. • Dealing with the bullying episodes in a very delicate way.

Table 4: 5 showing a summary of the practice positions given to different social actors in the parents' discourses.

4.9: Stage 6 – Parents’ Subjectivity

This section traces the consequence that taking up various subject positions will have on the participants’ subjective experience. The subjective experiences communicated through the interviews are highlighted in bold in this section, thus making them easier to comprehend.

In her discourse Dayna exposes the issue that her child Jake is spending too much idle “wasted time” at school, and thus is wasting time instead of promoting his academic skills (Dayna, line 29). She is **frustrated** about the fact that he is not being catered for, and that nothing is being done to change the situation saying that “they talked but they told me nothing” (Dayna, line 32). She is also **angry** that her word is not being taken into consideration. She is a **concerned mother**, going to school to try and change the way her child is being catered for but to no avail. Her thoughts are not given the necessary weight because of the constraints of the current educational policies that do not give enough flexibility in the curriculum, and thus she believes her child is at a disadvantage at school. All parents are **pro active**, coming to school, preparing talks, going to meetings to ensure that their children can get the best possible education.

Sandra, Jack and Sonia are more interested in having their child happy and building simple interpersonal relationships with their peers. Their aim is for the child to learn skills that can help them lead an independent life. Academics are not a major issue but rather social skills are felt to be a priority.

Sonia is constantly pointing out the missed opportunities her son had to endure because of his condition and because of the fact that society was not catering for him. She shows her **anger and frustration** for not being allowed to supervise her child during out of school activities but then not allowing her son to participate on his own. She is deeply **frustrated** by what society has to offer to cater for diversity, why is nothing being done and how can she be involved to make things better? She is **judgmental** about a society that is not open to difference, which talks about catering for diversity but then does not act in favour of it. She is a **powerful persuader**; she tries to tell us in depth about her feelings and how her

life is a “living hell” (Sonia, line 103) because of this negative social interaction between her child and his peers who bully him.

The mother feels **helpless** living in a situation, which causes **stress and anxiety** not only to her child but also to herself and the rest of the family. She uses words of **disappointment** for the fact that she does not believe the S.M.T. are doing enough to cater for the situation in the way she deems fit. She also feels disappointed with the way the L.S.A. is treating her child, calling him “lazy” and not helping him achieve his potential at school (Sonia, lines 94-95).

This issue of **helplessness** also emerges in Dayna’s discourse - because she wants to do something to make the school life of her child better, but at the same time she does not have the power to do so, of not being heard, of wanting a change that never arrives. She is sad that her child “hates” (Dayna, line 17) school, that the place where he should be catered and accommodated towards moving towards an independent living is actually hindering him to do so.

Dorothy shows the same **frustration** and feeling of **powerlessness** about not knowing what her child is going through at school. She says in her interview that she “wish(es) I could be in a small hole to see what he is doing (Dorothy, line 47) and see what her child is doing at school because for her school life is a mystery as her child says nothing at home. This is a recurrent theme with all parents because their children do not say much about school life, and thus the parents can only get a little information from the people around them about what is happening in the life of their children.

Another issue which emerges in the parental discourse is the feeling of **loneliness**, the feeling of being the mum of the “child that has autism” (Sandra, line 232). Sandra feels that she is pointed at many times as the mother with the child who is weird, and that that makes her feel lonely and frustrated. This causes her to feel unwelcome and not belonging to the school community. Instances which have made her think this include the times when her child was never told to attend birthday parties and when she was not told to contribute to the present for the teacher (Sandra, lines 210-212).

Another theme that is constantly present throughout the parental discourse is the need of **reassurance**, the need to know that their child is safe and protected at school. Sonia is afraid that the bullying episodes will not end, on the contrary she is realising that as her son Samuel gets older the episodes are becoming harsher. Dorothy and Sonia are **afraid** that their child will not tell them what is happening at school and so they will be unaware and helpless to do something.

Lucille on the contrary is very happy that her child is “happy” at school (Lucille, line 6), and that he feels **safe** and wants to go to school. She shows great reassurance in the support he gets from the L.S.A. stating that “it was a very good year with the L.S.A” (Lucille, line 29). The fact that she is there to help him through the day makes her feel at ease, she knows her child is in good hands. She feels there is a good communicative relationship between herself and the L.S.A and that makes it more feasible to discuss issues related to her son. Sandra is also **happy** with the positive impacts that mainstream schooling had on Ian.

This is also evident in Jack’s discourse, his son is very happy at school and a big part of this is due to his L.S.A. who is constantly there to support and help him in his daily needs. Both Jack and Sandra want the reader to understand that as a parent they are **aware of the limitation** of their children. Jack does not want to live in a fantasy world where everything is ok and there are no differences, he wants to acknowledge these differences and work with the L.S.A. to promote the potential of his child in the best way possible.

There’s no use saying my child has no problems, he has a number of problems that need to be tackled and lived with. You tell me we have a lot of problems near others, I say no but the little we have we need to live with.

(Jack, lines 100-104)

Again, another thread that dominated the discourse of this parent is the **fear of the future**, what will happen to his child once he will not be able to take care of him anymore? He wants his child to learn to be independent because he knows that one day he will have to fend for himself in this world.

He needs to learn to be independent because you know I'm not going to live forever, and his mum will not last forever neither. Someday he will not have us anymore, so he needs to learn to live by his own.

(Jack, 118-120)

All parents are worried actors and want their children to learn life skills to live an independent future.

4.10 Learning Support Assistants' Stage 3 and 4: Action Orientation and Subject Positioning

Here I present again stage 3 and stage 4 of the six-stage analysis for the L.S.A.s' semi-structured interviews. Stage 3, action orientation is presented alongside stage 4. Again, the discursive constructions are presented with verbatim quotes from the transcripts to help illustrate the action orientations and subject positioning stemming from the discursive constructions.

Self Reflexive Stop

Here I need to account for the fact that the choice of verbatim quotes is a representative of what I believe to be the most influential words in the text of the different semi-structured interviews. However there could be other researchers who would have opted to portray other quotations as they deem them more important. However I tried to portray texts, which I believed where best to explain the discursive constructions that the different stakeholders wanted to put forward in their talk.

4.10.1 Inclusion as relational

4.10.1.1 Inclusion as teamwork/lack of it

Berta positions the class teacher as needing to put more effort in communicating with her in order to provide a more inclusive environment as she believes that "more teamwork definitely, because since in secondary school there are a lot of teachers its difficult. It's a difficult system as it is" (Berta, lines 64-65).

Rose, who positions the relationship between herself and the other stakeholders as a social relationship emphasises teamwork as an essential factor when working with the parents, also accentuates this. There needs to be a link between home and schooling in order to provide a continuum for the young person.

Yes because I wanted , I saw him at school but I wanted to get to know him better. Ian is quite a severe case of autism requiring one to one attention constantly. It was very effective. She (his mother) gave me a lot of hints, and I also saw how he behaves outside of the school at home. I also discovered a number of abilities, for example that he is capable of dressing up on his own, here I would not be able to see them.

(Rose, lines 8-13)

Mia emphasises this as well when she explains the need of a balance in the interference of the parents at decision-making level. Mia positions herself as having the leeway to decide on the academic material for her student with a helping hand by the parents. They discuss issues together but do not impose decisions on Mia. The parents are positioned as being very reasonable and helpful in the decision-making process.

I think I was never so happy with a student as much as this year. Because Andrea obeys, he is such a sweet boy and his parents, they don't, emm they give me lee way on what to do during school time. I mean they only interfere when it is necessary for example topics, lessons it's all up to me.

(Mia, lines 16-19)

Another important aspect on teamwork is the relationship between the young person and their L.S.A. This is positioned as ever changing, as an important aspect in a positive communicative relationship and as needed to provide a serene environment for the young person. Moreover Alice positions herself as the sole caregiver for catering for the diverse need of Jake is hers alone.

I would say it is the main role really.

(Alice, line 104)

Alice positions the relationship between the L.S.A. and the teacher as a problematic one, causing friction between her and the teacher. Miscommunication and lack of compromise often ends up in causing a stressful

situation for Jake. She positions the school as lacking time where the teacher and the L.S.A. can discuss issues related to the young person outside the lesson. She positions the school as a lonely place, a place where there is no time to discuss issues with colleagues and that causes her to feel alone because teamwork is lacking.

I have asked the teacher please can you write them on the board so that emm he can participate with the rest of the class in taking the notes. Sometimes I have to take the notes for him so that he is not left out because he cannot cope with writing the notes being dictated to him.

(Alice, lines 41 -45)

Emm honestly I had to remind teachers more then once about certain issues to cater for the student so really they are not helping me a lot in a good way..... So you know what I mean, I dont find a lot of inclusive practices being actually practiced in school.

(Alice lines 65-72)

Sophie confirms this construct in the discourse of inclusion as relational by stating that she would like to have a lesson a week where she can communicate and discuss issues related to inclusive practices with the subject teacher. As she pointed out, she positions herself as not knowledgeable in all subjects and needs to be informed beforehand what the lesson will entail, so that she can research and make necessary adaptations for her student beforehand.

4.10.1.2 Inclusion as being happy and secure or unhappy

In one of her constructions of the wide discourse inclusion as relational, Berta positions the young person Ben as being happy, secure and feeling welcome at school. She positions his peers to be a major contributor to this feeling. On the other hand Sera positions Timothy as a social actor with limited communication abilities within the school peer community. The school is positioned as the only place where the young person can make new friends and acquaintances, as he does not attend any other place after school. This is also due to the fact that Timothy is positioned as a loner.

Mia moves a step forward and in her interview emphasises the positive notion of socialisation at school, and how that is effecting even her student Andrea's social relations outside the school grounds, including when he meets again his peers.

Yes, during lessons the children love him and they talk to him. He associated people with particular instances. He will always tell you the same thing.

(Mia, lines 50-51)

Alice positions her student Jake as feeling happy when he achieves small goals, however she still positions him as being lonely, lacking interpersonal skills and very shy.

He is a very quiet boy, he does not like to mix with other young people, he likes to sit by himself on the bench a lot during break.

(Alice, lines 113-114)

On the other hand Sophie talks about the fact that Samuel is unhappy and not wanting to go to school, as feeling frustrated and annoyed during the lessons because they are beyond his academic ability. She also says that the lack of interpersonal skills causes problems with his peers. This is because his peers are unaware of why he is acting in that way, and thus make fun of him and avoid spending time with him. Sophie positions Samuel as being forced to attend school by his mother because if he could decide, who would not attend.

He does not want to study, always on the bed playing computer games. He does not like school, he does not like to come to school but he always attends.

(Sophie, lines 23-24)

Sera points out a divergent construction from the mainstream inclusion as relational discourse. She explains that at times inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum is putting at a disadvantage their peers. This is because the time lost during lessons because of atypical behaviour from the young person's part as well as the difficulty in communicative approaches during the school day at times has led to aggressive behaviour.

I agree with inclusion and that children should be together but to a certain extent because many other children are ending up at a disadvantage. We are helping these young people that have special needs to integrate but I feel that we are forgetting the others.

(Sera, lines 97-99)

4.10.1.3 Inclusion and the fear of bullying

Sera positions Timothy as being a victim of bullying and of not being understood by his peers, whilst the peers are positioned as unaware of what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum is, as it is a hidden disability. This is also present in one of Rose's constructs, who positions the teacher as being the key to addressing the differences between the young people, and to give a name to the unexplained different exhibited behaviour by Andrea in order to prevent bullying episodes. Timothy is being positioned as different in the way he acts and behaves however his peers do try to include him once they realise why he is acting in that particular way.

Honestly I rephrase it, they try to integrate them socially. In reality it (inclusion) is not really helping a lot because for example Timothy, they make a lot of fun of him the other children, because he invents stories, he fantasises. They don't believe him, how he talks, he talks very fast so they don't understand what he is saying so they end up laughing at him.

(Sera, lines 104-108)

Timothy's unusual behaviour is the reason why he finds it difficult to interact with his peers. Sera positions Timothy as unaware of the fact that he is living in a community and that certain behaviours are not appropriate in particular situations.

Once he started shouting and having a tantrum the children started laughing, I mean they don't know what he has, they think he is making fun of someone. Even during exams he starts breathing heavily, like doing yoga. He does not realise that there are other people around him.

(Sera, lines 124-127)

Sophie also positions Samuel as being bullied by his peers, as not feeling part of the school and that this causes him to not want to come to school. Another point that emerges through Sophie's interview is that his peers are unaware of the condition of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. They don't know why he is behaving in a way that is peculiar for them; they position him as an outsider in the classroom.

4.10.2 Inclusion as accommodation

4.10.2.1 Inclusion as learning about diversity

Sera positions being identified as falling within the autism spectrum as being a hidden disability and thus young people are unaware of it. Their needs to be knowledgeable about what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails. Her student, Timothy, is being positioned as “autistic” and thus having “weird behaviour” and behaving in a way deemed inappropriate for the classroom setting when a change in routine happens, by crying, shouting etc..

I dont think they know he knows he has autism. There is a big lack of information to the young people. I've been an L.S.A. for almost 10 years and have seen it for these past years. There is no peer preparation programme. They should not only be done for children for example who are in a wheel chair because when the other young people see them they know whats wrong, it's visible, it's physical.

(Sera, lines 110-114)

The lack of peer preparation programmes is another recurring construct in the wider discourse inclusion as accommodation both in the L.S.A.s and even in the parental discourse. Sera explains that the adults within the close community need to be positioned as the educators about teaching about diversity in order to enable young people to understand the different behaviour exhibited by their peers who have been identified as falling within the autism spectrum.

This is also pointed out by Rose who explains that

emm, more with children who are in form 1, who are new, maybe if there is a student who has a disability they can do a circle time, which they actually do sometimes, but I think it needs to be more reinforced.

(Rose lines 48-50)

Sophie positions the young people in the classroom as unwelcome because they are unaware of why her student Samuel is acting in a way that they describe as “weird” and thus they do not accept it. More knowledge and education is required for this hidden disability. Unfortunately Samuel is positioned as lacking the necessary skills to relate to his peers and that causes stress and fighting episodes.

Samuel does not know how to communicate, the other kids are all the time fighting with him because he tells them something that irritates them or something that does not make sense to them so they get annoyed and move away.

(Sophie, lines 51-53)

4.10.2.2 Inclusion as academics beyond ability

Alice positions her student Jake as being overwhelmed by many subjects beyond his academic ability and so he feels like an outsider in his own school.

I would personally feel it would be more helpful to him to have emphasise on the main subjects and maybe include the science as part of the English lesson. I would be helping him in here (resource room) rather than learning science as a subject.

(Alice, lines 56-59)

Berta also points out this issue where she positions the school as a stressful place for Ben because of academics and the chaotic environment, which in turn puts stress on her because of the very demanding relationship between herself and Ben. She positions herself as constantly needing to reassure Ben and in turn Ben is positioned as finding school frustrating and beyond his ability to cope.

He is a very anxious boy, he suffers from anxiety, so homework is something he wants to get over with but unfortunately find it difficult to do.

(Berta, lines 38-39)

4.10.3 Inclusion as the need to assimilate in pre-existing policies

4.10.3.1 Inclusion as one-size-fits-all mechanism because of policy constraints

Sera positions the school as lacking tailor-made policies and as just adopting a *one-size-fits-all* scenario. She puts forward the idea that not all young people are the same and that different conditions will require different tailor-made policies. Moreover she moves a step forward and talks about the idea that some conditions do allow students to be in mainstream classrooms, but this is not always the case. This again opens up on the debate about mainstream versus special schooling and which one is the best option for the young person.

I think more need of classrooms for a resource room so they can integrate. The fact they are already in mainstream classes. It has to be up to the teacher and it depends on the condition. Some conditions are quite inclusive in mainstream. Timothy when you see him he does not look different you have to work with him every day to see the differences and the challenges.

(Sera, lines 181-185)

Rose positions herself as the sole provider of an inclusive environment for her student Ian as the lessons proceeds on a *one-size-fits-all* mechanism.

In Ian's case its a very big role, because I mean I do everything. He does not follow mainstream curriculum so I must prepare all the work we do at school. It has to be adequate to his level, a lot of pictures, activites were he can cut and stick pictures because it is what he likes, he likes to use the glue a lot.

(Rose, Lines 26-30)

Mia relates through her interview that the school is positioned as providing inclusion at a physical level only. Yes many times young people are placed in the same physical setting as their peers but they are not provided with tailor-made activities. This causes disruption in the class as the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum become bored and frustrated with the situation and do not know how to express it, and end up behaving in a manner which is not deemed appropriate in a classroom setting.

If for example for the sake of inclusion a particular student is disturbing the whole class as certain lessons are not interesting for them so they get annoyed.

(Mia, lines 25-29)

The teacher is being positioned as having a very difficult time to try and cater for all the diverse needs of the students in her classroom because she is constrained to assimilate in policies, which do not give leeway for enacting inclusive practices. Many times those who are at both ends of the learning spectrum will have difficulty during schooling.

Also, Sophie positions school as being a place of annoyance because of the *one-size-fits-all* approach and that since Samuel does not know how to express himself

he ends up behaving inappropriately in the classroom, which then ends up causing disruption during the lesson.

Good, but I think more needs to be done especially with these young people who have autism, because like Samuel you know he needs a lot of help and it is not being given to him.

(Sophie, lines 30-31)

Its a policy decision. Most of the rules here are aimed as streamlined and are not catered toward the young people unfortunately.

(Alice, lines 61-62)

Unfortunately both Alice and Sophie emphasis the lack of accommodation for the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, and the fact that it is the young people who need to assimilate into the pre-existing system and not the educational system that tries to create inclusive practices. Streamlining will exclude young people who are at the extremities, causing them to fall behind and loose the chance of a quality education.

4.10.3.2 Inclusion as a stressful and difficult time because of policy constraints

Sera explains that the parents are frustrated because of the school situation. She positions herself as a stressful actor at school because of the challenging situation she encounters daily because she has to cater for the needs of her study whilst abiding by policies. She positions the school as needing to be more supportive in the proper inclusion of Timothy. She is a stressful actor because of the difficult situation she is encountering at school. She and Alice position themselves as the sole provider for inclusive practices and that leads to a stressful environment. This is also pointed out in Berta's and Mia's interviews who respectively point out the stress at work that they encounter because of lack of teamwork, lack of resources and lack of tailor-made policies.

Sera and Alice also position the parents as outsiders and unaware of what is happening in the school life of their own child.

His mum told me that she feels frustrated because she does not know what is happening with him during the lesson and she has no say on how to help him at school.

(Sera, lines 84-85)

4.10.3.3 Inclusion as being constrained and decided by higher entities in the educational system

Stakeholders view inclusive practices and policies as being decided by the S.M.T. in the school, which in turn are constrained by educational policies that govern Maltese schools.

Sera positions the young person Timothy as a powerless actor at school, he has no say in the decision-making process. Even though sometimes he is present during the I.E.P., he has no say on what is decided. Berta also points out this issue in her interview. She states that Ben is a victim of the educational system because even though on paper his opinion is asked in reality decisions are taken independently of what the child would like.

The parents definitely. He was only there to include him a little, but no decision making.

(Sera, line 172)

However Alice puts forward a contradictory positive aspect regarding the decision making process. She positions Jake as having an active role in the decisions taken about his academic life. She explains that Jake was asked which subjects he feels confident in sitting for an exam and which not, and his views were taken into consideration when coming up with the final decision.

The first thing they asked him was what exams do you want to sit for and it was his decision. He did the main subjects Maths, Maltese and English. He did ICT because he enjoys computer and he did his options, Design and Technology and Italian, because he enjoys them. No it was definitely his decision.

(Alice, lines 134-138)

However there is a contradictory aspect to this issue. Even though Jake is given a say into what subjects to sit for in the exam, he still has to attend lessons during the year because Alice gives shared support to another student and so cannot stop attending lessons. Here Alice positions herself and her student Jake as being constrained by higher policies, which are decided by the Department of Education. The parent has the decisions put on her without having the chance to make amends. She wanted her student Jake to be pulled out of certain subjects as they are beyond his academic potential and he was not benefitting from them,

however since she is giving shared support to three students and her other two students follow the mainstream curriculum she could not accommodate for this problem. Pulling Jake out of the lesson would mean the others would not be catered for. This problem points to the constraints by higher bureaucratic policies.

Lets put it this way. His parents would like him to be pulled out more from certain mainstream classes, but because he has shared support within the classroom I can't take him out of the class because another student has to have support at the same time in class, so if I had Romeo in the beginning so I could take him out of the geography lesson and come here (both young people were not having geography) to do some extra help which was very beneficial to him.

(Alice, lines 48-53)

No its the decision of the board, of the what you call, the disciplinary board, the statementing board.

(Alice, lines 81-82)

This is also evident when it comes to Alice herself. Alice positions herself as being constrained by school policies about how much information she can tell the parents. She wanted to tell them that there was a problem with the reader during the exam sessions but she could not because of certain policies. This is again put forward when it comes to exams. Alice positions the school as not providing adequate resources when it comes to exam adaptations, and this causes frustration to the child and the family.

Yet if someone reads to him he is better able to comprehend what is being read cause he is listening rather than paying attention to reading. And so he could maybe answer a few questions. So he is at a disadvantage again. And I wasn't allowed to tell his parents about this. So they are not aware of it.

(Alice, lines 96-99)

Self Reflexive Stop

When Alice pointed out that she really wishes she could talk to the parent about the fact that her son is not coping with all the academics subjects but is constrained to do so because of policies from the Department of Education I positioned myself in her shoes. I agree with her, I feel the same at times when I need to finish a syllabus, which I know is beyond the academic ability of these young people but still I am constrained by policies and have to finish the syllabus.

When asking questions and with my own gestures and non verbal cues I made sure not to interfere with her responses by showing agreement or lack of it and moreover when it came to the analysis I tried as much as possible to detach myself from the situation and analyse only what is explicitly and implicitly written in the transcript.

Mia also positions the school as also being constrained by policies from the Department of Education, which are beyond the school itself. Even though in her talk she believes that the emphasis should be on life and social skills, this is hardly the case when it comes to acting inclusive practices at school.

But he is neither mainstream mainstream, he is in mainstream with a special programme. He had to be in 1.7 but there would have been too many L.S.A. so he had to be shifted and moved to another class.

(Mia, lines 58-60)

4.10.4 Inclusion as a way towards an independent living

4.10.4.1 Inclusion as the need to learn life skills for an independent living

In her talk Sophie emphasises the need to move beyond academics, which are too difficult and focus on giving young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum subjects that can be of benefit for an independent living. She is positioning the school as a tool that can aid in the preparation for these young people to the world of work.

More subjects they can get something for their future.

(Sophie, line 50)

This line of thought is also seen in Sera, Berta and Rose's interviews. All argue in favour of a curriculum that is more focused on life skills rather than on subjects which will be of not benefit to their students. Rose explains that she has worked on very simple tasks like tying the shoelace or simple money calculations because it was those things that Ian will benefit from in his everyday life. She positions herself as a promoter to aid in helping Ian learn life skills for living independently in the future.

The following table 4:6 offers a summary of the different social actors and the action orientation and related subject positions that are mentioned in the L.S.A. discourse.

Social Actors	Subject Position	Action Orientation
L.S.A.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sole provider of inclusive practices. • Active actor in the life of the young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum. • Powerless actor because of policy constraints. • Aware of the limitations of the child. • Stressed and anxious because of the workload put on them. • Need of teamwork and more time to cater for diverse needs of their students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship between the L.S.A. and the student is viewed as an imbalanced one where the sole responsibility of inclusive practices is on the L.S.A. • Power imbalance where the L.S.A. is constrained what to say and do in the classroom because of educational policies.

Young Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unaware victim of bullying. • Victim of bullying. • Powerless and unhappy. • Loner and not having any friends • Victim of the educational system. • Never fitting in mainstream. • Not conforming to society. • Autistic young person behaving in a weird way. • Innocent boy. • Different and not conforming to what society regards as normal behaviour. • Happy and interacting with peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship between the young person and his peers is viewed as a social arrangement where the young person is the victim and his peers are the bullies. • Relationship between the young person and his peers is viewed as a social arrangement where the young person is happy and interacting with his peers.
Peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwelcoming. • Perpetrators of bullying. • Lacking awareness and knowledge about what autism entails. • Need of peer mediation to help them understand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relational discourse where there is an imbalance in the relationship and the young people identified as falling within the autism and their peers and that this relationship will have a positive or negative effect on the schooling experience of the young person.
Schooling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritarian and powerful figure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schooling discourse positions the school

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering support to parents and L.S.A but only when asked and when it comes to bureaucratic material. • Lacking insight in the condition of autism. • Needing to be flexible. • Tool to promote independent living • Not catering for diverse needs • Needing to be more flexible • Target on academic subjects whilst special schooling targeting on social skills. • Constrained by higher educational policies. 	<p>as the tool to promote or hinder inclusive practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power imbalance between school and the Department of Education.
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Table 4: 6 showing a summary of the different social actors and the action orientation and related subject positions that are mentioned in the L.S.A.s' discourses.

4.11 Learning Support Assistants' Stage 5 – Practice Position

Having positioned herself as the sole provider of inclusive practice, Alice talks about the need to constantly remind the teacher about the diverse needs of the young person. Alice reported that she has to constantly remind the teachers on small things that are essential for the wellbeing of her student, like writing notes instead of dictating them.

On a positive note Mia explained that she does find practical support and the teacher is positioned as helpful and gives her the handout beforehand so that she can prepare. Also the teacher includes Andrea in the lesson by involving him and

giving him the opportunity to use the whiteboard and carry out interactive games. However Mia is still positioning herself as having a major role in carrying out inclusive practices and she still needs to prepare all the adaptations for her student Andrea. The only reason she can adapt to the curriculum is because he is in a low stream and so they are not that much geared for the exams, because otherwise it would be extremely difficult.

Everything. I do everything!! I have to prepare all the adaptations for the lessons, everything.

(Mia, line 41)

She uses the word everything repeatedly in her talk to emphasis the fact that she does all the preparations to cater for the student herself. This is also evident in Rose's interview. She positions herself as needing to do everything to promote inclusive practices – preparing all the work, pictures etc. Even though Ian is in the same class as his peers, he does not follow the same curriculum and it is she who has to accommodate for this. In fact before starting school during the summer holidays she went to his house to see his strengths and skills even outside the school, in order to be able to work better together. She says that she has a very positive relationship with his mother and they work constantly together for the well being of the student.

Another issue that has been pointed out by the L.S.A.s, especially by Sera, is the need for the school to act by doing peer preparation programmes as students in the class are not aware of what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails, and thus they are either fearful of Ben or laugh at him. This is also accentuated by Rose who having positioned Ian as different, puts forward the needs to prepare his peers about what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails, that the “child is different but should be treated with love and respect” (Rose, lines 52-53). Ian's peers are positioned as unaware so they act by having an unnecessary fear because they do not know and understand his behaviour.

Yes, where the teacher talks and explains to them that everyone is different but should be treated with respect and love. To explain

difficulties encountered by the student. Sometimes the children are afraid of him because of the so-called weird behaviour. They do not know that he is not aggressive, that he is a very sweet boy.

(Rose, lines 52-55)

Awareness is essential. When Ian's peers got to know him in class, their attitude changed. They are positioned as acting in a loving way and including him in everything. Rose related a particular instance in her talk where she had a hurt leg and his classmates, out of their own initiative took him to the P.E. lesson and took care of him.

Sera explained in her talk that many times, Timothy, who has been positioned as lonely and frustrated at school, acts by having inappropriate behaviour in class like crying and shouting because he does not feel understood. His peers don't believe Timothy because he says fantasy stories and talks very fast. The L.S.A. tries to show him the difference between reality and fantasy, however he finds it difficult to realise the distinction between them.

Sera talks about how Timothy asks a lot of irrelevant questions and stops the lessons and that irritates the other classmates. He acts out by breathing heavily and this makes his peers laugh at him as they don't realise the reason behind his behaviour. This makes the day tiring for the L.S.A. because she needs to constantly give him her full attention.

Sera positions the relationship between Timothy and herself as a highly dependent one. Timothy is always looking for her reassurance and puffs and bangs if she moves to help any other students in the class. She explains that even though she acts by prompting him to participate in school life and classroom activities, he is reluctant and when he participates in class it is many times to say something that has nothing to do with the lesson. Timothy in turn acts out by trying to exclude himself from his peers. He refuses to interact with his peers as he wants to know what the L.S.A. is saying

I tell him to go near his friends but after a few minutes you see him coming back. And he listens to every word you are saying. You have to

pay attention what you are saying. It's autism, listens to every word and remembers every single thing you said.

(Sera, lines 197-199)

She in turn tries to show him a different way of saying things, being less blunt so as to help in his social skills. Sophie also repeats this, saying that Samuel is alone during break time most of the time and he rarely goes to mid day break activities. Having positioned his peers as perpetrators of bullying she says that they act out by fighting with him and calling him names because they don't understand his behaviour. He does not know how to communicate with his peers.

Samuel does not know how to communicate, the other kids are all the time fighting with him because he tells them something that irritates them or something that does not make sense to them so they get annoyed and move away.

(Sophie, 51-53)

Sophie puts forward the idea that her student Samuel finds it difficult to express his feelings and does not have a good relationship even with her. Even though mainstream schooling helps him mix with young people of his age, he is still finding it difficult to interact with his peers because of his condition. Again Alice says that during break Jake is very quiet, doesn't mix with his classmates and when prompted to attend activities he gets fed up easily after a very short time.

On a positive note, according to Rose, Andrea interacted by managing to create simple relationships with a few classmates, he plays during break with two of his friends, and even though the interactions are non-verbal they still understand each other. He associates faces with episodes in his school life.

If you were with him in year 5 in primary when he sees you he will always say you are the one of year 5.

(Mia, line 52)

Mia also talks about the need for school to act towards inclusive practices by having life skills programme and more commitment from the school staff. She talks about the need to prepare out of class activities that young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum can participate in. She says that there is no use in physically placing the young person in the same class for the sake of

inclusion, if he is then not benefitting but on the contrary it is causing a disturbance to the whole class. This is also seen in Alice's discourse who wants the school to act by emphasising lessons of core subjects including Maths, Maltese and English and less focus on the other subjects.

Alice explains that there are a number of gaps in the educational system. She suggests that there is a difference between what is written in policy documents and what is really happening in the classroom. The young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are not accommodated in exams. Her student has no exam help and she cannot take Jake out of class. This would be essential to improve basic academic skills as she emphasises the need of repetition for the achievement of small goals.

Berta on the contrary says that the school acted by helping young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum but only during exams. Having constructed inclusion as relational, she says that educational stakeholders need to act towards inclusive practices by providing a better working interaction with teachers and more teamwork with the teachers and other L.S.A.s. Having dedicated parents who are actively involved in the school life of their children makes a big difference for the L.S.A., as she can discuss how to help her student in the best way possible. Berta says that she has a very good communicative relationship with the parent of her student Ben.

With his mummy v good

(Berta, line 11)

They also use a daily communication book to discuss what has happened in class and any information relevant for the well being of the student. Having again positioned the relationship between the parent and herself as a social arrangement, Mia also states that she has a very positive relationship with the parent, they interfere minimally with regards to inclusive practices and activities she wants to carry out in the class and at school with their child as they believe in her good judgement. However they are positioned as always present when she needs their help. Even though the S.M.T. helps out during crisis situations such as for example a bullying episode, on a daily basis the well-being of her student is her

sole responsibility, with some additional help from the class teacher from time to time.

In conclusion, Table 4:7 summarises the different practice positions of social actors depicted by the L.S.A.s' discourses.

Social Actor	Practice Position
Young Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arguing, having atypical behaviour in the classroom, screaming, banging on the table, refusing to go to school, restlessness, • Idle time doing nothing. • Physically bullied – being hit in the eye and punches in the face. • Verbally bullied. • Interacting with friends- walking during the P.E lesson without the need of the L.S.A. • Smiling and waving to peers. • Staying alone during break time.
L.S.A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing resources and activities for the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. • Pushing the student under her care to participate in extra curricular activities. • Working with the student to reach small realistic goals. • Working with other professionals to come up with an Individualised Educational Plan that meets the need of the young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not allowed to take decisions about the academic aspect of inclusion of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum at school because of constraints by higher educational policies. • Working on their own because no time for discussion and teamwork.
Parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive mum • Putting a wider picture to the school situation. • Pushing the child to participate in school activities. • Not able to make decisions.
School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excluding perpetrators of bullying. • Being present in case of difficult situations but not involved in the everyday school routine. • Not accommodating during exams.

Table 4:7 showing a summary of the practice positions given to different social actors depicted in the L.S.A. s' discourses.

4.12 Learning Support Assistants' Stage 6 - Subjectivity

This section traces the consequence of taking up various subject positions on the participants' subjective experience, in this case the L.S.A.s of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Willig, 2008, p. 116). Again, the subjective experiences communicated through the interview are highlighted in bold in this section to make it easier to comprehend.

Berta wants to emphasise in her construction about inclusion that she is feeling **overwhelmed** because of the very demanding situation she is experiencing with

her student, and because of the lack of help she is getting from the S.M.T. She expresses the difficulty in her everyday routine because of the lack of time and teamwork that are present at the school. She feels that she is on her own and the feeling of **loneliness and helplessness** that this results in. This in turn puts a strain on the relationship between her and Ben. She says that the fact that Ben needs constant reassurance puts pressure on her and he does not allow her to help others in the class because he is very jealous.

The issue of jealousy has featured in other L.S.A. discourse. Sera says that she feels **frustrated** at times because the young person she is responsible for is very jealous and wants to know all her moves. If she misses a lesson or tries to help someone else he ends up having a behaviour not deemed appropriate in the classroom.

On the whole not bad, but it was a very tiring year, he is very demanding, and very tiring. If he had to be with me next year I think I'll go mad (laughing) asking asking asking all the time.

(Sera, lines 75-76)

Sera uses the word 'mad' to emphasis that she had a very tiring year, Timothy is demanding and that puts a **strain on her**. Also it is difficult to find the right approach with him, as it depends on the mood he is in and if he is in a bad mood than everything becomes her fault.

This is also accentuated very much by Alice. She emphasises the issue that all the responsibility of inclusion is on her, **putting the blame on the teachers** at school for needing to tell them constantly about the difficulties her student is encountering during the lesson. She feels **left out** by the actions of the teacher.

I have asked the teacher please can you write them on the board so that emm he can participate with the rest of the class in taking the notes. Sometimes I have to take the notes for him so that he is not left out because he cannot cope with writing the notes being dictated to him.

(Alice, lines 41-45)

In her talk Alice wants the reader to feel that she is feeling **trapped by the system**. She wants us to feel that she is being constrained by higher policies from the Department of Education and she cannot do things that she believes would be of benefit to the young person because of this. On the other hand the syllabus is a major constraint, and when the teachers are tight with the syllabus they just forget that they need to enact inclusive practices in the classroom.

It's a policy decision. Most of the rules here are aimed as streamlined and are not catered toward the young people unfortunately.

(Alice, lines 62-63)

There is a **sense of frustration**, frustration over a system that is not catering for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum as it should, a system having gaps that are causing a stressful environment to the young person and themselves. Decisions are being imposed on both the mother and the L.S.A. and this directly affects the well being of the young person.

If it was up to his mother, we would have taken him out of that class, that's why I gave you that sheet last time (to fill about progress etc.) because she wants him to become one to one. But that's from the department they make the decision not us.

I have made them aware from my side but as an L.S.A. there is certain steps you can take, and certain steps you can't take.

(Alice, lines 78-80)

This idea of having the full responsibility of enacting inclusive practices seems to be a recurrent issue in all L.S.A.s discourses. This is also evident when Mia's expresses the problem that she has the full load of preparation on her. Alice also states that apart from paper work and incidences that crop up during the year, in which she has the full support of the S.M.T., when it comes to the daily inclusive practices to cater for the diverse needs of her student there is minimal involvement from the S.M.T.

Another important construct that was raised was the importance of feeling **appreciated**. Mia explains that she has the full co-operation of Andrea's parents and so feels **appreciated and willing to work** extra hard to give the most serene

environment possible to her student. This is the same line of thought of Rose who went out of her way to make sure that Ian is catered for in the best way possible.

Very good, I think I was never so happy with a student as much as this year. Because Andrea obeys, he is such a sweet boy and his parents, they don't, emm they give me leeway on what to do during school time.

(Mia, lines 16-18)

Both Berta and Sophie point out the feeling of being **understood and helped** by the parent, and that their positive attitude makes them more willing to work hard to make sure the young people get the best possible environment where to thrive.

Rose also explores the notion of the **happiness** she feels when she sees the young person being cared for included by his peers. However she explains that unfortunately the lack of awareness will hinder this positive behaviour. She feels **frustrated** because she believes that if students were more aware of what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails, they would surely not act in a negative way towards their peers. To consolidate this Rose says that the young people who are in Ian's same class who are now aware that Ian has been identified as falling within the autism spectrum and what that entails are very loving and caring, and have found a way to communicate without words.

The young people in his class really love him, they include him in everything, even during P.E. once I left him alone and he went walking with them.

(Rose, lines 62-63)

Alice talks about the **feeling of accomplishment** when Jake accomplishes small goals. In her discourse she wants the interviewer to feel her **sense of pride** when Jake manages to achieve small goals that were set in the Individualised Educational Plan at the beginning of the year. She wants the interviewer to feel that hard work does pay off and at the end of the year she was very happy that after a whole scholastic year her student Jake managed to achieve what they had set out to do at the beginning of the year.

4.13 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the data gathered using a social constructionist approach. Carla Willig's six-stage framework to critical discourse analysis was adopted to view how the three stakeholder groups view inclusion. The next chapter, chapter 5, will discuss the findings emerging from the above analysis in relation to the literature available at present.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Even though the right to a quality education is recognised by a number of “countries as a universal right” (Marshall & Goodall, 2015, p.3162) there are still varying perspectives on how it should be enacted (Marshall & Goodall, 2015). Allen (2008) states that throughout the years inclusive practices have been subject to a number of contrasting discourses.

Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 states that the best interest of the child shall be of primary consideration when it comes to decision-making on school matters (Article 3, UN, 1989). However, as Lundy and Kilkelly (2006) put forward, even though the main concern is the best interest of the young people identified as having a disability, what is actually seen as their best interest is still vague. Thus, a clear cut definition of what actions need to be carried out in order for these young people to get a good education is still very difficult to achieve, as every individual is a unique person having his or her specific needs. Educators working in mainstream schooling regard this topic as a very controversial one, and there are still different opinions on who should be given mainstream education and moreover to what extent (Cassidy, 2011).

These inclusive practices within mainstream settings have been given impetus with the Salamanca Statement in 1994, which represents a worldwide agreement towards the goal of inclusive education, and the Individuals with Disabilities Act in 2000. Also, UNESCO (2009) defined inclusion 'as a process of strengthening the capacity of an individual’ (UNESCO, 2009, p. 8).

Vlachou (1997) suggests that the struggle for inclusion is a discursive one, where the linguistic and ideological dimensions of what inclusion means influences the way it is enacted in schools. Kavale & Forness (2000) discuss the need to create schools that cater for the diverse needs of all young people, and help them live together within the school community. However, contradictions may arise

between what is being taught in a course and what is actually present in mainstream schools, especially when the knowledge is still being contested and emerging, a case in point being inclusive education (Florian, 2011). Ochs et al., believe that “physical placement of children [identified as falling within the autism spectrum] in inclusive educational settings alone is not sufficient” (Ochs et al., 2001, p. 400).

One important question that has been asked throughout this research is: What constitutes inclusion for different stakeholders? Is inclusion doing what it sets out and claims to be doing for the welfare of the young people who have been identified as falling within the autism spectrum? Norwich (2005) debates whether inclusive education is more concerned with the young person’s rights or what is best for them educationally. As Burman (1994) points out

What are the tensions between a commitment to the needs and interests of children and the statutory requirements to teach them skills?

(Burman, 1994, p. 176)

A stimulus for this thesis is the realisation that we educators need to delve much deeper into the area of inclusion, especially when it comes to young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. In 2001 Carrington and Graham stated that “more qualitative research in the field of autism is necessary to achieve an in-depth exploration of the real-life experiences of these individuals from their own perspective” (Carrington & Graham, 2001, p. 47). The Maltese Minister of Education, Hons. Evarist Bartolo has also accentuated this in the conference ‘Autism and Education’ on 18th November 2016 where he emphasises the need to cater for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in mainstream schools.

The following discussion will be based on the four discourses which have emerged through the analysis of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, parental, and L.S.A.s interviews.

These are:

- Inclusion as relational,
- Inclusion as accommodation,
- Inclusion as a way towards an independent living,
- Inclusion as the need to assimilate in pre-existing policies.

The main research questions remain:

- 1. How do young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum construct and give meaning to inclusion?**
- 2. How do the parents of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum construct and give meaning to inclusion?**
- 3. How do the L.S.A.s of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum construct and give meaning to inclusion?**
- 4. What are the implications of these views for the school policy development and inclusive practices in the school?**

The ways of talking and constructing inclusion as presented in chapter 4, which have been grouped into the 4 wider discourses listed above, will now be discussed further and presented from the perspective of each stakeholder group.

5.2 Inclusion as Relational

The Maltese National document ‘Creating Inclusive Schools’ (2002) aims to promote the fundamental values of love, family, respect and inclusion. The term ‘students with Individual Educational Needs’ (IEN) is used in the document rather than the terms ‘special needs’ and ‘students with learning difficulties’ so as to “avoid stigmatising such students as special and help us regard them as part of the normal diversity among all students” (National Curriculum Council, 2002, p. 2).

Even though this document, as well as the current curricular framework adopted in Maltese schools, the National Curricular Framework (Ministry for Education

and Employment, 2012), promotes the values of respect and inclusion, a main focus is still on the academic inclusion of young people. Thus, these documents are quite contradictory with what has been explored through the analysis reported in chapter 4. As discussed in the previous chapter inclusion as relational is a major discourse for all three stakeholders. Whilst the document 'Creating Inclusive Schools' (National Curriculum Council, 2002) portrays the fact that in educational settings inclusion and ability are "normally equated with academic prowess" (National Curriculum Council, 2002, p. 5), the analysis has shown that for the stakeholders interviewed, one of the main constructions of inclusion is as relational. This is a very important issue to point out as it again shows the differences in the way different stakeholders view what constitutes inclusion. Participants in this research view inclusion in terms of the social interactions that the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum manage to establish. Young people want to feel safe, secure and have a sense of belonging at school, but unfortunately the analysis of the data gathered does not always show this.

Clough and Nutbrown (2013) argue that unfortunately for many people inclusion is only an issue of location where people argue that as long as young people are educated within the same location then inclusion is being enacted. The history of education shows the shift from segregation to the possibility of parents to have a choice on whether they should send their children to special or mainstream schools. Clough (1998) argues that however physical inclusion on its own is not enough; we need to make sure that young people are included in relation to curriculum adaptation and emotional well being, by teachers who are adequately supported to cater for the diverse needs of each and every one of them. Garner (2000) and Slee (2000) also put forward the need of curriculum developments because unfortunately these have failed to keep up with the new developments and ways of thinking in relation to inclusion.

However, it is important to point out that without the physical inclusion of these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in mainstream schooling the discourse of inclusion as relational would not have been made possible. In Malta we have a high rate of young people identified as having a

disability attending mainstream schooling (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014), and thus the talk of inclusion as relational is present because parents take for granted the physical co-location in mainstream schools. However, they still feel that when mainstream schooling is chosen, the physical inclusion in mainstream schooling is still not sufficient for how they construct inclusion.

5.2.1 Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum construct their views of themselves through feedback that they receive from others. Also, other people, including peers and teachers react to behaviours, which to them are different from the norm. In her critical reflections about disability and psychology Murray (2006) put forward that young people will incorporate the view of the school community into their own self-concept.

There is a wide agreement in literature that young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum will have difficulty with social communication, express egocentric traits and use inappropriate body language in social situations (National Autistic Society, 2014). These are known as the triad of impairments (National Institute of Mental Health, 2013; Gross, 1994; Wing & Gould, 1979). In my research Timothy is positioned as talking fast, breathing heavily and making facial expressions that were not understandable by his peers. Bauminger, Shulman & Agam (2003) carried out observations with such young people in different social situations at school and pointed out that they may experience rejection because of their peculiar social functioning leading to less social involvement than expected (Bauminger et al., 2003).

Long-term studies as well as the analysis in this thesis have shown that the majority of these young people will have limited friendships (Ofe, 2015; Howlin, Goode & Hutton, 2004, Howlin, Mawhood & Rutter, 2000). Knowing that social skills impairments are a characteristic of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, it is essential for these young people to be given sufficient social skills training while at school (Bellini, Peters, Benner, Hopfs, 2007). One example can be the social interaction intervention programme, which was

analysed by Bellini et al. (2007), aiming to assist young people in building relationships with their peers and classmates. 55 children and adolescents identified as falling within the autism spectrum participated in the research, and the resultant findings indicated that social interaction interventions helped improve both social skills as well as communicative skills within mainstream classrooms (Bellini et al., 2007).

Young peoples' perspectives on schooling have been researched and results show that friendships have a major effect on the overall experience of mainstream schooling for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Caulder et al., 2013; Hwang & Hughes, 2000). Andrea and Ian took photos of places in the school, pointed to the happy face, and also took photos of their small circle of friends. Ben also explained that he enjoys coming to school and does not like summer because he has to stay at home and he likes school and his peers.

However it is not surprising that research with young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum suggests that they may struggle to initiate play with their peers, and prefer situations which provide a clear and definite set of rules that need low levels of social exchange (Bauminger et al., 2003). Samuel does not like extra curricular activities because it means a change in routine. Unfortunately the research conducted by Rotheram-Fuller et al., (2010) with a sample of 79 young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum indicates that only half of these young people have social relationships with their peers in the mainstream classroom (Rotheram-Fuller et al., 2010).

Self-esteem (Smith 2002) is also seen to be a building block in a good educational system. There is a link between positive experiences in school and life satisfaction, that shows that when asked, the more young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum were happy at school the more positive they were about their life (Parsons, 2014). This makes the link between school and home prominent (Levy & Perry, 2011).

In their talk, the majority of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum construct the discourse of inclusion as relational in terms of the

friendship relationships that they manage or not to establish. However Ben is neutral to the friendship idea. He is not really interested in interacting with his peers, but this does not really seem to affect his school life from the interview responses. He is happy that the classmates who he considers as friends are playing and he is watching as a passive observer. Studies on young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum indicate that they will spend more time on their own and do not like to initiate interaction with other peers in mainstream settings (Humphrey & Symes, 2011; Sigman & Ruskin, 1999). Ultimately, there is no consensus as to how young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum understand the idea of friendship.

Even though Andrea and Ian used social stories to express the fact that they have a circle of friends, it still consisted of only two or three friends who they knew from primary school and because they lived in the same hometown. The social networks of these young people are smaller than typical classmates (Wong & Kasari, 2012). Locke, Kasari, Rotheram-Fuller, Kretzman & Jacobs (2013) compared the social networks of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum with their typical developing classmates by using surveys and passive observation for one academic year. The results showed that these young people have limited friends when compared to their typical peers (Locke et al., 2013). Moreover when these friendships are present, there is difficulty in maintaining them and this plays yet again a crucial role in the overall experience of young people at school (Rossetti, 2015). Friendship relationships require a number of skills which young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum find difficult to cultivate. This is consolidated in the recent study by Mendelson, Gates & Lerner (2016) which showed the risk of social isolation and lower friendship networks these young people experience, leading to stress and isolation.

In her research in 2011 Rossetti explored the way in which the peers of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum work to create friendships with them. These ways include starting a situation to spend time together, giving practical skills to interact together, waiting for the friends to answer back and posing questions so that these young people can answer back (Rossetti, 2011).

Research carried out by Liptak, Kennedy and Dosa in 2011 also points out this situation. 55.4% of 17 to 21 year old adults identified as falling within the autism spectrum did not meet up with their peer once whilst 63.9% did not even receive any phone calls from a friend outside the school grounds. It was only Jake who talked about meeting up his friends at catheticsm and in his hometown after school, all the others did not have any socially interaction outside the school grounds. Moreover, his classmates never invited Andrea to any parties or activities. However it is interesting to note that Andrea was not really aware that he was not being invited to parties and extra curricular activities and did not really feel left out in this situation. It was more his mother who was feeling this isolation.

A research conducted by Shattuck, Wagner, Narendorf, Sterzing & Hensley in 2011, where longitudinal data of a wide number of young people requiring special education was analysed indicated that 54% of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum were not invited for activities or saw friends outside the school community, which again reinforces the analysis of the previous chapter that forming meaningful friendships is difficult for these young people.

Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum will find it hard to participate in social interactions during break time, as is evident both through this study and in the research available (Koster, De Raedt, Leyman, De Lissnyder, 2010). Wainscot, Naylor, Sutcliffe, Tantam, & Williams, (2008) carried out a study with 57 young people of whom 30 were identified as falling within the autism spectrum, whilst the other 27 showed typical behaviour. The study compared the social interactions of these young people both during lessons as well as during break and extra curricular activities. They found that due to the social interaction difficulties of these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, they intentionally avoided social interactions especially during break time. This is done to minimise the risk of having to deal with demanding social situations and reducing the risk of being a target for bullies. Both Timothy and Samuel pointed out in their discursive constructions that the reason why they took no photos of their peers is that they don't like them because they make fun of

them and laugh at them even during break time. This is also evident in the photographs that were taken by Ben, which often showed others playing whilst he was enjoying the scene, but avoiding to be an active participant. None of them took part in any extra curricular activities, with Timothy specifically arguing that he does not like to change the classroom for other activities.

Timothy's peers make fun of him because of his inappropriate jokes. These episodes can lead to isolation (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008). I did not delve deeper into the issue because he looked uncomfortable talking about it so I did not want to cause any type of distress. Research by Samson Hardan, Podell, Phillips, & Gross (2015) involving 21 children and adolescents identified as falling within the autism spectrum and their matched typically developing peers indicated that their literal interpretation of language makes it difficult to understand jokes and that can lead to mockery as in the case of Timothy and Samuel in my research.

In the young people's interview Timothy talks about the problem that he knows he is different and that the other peers do not understand the way he behaves. In the research by Bauminger & Kasari in 2000, when asked about their school experience, young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum found school as a context where they can feel lonely and isolated (Bauminger & Kasari 2000) and will either isolate themselves from their peers like Timothy or else try to fit in. Timothy positions his peers as unaware of his condition, which is the reason why they laugh at his jokes and gestures. This is in line with what Billington et al., (2000) puts forward where he talks about how the peers of these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum call them bizarre. As Petrina, Carter & Stephenson's (2014) also found in their research, such reflective comments from a young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum is difficult to find in the literature. It shows that Timothy is able to think and process a complex social idea and is comparing his friendship relationships with those of his peers. It also indicates that he is able to construct what he means by friendship and why he does not want to take photos because he does not believe his peers are his friends.

Sharp, Peter & Smith (1994) define bullying as the

Systematic, repeated abuse of power involving physical and verbal abuse as well as acts of indirect aggression, characterized by gossiping, spreading malicious rumours and deliberate attempts at exclusion from the child's social peer group.

(Sharp, Peter & Smith, 1994, p. 2)

Because young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum lack an understanding of social interactions, they will in turn be more vulnerable to social exclusion and bullying at school (Humphrey & Hebron, 2015; Boyle et al., 2013, Cappadocia, Weis & Pepler, 2012; Attwood, 2006). Humphrey & Lewis (2008) interviewed 20 young people identified as having Asperger's syndrome and high functioning autism and, unfortunately, almost all experienced bullying and teasing at varying degrees.

Northern Ireland Schools for Autism and other Related Condition (NISARC, 2015) surveys indicate, the difficulty in maintaining these social skills leads to episodes of bullying and emotional distress for these young people. Nabuzoka & Smith's (1993) and Farrell's (1997) researches respectively pointed to a link between being bullied and having learning difficulties. Nabuzoka & Smith (1993) reported that half the students with learning difficulties that participated in their qualitative study experienced bullying related to their learning difficulties.

In his book 'Freaks, Geeks & Asperger's Syndrome' Jackson (2002) who has been identified as falling within the autism spectrum points that these young people still find it hard to realise that they have been victims of bullying episodes. This has also emerged through the analysis where parents put forward more bullying episodes than their children. Espelage & Swearer (2008) used a social-ecological perspective to prevent these bullying episodes and found that for these young people, bullying episodes are more difficult to detect and explain (Espelage & Swearer, 2008; Jackson, 2002). In fact in this research even though Timothy and Samuel put forward bullying episodes they did not define them as so. Unfortunately, the data gathering methods that were available for the young people to communicate with could have been limiting, but I did my utmost to

make their voice heard. Having said that, I still cannot exclude that other episodes were present but the young people did not express it in their interview texts.

As the N.C.F. (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) affirms all young people should learn and experience success by respecting diversity in all its forms, whilst promoting an inclusive environment and ensuring that policies and practices that address the individual and specific needs of the learners and learning communities are present (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012, p. 33). Unfortunately talk of schooling, as a negative experience is still present in the interviews of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Young people at times still feel lonely, isolated and unwelcome, and that puts a strain on all the family as in the case of Timothy and Samuel. With the onset of adolescence they will find it even more difficult to communicate with their peers, and having the research based in a secondary school has shown this difficulty in communication (Locke et al, 2010).

Literature and results from this thesis suggests that these young people are more likely to experience anxiety when compared to other typical developing peers (Rowley et al., 2012; Kim, Szatmari, Bryson, Streiner, Wilson, 2000). One of the reasons for this stress might be the difficulty with reasoning and learning difficulties that are linked with young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Sofronoff et al., 2005). Attwood (2004) indicated that anxiety is the top difficulty for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, with 65 % of adolescents experiencing anxiety and depression (Attwood 2004).

A multi-case study conducted by Carrington, Templeton & Papinczack in 2003, with young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, indicates that secondary schools can, at times, be chaotic environments that cause stress to young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum who find order and predictability a security blanket enabling them to function (Carrington et al., 2003). Young people in this research have pointed out break time and extra curriculum activities as a stressful time in the daily routine of the school. Samuel tries to play truant most of the time. All young people find friendships difficult to

maintain and thus lack good communicative relationships with their peers. The researches with young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in this area indicates that school is a stressful place for them (Ting, 2015; Carrington & Graham, 2001) leading to problems related to bullying, loneliness and lack of social interactions (Humphrey & Hebron, 2015). Peers need to be educated about how important it is to have a positive attitude towards inclusion (De Boer, Pijl, Minnaert, 2012).

Even though improvements have been made to try and understand the relational aspect of inclusion for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, research is still lacking in this area (Potter, 2014) and this will cause difficulties when enacting inclusive practices. Studies of student perspectives are still a growing field in inclusion research. Inclusion is regarded as a “mixed blessing” (Ravet, 2011, p. 668) for many young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Billington & Lindsay, 2007).

Barton (2005) puts forward the need to empower people identified as having a disability by using emancipatory research in order to give them voice and create a partnership between disabled and non-disabled researchers. I wanted to find out how the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum construct inclusion by gathering first hand data. The majority of researchers gather data from parents and teachers, which is obviously important, however it fails to provide the direct perspectives of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. I can talk from my personal experience: I was not prepared to teach young people identified as having a disability when I started teaching. I was assigned a class where a number of students did not respond verbally to me and was not told about the situation. I had never taught them and felt guilty that I was not prepared enough to cater for their diverse needs. I was not prepared for that class and felt that I was not helping them use their full potential and that that was unfair on them. This thesis has given me the opportunity to gather data from the perspective of the direct stakeholders and get an insight into what really matters to these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Also researching literature enabled me to gain further access into resources available on how to better cater for diversity in my classroom. All young people participated

willingly in the research with Timothy feeling a sense of pride and accomplishment in carrying out an assigned task that showed his peers that he was capable of achieving goals by himself. This situation, where little insight is present from the direct stakeholders involved, appears to be leading to too many mainstream schools to still struggle to deliver the promise of inclusive education that aims at achieving good academic and social results (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014; Florian, 2011 Müller, Schuler & Yates, 2008).

However Danieli & Woodhams (2005) take a critical stance towards emancipatory research and argue that there needs to be a more pluralistic approach when it comes to theories and disability research.

5.2.2 Parents of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

Through the interviews of the parents of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum it could be noted that the discourse of inclusion as relational and making friends to avoid being alone and anxious at school, was more emphasised in the parental discourse rather than in the young people themselves.

Research shows that the difficulty in maintaining social interaction for these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum is a result of their difficulty in establishing and maintaining friendships (Potter, 2014; Daniel & Billingsley, 2010). Reasons for these friendship difficulties include the desire to play on their own as well as being afraid of being exploited and laughed at. Both Sonia and Dorothy put forward the idea that autism is a hidden disability and so their children are not understood, and thus their peers will find it difficult to make friends with them.

Sonia and Dorothy state that the reason why their peers laugh at Timothy and Samuel is that they do not comprehend the reason why they behave in a different way than to what they are normally accustomed to. Timothy's peers do not comprehend his way of interpreting jokes and find it difficult to understand his peculiar behaviour during lessons (Locke et al 2010). However, Vignes, Godeau, Sentenac, Coley, Navarro, Grandjean et al. (2009) gathered data both from young

people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and parents, and reported that when peers interact with these young people within a secondary school setting their attitude toward them is more positive.

Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum will find it difficult to keep eye contact, respond to their peers and interact in activities that are outside their normal routine frame, and thus their peers will find it difficult to communicate effectively with them (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008; Klin, Saulnier, Sparrow, Cicchetti, Volkmar, & Lord, 2007; Baker, 2002). Parents, especially Lucille, explained that their “condition” does not allow them to make friends easily (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, & Dempf-Aldrich, 2011) especially during out of class activities including break time. Also, these young people will lack empathy and find it difficult to carry on conversations (Young, 2015). In her research with young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and their typical developing peers, Young (2015) put forward that during extracurricular activities friendships are consolidated, since these young people do not like to participate in these activities, they are less likely to engage in meaningful friendships. This is confirmed in the parental interview responses as well, their children do not participate in extra curricular or out of school activities, thus any social interactions they have is very limited. There are various reasons why the playing field might be a stressful environment for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Anderson, McDonald, Deidre, Smith & Taylor, 2016). One of them is that in contrast to the structured routine in a classroom, the playing field is unstructured and causes a disruption in their normal routine (Kasari, Locke, Gulsrud, & Rotheram-Fuller, 2011).

Sonia states that her son is realising that he is different as he is now getting older and becoming more aware of the differences that exist and that his peers are treating him differently. This makes him withdraw more from social activities. Sandra also revealed that she knows that other young people look at her son as “weird” because of his type of behaviour. So rather than just get angry, she wants to educate his peers on why he is behaving in that way, to give them an explanation. Young people with severe physical disabilities may be more

accepted in a classroom since they readily stand out (Kasari et al., 2011) and their peers tend to have a functional protective role towards them. Daniel & Billingley (2010) interviewed seven boys identified as falling within the autism spectrum aged between 10 and 14, their parents and teachers and findings indicated that these young people find it more difficult to maintain friendships now that they are older and they are becoming more aware of not fitting in (Daniel & Billingsley, 2010).

I believe that since being identified as falling within the autism spectrum is not a visible disability it is more difficult to understand. I once stopped my lesson to give an explanation to the students in my class about why their peer who was identified as falling within the autism spectrum was behaving in a different way than what they were used to. In my experience, I believe that young people need to be told what is happening; they need to know the reason behind that type of behaviour. I was quite impressed by the level of maturity that they showed, when the behaviour that they found difficult to understand was explained.

As discussed above, young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum at times prefer to stay on their own and do not want to interact with peers their age. However, through their interview it emerged that the parents find this issue hard to digest and want their children to be accepted at school, which is another point that confirms the discourse of inclusion being viewed as relational by the parents. Howell & Pierson in their research in 2010, investigated parents' perspectives of schooling for their children, and came to the conclusion that when it comes to participation with typically developing age peers in mainstream schools, their children developed more natural friendships, a greater sense of belonging and a more positive self concept.

The feeling of being an outsider for the parents is another issue that emerged through analysis. Sandra says that she felt left out when all of Ian's peers were invited to birthday parties and Communion parties, and her son was only invited once in all the school years to attend to parties. She felt sad that her son was being excluded from these activities. The difficulties in social interactions will cause this isolation and feeling of being rejected, and this will have an effect on

their quality of life (Davys & Tickle, 2008). However the parents also feel the loneliness and isolation of their children at times even more than the children themselves.

Gus (2000) reported that parents find that the circle of friends' activities could be successful in helping to challenge the attitudes and stereotypes of their peers towards the behaviours attributed to young people identified within the autism spectrum. This also emerged from my analysis in the interviews of parents including Sonia, Sandra and Dorothy. Peer preparation programmes will promote peer interactional skills of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. They can target the parents (Mc Curdy & Cole, 2014; Frankel, Myatt, Sugar et al., 2010) as well as their peers (Wong & Kasari 2012). When peer preparation programmes led by their peers were present, they proved to be more effective when compared to ones that were led by adults (Wong & Kasari, 2012).

In the parental discourse of inclusion as relational the fear that their children are being bullied at schools both physically and emotionally also emerged. Students' relationships with peers can prove to either hinder or be of help to successful inclusion in school. Unfortunately, the social naivety of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum causes them to be easy targets for ridicule (Humphrey, 2008) and both parents and educators agree that this is not always addressed by tailor-made interventions (Wiele, 2011; Gray, 2005). In fact one of the social positions that emerged from the parental analysis is that their children are innocent victims of bullying and their peers, the perpetrators of these bullying episodes. Sonia emphasised in her interview that school became a "living hell" because of the severity of the bullying episodes whilst Dorothy explained that she did not take matters further because the episodes were dealt with very well by the school management team. Also, as Dorothy also pointed out and research with parents indicated, child safety and episodes of taunting and bullying may be greater as the children get older (Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989, Sofronoff et al, 2011).

A U.K. National Autistic Society parental survey in 2012 found that over 40% of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum have experienced

bullying and peer victimisation at school. Moreover, these young people report lower quality friendship compared to their typically developing peers (Chamberlain et al., 2007; Bauminger & Kasari, 2000). Also a study by Sofronoff et al. in 2011 involving parents of school age children identified as falling within the autism spectrum also linked cases of bullying to the difficulties in social interactions of these young people. This could be a result of the challenges that these young people have to understand social cues, non-verbal communication and realising what their peers want to express to them (Espelage & Swearer, 2008).

Talk of stress because of an unwelcoming environment is another major issue both within the parental discourse of inclusion as relational as well as for the young people themselves. Unfortunately, as emerged through the analysis, parents feel alone and would like more support as they are confronted with a number of challenges to cater for the daily needs of their children. In fact studies indicate that these parents will have more elevated stress levels and anxiety than parents of typically developing young people (Baker, Brookman-Frazee, & Stahmer, 2005; Hastings, Daley, Burns & Beck, 2006). 243 mothers of children identified as having a disability participated in a research by Dykens, Fisher, Taylor, Lambert & Miodrag in 2014 with 65% of the samples being mothers having children identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Out of these, 85% showed significantly high stress levels, 48% showed depression signs and 41% anxiety disorders. In agreement with the above, Feldman (2007) and Mancil Boyd & Bedesam (2009) carried out research with parents using various instruments to measure stress levels, and their results indicated that parents having children identified as falling within the autism spectrum have a higher risk of developing depression when compared to parents who have typically developing children (Feldman et al. 2007).

When parents were involved in the intervention strategies for their children, stress levels were seen to be reduced (Dykens et al, 2014). Moreover parent education can help improve mental health for these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Tonge et al., 2006). A survey carried out by NISARC in 2015 revealed that 44% of parents needed medical advice for their children as a

result of stress, with 46% needing referral to mental health services. Dayna expresses the difficulty she encounters in the morning because her son Jake is reluctant to attend school, whilst Lucille points out the anxiety that her son Ben had at times when trying to cope with all the homeworks and academic subjects at school. Sonia and Dorothy also point to this stressful situation that then continues at home. Lack of social skills can make school a scary place and thus young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum will try to escape it by not attending school (Provincial Outreach Programme for Autism and other Related Disorders, 2015; Farley, Macmahon, Fombonne, Jenson, Miller, Gardner, & Coon, 2009 Rubin, & Rose-Krasnor, 1992) as indicated by Dayna in her interview.

Linked to the above issue of bullying and stress, a major issue that emerged through the parental analysis is that for these parents inclusion is constructed as the need to have their children being happy, safe and secure in school. School is shaped by an over-riding emphasis on developing cognitive skills at the expenses of developing effective communication skills that lead to happy and serene environments, which, on the other hand seems to be the major aspect of how parents give meaning to inclusion (Ravet, 2011; Billington, 1997). The use of specialised autism classrooms, sensory rooms and activities during music lessons, gym and break time can all help to promote a more happy and serene school daily life (Soltau, 2015)

The English policy, *Every Child Matters* (DFES, 2003) put happiness, emotional well-being and engagement at the centre of discourses on inclusion. This is also evident in our local Maltese policies, especially the 'Education for All' (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014) document that focuses on a quality education consisting of a safe and serene environment where all students can strive. Unfortunately, the notion of policy as practice is still a major issue in inclusion. Students in school need to become aware on how to collaborate with peers and adults of diverse backgrounds and needs in order to enrich the life experiences of each other and make it a more welcoming and serene one (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012).

Parents want to express their feeling of powerlessness when it comes to their children's school life because they are not aware of what is happening and whether their children are safe and secure. One of the reasons they put forward for this feeling is the limited time available to communicate with their child's L.S.A. Sonia opens up about how she positions her son as lonely and the feeling of unwelcomeness he is presented when she tries to involve him in activities outside the school community, emphasising the missed opportunities her child had to endure because of the lack of awareness of what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails. Dorothy points out that she knows her child is alone during break and that worries her a lot. This is in line with what Pisula (2011) found when interviewing a number of parents having children identified as falling within the autism spectrum who came up with a number of factors that caused this feeling of powerlessness, these included the child's characteristics, the lack of adequate support and lack of communication with professionals, as well as the attitudes of the outer community who do not understand the challenges that they encounter in their everyday life (Pisula, 2011).

Research is needed to investigate the way parents can be helped in accessing resources from the community, in forming connections between home and school and in helping in the emotional well being of the parents who find dealing with certain situations difficult to handle (Foster, 2015). Carter, Lane, Cooney, Weir, Moss & Machalicek (2013) carried out research with a number of parents of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and the results indicated that a number of factors affected the self-determination and achievement of their children, which included the educational settings and the presence of challenging behaviour which in turn leads to parents needing to be given the necessary skills to be able to support better their children to use their potential to the full (Carter et al., 2013). More research is required to investigate the way social workers in schools can give support to parents of these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Foster, 2015). Parents in this research advocate for more support needed when it comes to the parent and teacher communicative relationship. They need to be involved and asked to share information about their child to make the transition between home and school a much more serene one (Kiser & Spitali, 2011).

In Malta, the external audit report that was published in 2014 focusing on inclusive education – Education for All Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014) put forward a number of points from this document, including the need for learners to focus not only on academic issues, which at times is detrimental to their inclusion and their positive experience of schooling. Jack and Sandra emphasise in their interview that their main aim is for their children to be happy at school, they are not really interested in achieving big academic goals, but rather that their children learn life skills that can help them to live an independent life in the future. Sandra explains that she knows her child will never reach certain academic milestones in life but she still opted to send him to mainstream schooling because she wanted her child to benefit from the social aspect of it, and feel safe and serene in the school environment. Again, in the parental discourse, inclusion is viewed as relational rather than academic, which is quite contradictory to the mainstream idea of inclusion as focusing on academics. Billington et al., (2000) when observing traditional lessons identified the exaggerated focus on academic functioning that was in turn limiting the developing of social communication skills and self esteem. The curriculum was in fact focusing on what the teachers believed should be taught rather than on the needs of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Even though the aim of the policy documents is for the full inclusion of young people, including those identified as falling within the autism spectrum, without the necessary support to young people and educators to establish effective inclusive schools, these young people end up excluded and feel like outsiders in their own schools (Hardman, Drew & Egan, 2008). Sonia says that since young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum lack the required resilience to overcome difficulties linked with bullying, school will increasingly be described as a lonely, distressing and unsafe place, something that is consolidated in the work of Tantam (2000).

It is not only necessary for young people to be placed in inclusive settings, but one also needs to make sure that when this is the case they are not being disadvantaged in their educational achievement or being caused more stress

socially (Boyle, Scriven, Durning & Downes, 2011). This was also the same line of talk of Dorothy and Jack. These young people need support to thrive in mainstream settings. Fortunately, this is not found in all interview responses, and Sandra, who uses the strong word “miracle” to emphasise, has talked about experiences and the positive effect inclusion has had on her child. Lucille and Jack also point out that their children are happy at school. Some parents reported that their child’s inclusive experience is related to them being accepted by their peers and meaningful friendships that they create with their non-disabled peers (Ryndak, Downing & Morrison, 1995).

In the parental constructions in the wider discourse inclusion as relational a dilemma that Sandra had is that they had to decide before their children started schooling whether to send them to mainstream or special schools. What if they send their children to mainstream schooling and they end up lonely and isolated? Research with parents suggests that parents generally support inclusion however are concerned with the negative effects that their child’s behaviour can have on the social interaction with their peers, and thus on the on-going progress of their child in mainstream school (Prado, 2011). Sandra said that one of the main reasons she opted for mainstream schooling and not special school was that she wanted her son to be exposed to peers his age. Sonia also points out that school is the only place where her child has any social interactions with people his age. In their research with parents of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, Koster et al., (2010) concluded that many parents opted for mainstream schooling as they believed it was the ideal place to help their children create meaningful friendships. However their difficulties in building these relationships need to be accounted if they are to be truly included in mainstream classrooms as indicated by all parental responses.

Sandra explained that even though there were problems during the years, fortunately all were resolved in the best interest of the child. This dilemma is quite evident with parents, deciding on mainstream or special schooling with the benefits and disadvantages that both situations bring with them. Since both mainstream and special schooling offer pros and cons, a final decision is not very easy to achieve (Wilcox & Hoon, 2014). These decisions will have

an effect on the child as well as his peers and school stakeholders (Wilcox & Hoon, 2014). If mainstream schooling is chosen then it is essential, as can be seen through the analysis, that effective interventions are adopted to minimise the difficulties of these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in terms of social communication and academic achievement (Camarago, Rispoli, Ganz, Hong, Davis & Mason, 2016).

Ultimately parental discourses revolve around the need to place their children in a school setting where they can try to build friendships and be happy outside the home environment. All parents believed that inclusion as relational is a very important aspect of inclusion, and wanted to try the possibility of having their children interact with their peers despite the difficulties that they might encounter. They position their children as needing to be exposed to the same opportunities like all other young people their age in order to make them feel happy and boost their self-esteem to lead an independent life in the future.

5.2.3 L.S.A.s of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

Even though positive outcomes have been reached, there are also a number of difficulties that are encountered when young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are placed in mainstream schooling (Ingram et al, 2007).

It is important to note at this point the difference between the relationships that exist between the parents and the young person, and the L.S.A. and the young person. The term child and student respectively denote a difference in relationship, which is important to account for here.

In a recent qualitative research by O' Hagan & Hebrow in 2016, educators reported the difficulty in friendship relationships, especially when it comes to secondary schools, where the scholastic routine is very easily disrupted due to extra-curricular activities which makes the stress levels of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum increase. L.S.A.s in this study explained this issue with the change of routine and the fact that it disrupted the daily schedule of the young people in school. This is in line with what Singer (1999) pointed out about the unfriendly nature of the school environment for these young

people since the order and predictability that many of them rely on is often contrasted by the noise and chaos that is commonplace in mainstream schooling (Autism Speaks, 2012).

A qualitative study by Humphrey & Symes in 2012 investigated bullying episodes involving young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and the effect the presence of a learning support assistant has on these episodes. Results indicated that bullying can be due to difficulty with peer interaction, and since the presence of a learning support assistant made it more difficult to work independently, it will cause these young people to find it more difficult to be socially included in the classroom as a result of this adult presence (Humphrey & Symes, 2012). Sera says that Timothy tries to spend more time with adults because he knows that even though his behaviour is said to be 'weird', adults will not laugh or make fun of him.

Reports with educational stakeholders have indicated that between 65% (Carter, 2009) and 94% (Little, 2002) of students identified as falling within the autism spectrum that attended mainstream schooling have experienced a bullying episode some time in their school life. Unfortunately not all of these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum are aware of the severity of the episode and so adults are constantly worried that they are not being safeguarded in their school environment as expressed in the L.S.A.s and parental discourses. This is in line with research conducted in 2015 by Hebrow et al., where both parents and teachers pointed out more episodes of teasing, unkind behaviour and bullying episodes whilst the young people did not realise the occurrence of these incidents.

One of the L.S.A.s constructs in the discourse inclusion as relational is the need of more peer preparation programmes to prepare the classroom peers to the type of behaviour exhibited by young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Sera puts the blame of these bullying episodes on the fact that Timothy has been identified as falling within the autism spectrum and on the lack of knowledge Timothy's peers have about it. Keeping in mind that all friendship relationships are unique, this is more so between a young person identified as

falling within the autism spectrum and their peers, due to the social interaction limitations posed by these young people (Rossetti, 2011). Young in 2015 put forward the need for their peers to know what autism is since sometimes they do not know the difference between autism and other conditions such as down syndrome, and are not aware of the typical behaviours exhibited by different young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. That makes their behaviour peculiar and difficult to comprehend for their peers.

Rose expresses the need for the teacher to tell the peers in the class why that particular young person is acting differently than his peers. She talks about how the circle of friends' activity helped the young people in Ian's class to understand his behaviour and why he acted different at times. Peer support can help with peer interactions of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Richards & Clough, 2004), as research has indicated that there were more positive behaviours present when peers rather than a teacher of special education was involved in support (Carter, Sisco, Melekoglu, & Kurkowski, 2007).

As discussed above, knowing someone who has a disability will many times help young people to have a more favourable attitude towards them (Avramidis & Kalyva 2007). In their research with 120 students and educators, 32% of respondents argued in favour of inclusion as it made students feel 'normal'. Moreover typically developing peers will also benefit as they will gain more insight and understanding about young people identified as having a disability and this will help to "overcome prejudice" (Richards & Clough, 2004, p. 80).

Timmons, Brietenbach & Maclsaac (2006) provided a series of lesson plans and resources including worksheets and video links to teach the young person's peers about what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails, so that peers in the class can give a name to the different behaviour that these young people are exhibiting. This will promote more positive attitudes and help towards a more welcoming school environment. Moreover Merryday (2016) who is both a teacher and a parent of a child identified as falling within the autism spectrum puts forward a number of points that can help peers accept her child. These include, focusing on the abilities rather than disabilities of the young person,

including the peers in autism awareness activities and encouraging older people to reach to the wider community for help and resources. When the educator and the parent work together for the best interest of the young person, the outcomes are more positive.

Interviews with L.S.A.s in this research and educators still report that they are unprepared to cater for an inclusive educational system (Florian, 2011). Collaborating together is an essential aspect of teaching. All educators need to share the responsibilities of both their students' achievements as well as their behaviours (Hipsky, 2011). Through this collaborative approach, teachers and other educators can give advice to each other, work as a team to develop positive strategies towards inclusion and engage in conversations to develop and support each other (Hipsky, 2011). Berta states that the lack of communication between the stakeholders involved is many times the reason why schooling becomes such a stressful event in the life of the child and the people around him. Moreover it is essential not only for educators to work together but also for these educators to collaborate with other professionals who can give advice on how to cater for diversity at school. These might include nurses, social workers, councillors, therapists, psychologists and transition coordinators. These constant developments, collaborations and partnerships with other professionals and the teacher can aid to find creative ways to work and support young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Shaddock, Goriello & Smith, 2007). Unfortunately the lack of time as indicated in the L.S.A.s interviews constraints these partnerships between stakeholders involved (Westwood, 2003).

In fact, even though the system in Malta is sincerely aimed at developing inclusive environments, there are limited possibilities for inter-professional communication and this results in differing perceptions and expectations amongst the stakeholders involved (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014; 2012). When there is lack of communication between the general education teacher and the support personnel, the young person will not benefit adequately from the inclusive practices (Auxter, Pyfer, Zittel, Roth & Huetting, 2011). Sera talks about the stress she encounters because of the challenging daily situation she has to deal with. Sophie and Rose also emphasise the need for more inter

communication between them and the class teacher because unfortunately lack of time makes it difficult to communicate. Mia on the other hand puts forward the fact that the classroom teacher gives her the handouts beforehand to give her time to prepare for her student. Positive practices can include planning approaches to the content, process, as well as to how the young people show their understanding and readiness to learn (Shaddock et al., 2007). I myself can relate to this problem because I encountered it in my teaching years. The lack of time to discuss issues that arise with the L.S.A.s and other professionals at school makes it difficult to plan, discuss and prepare resources for the specific needs of the students in front of me.

Discourse of care is another construct that emerges through the analysis of the data. One issue that effects inclusion is the relationship between the learners, L.S.A.s and peers. If there is good communicative working relationship between the parents and the L.S.A. the young people will definitely benefit. Rose spent the summer holidays going to Ian's house to be able to observe his strengths and weaknesses and to be able to prepare tailor-made activities for his potential. Home visits to aid in positive transition to secondary schooling is also put forward by the Hampshire Country Council who in 2010 presented a set of strategies for the positive inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in mainstream schooling. These included the importance of home visits and preparation of tailor-made activities. Roses' visits were of great help and this was evident in the parental interviews as the mother was so happy with the work the L.S.A. was doing with her son, and how serene and safe he felt at school. Moreover, this was evident with Ian's progress. A positive and respectful team building between home and school will increase social justice and aid in learning, and this will have an effect on the social life of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Meaded, 2011). We have young people in front of us who have their own personalities and it is our responsibility to find the best key to cater for their needs.

Even though Ian does not respond verbally, Rose understands his gestures and communicates efficiently with him. Ian responds to her cues and is happy when carrying out activities. He is very attached to Rose and when drawing pictures he

included her in all the pictures. When it came to taking photos of what he likes at school he wanted to take photos of him and Rose doing hands-on-activities.

Alice positions the policy makers as needing to focus more on the well-being of the young people and on communicative skills rather than on academic subjects which in many cases are beyond their ability. The focus on academics is high at times hindering the work on the social sphere (Klin et al., 2007) and this ends up causing isolation (Chamberlain et al., 2007). The learning environment needs to be adapted to be able to effectively meet the needs of all students in mainstream schools (Dunlop, Mackay & Knott 2007) to be able to cater for diversity to provide a happy and welcoming environment. This is what the literature refers to as general differences positions where the needs of the different groups in society are recognised and accounted for (Norwich & Lewis, 2005).

The below quote emphasises the need for the educational system to match the needs of the young person in order for him or her to be able to thrive and use his or her potential to the full. The efficacy of mainstream inclusion for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum is often a very debatable issue, mainly because each one is unique despite sharing commonalities (National Autistic Society, 2014; Baron-Cohen, Richler, Bisarya, Gurunathan, & Wheelwright, 2003)

When the person with AS and the environment match, the problems go away and we even thrive. When they don't match, we seem disabled.
(Baron-Cohen et al., 2003, p. 180)

I do believe that a single teacher can make a difference on his/her own, but the joint effort of all the teachers together can be the stepping-stone to make positive educational change. It is our responsibility to encourage and work together as a team to provide the best educational environment for all the young people in front of us. It is essential to prepare beforehand for the successful inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. These can include a number of things, like the use of social intervention programmes and preparing the I.E.P. amongst others.

5.3 Inclusion as Accommodation

The Salamanca Statement for Action for Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) and research by Clough & Nutbrown (2005) puts forward the need for inclusion to accommodate all young people in mainstream schooling irrespective of their diversities. Locally, one of the main aims of the Maltese document ‘Creating Inclusive Schools’ (National Curriculum Council, 2002) is that inclusive education is the responsibility of each and every one of us. Throughout the years there has been a shift in mentality where teachers and the school community now recognise that all young people have strengths that need to be celebrated. All students in the classroom and their well-being should be the responsibility of all stakeholders within the educational system.

It is hoped that we will start viewing all students as lying within a spectrum of common and individual needs that should be met as far as possible within regular education provision.

(Creating Inclusive Schools, NCC, 2002, p. 5)

5.3.1 Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

Carrington and Graham (2001) put forward the idea of inclusion as the need to accommodate for the diverse needs of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum when carrying out case studies with these young people. The extent to which students integrate themselves in the school’s social world was dependent on what was perceived as normal and abnormal behaviour. Their findings suggest that young people feel forced to adapt, compromising their identities in the process. As they grow older, they start to realise that they are different and do not fit (Lawson, 2008; Carrington & Graham, 1999). They express the need to fit in teacher-students behaviours that are acceptable in the classroom and in outer social contexts. The way I as a teacher behave in class and accept and reject different types of behaviours will in turn set the tone for the classroom.

As discussed in the previous section, the realisation of being different is one of the ideas that emerged through the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrums’ discourses. Lawson discusses this issue in 2008 where she talks about her identities and experiences as a person identified as falling within

the autism spectrum. She puts forward the concept of normalcy and the need for people to understand what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails and what accommodations need to be present for a quality education in mainstream classes.

Goodall & Marshall (2015) explored the right for a young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum to have a meaningful education by looking at how these principles are explained and enacted through important international laws including the International Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNESCO, 2006). The position of a *one-size-fits-all* stance to education is found to be inappropriate for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum as indicated in the interview responses of Timothy, Samuel and Jake. Unfortunately, this approach reduces the efficacy of mainstream education (Goodall & Marshall, 2015). Apart from having needs that are common to all, young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum have specific needs, which need to be catered for (Jordan, 2005).

One way to help involve these young people in the lesson, and motivate them to have a positive attitude, is the use of social stories as a way to decrease the social difficulties they encounter in their day to day routine (Kokina & Kern, 2010). Even though social stories as the ones used to explain the research to the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Refer to appendix 4 for a copy of the social stories used) do have their disadvantages, it was successful in helping to provide information about practical concepts and moreover, they are quite easy and not time consuming to implement within mainstream classrooms. In fact Kokina and Kern (2010) state that the use of these social stories can be a very positive resource, especially to promote social interactions in inclusive classrooms, because they are easy to implement and do not alter the day to day running of the mainstream classroom. Also, research indicated that when these social stories were being implemented students identified as falling within the autism spectrum attending mainstream classrooms did better than those in special schools (Kokina & Kern, 2010).

Because young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum find it hard to decipher face-to-face interactions and gestures, social stories can be a way of depicting a social situation and how it can be handled (Scattone, Wilczynski, Edwards, & Rabian, 2002). This is because normal conversations can be a problem for these young people. Qualitative research findings with young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum have indicated that these young people are visual learners and that social stories are successful because they use visual instructions to be able to deal with complex interpersonal interactions (Xin & Sutman, 2011). This is also evident in this research where Timothy, Ben and Jake all positioned mainstream schooling as being a positive experience when visual aids were using during the lessons and when they were actively involved in the lessons. Denning (2007) describes social stories as an, “attempt to accurately describe the situation in which a behaviour occurred, describe the perspective of those involved, and provide guidelines for what the student should do in the future” (Denning, 2007, p. 18). They are designed to teach these young people how to manage their behaviour during different social situations by:

- Giving a description of the place of the activity.
- When the activity will occur.
- What will happen during the activity?
- Who will be participating in the activity?
- Why the student identified as falling within the autism spectrum is participating in this activity.

(Xin & Sutman, 2011)

Both Ian and Andrea responded very well to the use of social stories both when explaining about how they will participate in the research as well as when they had to choose whether they took photos because it represented a positive or negative experience at school. I had the opportunity prior to this research to observe how these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum use social stories making me more familiar to the idea and able to implement it more easily.

In their research Carrington and Graham (1999), Richmond (2007) and Marshall & Goodall (2015) found that young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum expressed elevated stress levels because of schoolwork assigned as well as the need to meet with the social expectations of their classmates. Timothy says that he would prefer to have more hands-on activities rather than written work with Samuel feeling stressed because of the low marks he gets in homeworks and tests. Brueggemann, Garland-Thomson and Kleege (2005), three disabled teachers, argued that there are a wide variety of learning methods and not all will work, but it is important to find the right key that best fits for each of the students in front of us. They put forward the example of using visual aids to explain difficult concepts as it could be of help (Brueggemann, Garland-Thomson & Kleege, 2005).

Unfortunately, even though in accordance with non-discriminatory approaches, teachers need to accommodate for these modifications that are listed in the individualised education plan (I.E.P.) to make curriculum more accessible within mainstream schooling, this is not always the case (De Vore & Russell, 2007). Samuel does not like school subjects and does not like to come to school because he gets bored listening to lessons he does not really understand. This puts the pressure on us educators to find ways to remove this barrier to learning and provide a more welcoming environment, by catering for the diverse needs of the young people in front of us. Samuel positions himself as feeling awkward when he gets homeworks back after it has being corrected by the class teacher and he does not do well like his peers. He does not like to attend these lessons because he feels lost. This is also found in Jake's interview who expresses the desire to have more subjects removed as he does not understand a number of topics and feels bored during a lesson where the teacher is all the time talking and he is not following. This discourse calls for more highly qualified teachers of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to have a range of inclusive practices that are suitable to cater for their diverse needs and promote academics that are at their level (National Autistic Society, 2016; Nelson & Huefner, 2003).

In the discourse of inclusion as accommodation, one of the issues that Jake puts forward is the idea that he finds it difficult to follow mainstream curricula, but since he has shared support from the L.S.A. with other students, Alice his L.S.A. finds it difficult to cater for the diverse needs of both her students, under her responsibility without help from the other stakeholders in the school community. He is alone and cannot cope with the situation. This is in line with a study conducted by Asburner, Ziviani & Rogers in 2011. These researchers assessed a group of students identified as falling within the autism spectrum using Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and the Vineland Adaptive Behaviour scale. Data indicated that those students who had specialised provision improved more in social skills and behaviour when compared to those who did not have these specialised provisions. This points to the need of alternative support to cater for young people identified as falling within mainstream classrooms to help them cope with the problems encountered at school (Asbhurn et al., 2011).

5.3.2 Parents of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

The discourse of normalcy (Bornstein, 2014, Clough & Nutbrown, 2013) and the need to accommodate to fit in is evident in Sonia's and Sandra's interview. They know their children are not considered as fitting with the normal behaviour and expectations, and that that in turn causes them to be excluded in a number of social activities. This creates an unwelcoming environment for young people. Jack positions his son as not normal and that there is no use in downplaying the situation.

Giving a diagnosis enables families and teachers to give meaning to the condition and learn how to live with it, prepare resources, and identify the strengths and difficulties related to being identified as having the condition (Jones et al., 2008). Ben enjoys school and this was evident through his interview. However, both his mother and himself expressed the panic he feels when they give him a lot of homework because he wants to finish all of them at once. A crucial issue for 42 % of the families surveyed by Robertson, Chamberlain & Kasari in 2003 was their concern that school staff did not appreciate the impact that being identified as falling within the autism spectrum has. Poor teacher-student relationships have been linked to increasing behavioural difficulties and lower rates of social

and academic achievement for these young people in mainstream classrooms (Robertson et al., 2003).

In their interviews, parents talk about the idea that their child is different not only in their way of behaving but also in their way of learning and there is no use trying to hide it because that will hinder their educational and social aspects. For example Jack talks about how he teaches his son how to use a hammer whilst Andrea is next to him in the garage. Singer (1999) states that for difference to be regarded as difference it needs to be acknowledged. In their parental discourse Jack, Sandra and Sonia emphasised that there was no use in denying the fact that their sons had additional needs and were different from their typically developing peers. Thus the “right to be the same must be tempered with an awareness of the right to be different” (Ravet, 2011, p. 672).

Education for diversity is emphasised in Malta’s National Curriculum Framework: Towards an Education for All (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) a document that is currently being implemented in our schools. It focuses on decision-making in the school, language and methodologies as well as student interactions and learning resources. These are important to ensure the inclusion of “multiple perspective and voices within the learning environment” (N.C.F., 2012, p. 32). Without having the necessary knowledge and understanding of what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails, educators will make the mistake of only seeing the surface behaviour of the young person in isolation. However, as Sonia says, this is only the tip of the iceberg when she positions her son’s educators and peers as lacking knowledge, as not knowing why her child Samuel acts in that particular way. She even moves out of the educational sphere and expresses the trouble she had during her son’s childhood years because other children and parents did not realise that his different behaviour was a result of him being identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Also, Sandra moved a step forward and with the help of the senior management team (S.M.T.) presented a talk to Ian’s peers in school on Autism Awareness. I was present for this talk and I can say that it was very educational. His peers were very attentive to learn about autism and I can honestly say that a number of experiences that Sandra shared with us made me

realise the difficult time she and her son encountered because of the lack of knowledge about what being identified as falling within the autism spectrum entails.

Parents like Sandra, Sonia, Jack and Lucille want to be more empowered to be able to participate actively in the school life of their children and have a say, especially in the academic functioning of their children. Parents put forward the need of more school support including positive teacher-parent relationship and resources available to help reduce stress levels (Krakovich, McGrew, Yu & Ruble 2016). Charman et al., (2011) expresses that the knowledge and expertise that parents and caregivers of children identified as falling within the autism spectrum have can be a great asset to improve their school experience. This is also put forward by Bennett (2015) whose research findings suggest the need to provide a variety of services that can help parents and families to deal with the challenging situations and have a say in the life of their children.

Moreover locally we have autism support groups provided by the Ministry for Education and Employment to support young people and parents as well as an autism support teacher (only available in primary schools). In my opinion however more effort needs to be made to incentivise parents to use these support groups and promote awareness in schools about their availability. Dorothy talks about the need of support groups so does not seem to be aware of the actual presence of these groups locally. Ben's mother Lucille talks about how difficult academic subjects are to Ben, and she sees this as being the reason why he is suffering from anxiety. However, she says in her interview that, fortunately, with the help of the guidance teachers this has improved and he is now much happier at school. Vernon, Koegel, Dauterman & Stolen, (2012) investigates the effects that teaching parents on how to implement a social intervention programme had on their children. Results showed that when these parent-delivered interventions were carried out, their children had better eye contact and verbal communication as well as a general increase in the positive attitudes of both the parents and their children was observed.

5.3.3 L.S.A.s of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

In Malta, in 2005 the 'For All Children to Succeed' document (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2005) focused on the need for educators to collaborate with all stakeholders, especially parents, to provide a serene environment for all students. This is an evident discourse that emerged in the L.S.A.s talk, the need to collaborate together and work together to promote inclusive practices. Furthermore as already stated, the current National Curriculum Framework Towards an Education for All (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) emphasises the need to empower learners to achieve their full potential. On a positive note, Malta is one of the countries with the highest percentages of students identified as having a disability attending mainstream schooling amongst EU members (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012).

Because young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum may have developmental delays that can affect academic performance, the education of these young people needs to take this aspect into consideration (National Autistic Society, 2014). Research conducted by Chourliaki & Fairclough in 1999, Corson in 2000 and Bunch in 2005 with educational stakeholders put forward the need of identifying educational policies and practices that contribute to successful inclusion.

Unfortunately at times educators unknowingly carry out actions that have unintended consequences that result in the further isolation of young people identified as having a disability rather than their inclusion. Through a cross sectional survey conducted with 74 school teachers Vaz et al. (2015) concluded that the teachers' attitudes can at time be based on their concerns to implement inclusive practices in the classrooms rather than on a particular ideology that they believe in (Vaz et al., 2015). These concerns may include time constrains, lack of support and limited training and competencies (Vaz et al., 2015). This in turn emphasises the need to work on holistic approaches to the curriculum as an important aspect in catering for diversity (Garner & Forbes, 2015).

Another issue that emerged is that inclusion is seen as more the sole responsibility of the L.S.A. rather than the class teacher and the rest of the school community.

This seems to be a perception throughout schools in Malta as it has emerged again through the recent external audit in 2014. When training is offered, it is not perceived as something all educational staff should be concerned with, thus, making it a low priority for the whole staff. Unfortunately, the external audit report surveys (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014) indicated that less than one third of the present L.S.A.s feel adequately supported in finding answers to everyday practical problems that they encounter. The responsibility placed upon L.S.A.s further reinforces the low expectations on teachers who are not trying to gain greater understanding of inclusion and what they can do to promote it. Research suggests that even though newly qualified teachers are expected to enact inclusive practices they do not have the required training to do so (Garner, 2000) which will in turn make educational professionals have an attitude towards inclusive practices as a “yes, but” approach (Clough & Nutbrown, 2005, p.105). This is a recurrent issue that all L.S.A.s agreed with. Even though they believe in mainstream schooling and in the principles behind inclusion, they believe that they lack training and support services to cater for the diverse needs of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Roberts & Simpson, 2016; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014, de Boer et al., 2011; Shaddock et al. 2007)

Within the rights-based-approach to inclusion (UNICEF, 2011) it is argued that educators who support young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum need specific training to be able to understand the behaviours and responses of these young people (Bruster, 2014). McGregor and Campbell (2001) and the Maltese external audit (2014) found that teachers with more autism-specific training and experiences were more likely to favour the inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in the daily lessons of the mainstream classroom. Analysis of the L.S.A.s interviews indicated that they feel that they are not knowledgeable in all subjects and feel they do not have the necessary skills to cater for the needs of the students assigned to them. Teachers without autism specific training will not be an asset to these young people and thus will be hindering their education in mainstream (National Autistic Society, 2016). In the U.K. in 2013 over 7,000 people have signed a petition promoting the need of obligatory autism training for educators. These 7,000

people include members of parliament and educational staff. On May 26th 2016 a newspaper article in the U.K was titled “Autism to be part of core teacher training, Government says” promoting this very positive initiative. Training will ensure that these L.S.A.s are able to structure a supportive learning environment and address problems in the classroom as well as promoting a positive working relationship with families having children identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Iovannone, Dunlap, Huber & Kincaid 2003).

The pressure of catering for the diverse needs of the young person and adapting the curriculum on their own is another discursive construction in the discourse inclusion as accommodation put forward by the L.S.A.s. In a qualitative research with educators, Boyle, Topping & Jindal-Shape in 2013 found that sharing the same values will make cooperation and working in a team possible. All stakeholders involved need to work together towards one common goal, that of providing a serene and welcoming environment for the well being of all young people in school. L.S.A.s in particular Sophie and Berta say that for effective team work there needs to be specific staff development where the stakeholders involved will be given the necessary skills to learn how to work as a team. This point has also emerged locally in the external audit for inclusive education (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014) as well as internationally in the work of a number of researchers including Deppelar et al. (2005), Simpson et al., 2011 and Vaz et al. in 2015.

For effective communication strong leaders need to make sure that the responsibility for the young people is shared between all stakeholders not just the learning support assistants, thus creating a continuum of support for teachers, the learners and their families by developing the role of specialist provision as part of a coherent inter-disciplinary support service (Bartolo, 2016; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014; Ayers, 2004). However analysis has indicated that this teamwork is many times neglected by the S.M.T, and educators are not happy with the way inclusive schooling is putting its effort on the role of teamwork. All L.S.A.s especially Alice, Mia and Rose emphasise the issue that they position themselves as the sole provider for preparing materials tailor-made for the student whilst the lesson proceeds with a *one-size-fits-all* mechanism with

Mia saying that there is only help with bureaucratic papers.

In Slater's (2012) narrative research on educational leadership, the way the school leadership team deals with situations will have an effect on the teaching staff and the overall experience of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, thus it is essential to put forward values of respect and diversity in the school (Slater, 2012; Cheung, 2009). In the school where the research is conducted efforts are made to promote inclusive practices, and I can personally say that in my opinion educators are committed to promoting inclusion, however barriers including curriculum and time constraints still hinder their positive attitude (Garner, 2000). Unfortunately L.S.A.s still feel that the responsibility to cater for diversity is many times their sole responsibility with little help from the classroom teachers and the S.M.T. which causes stress in their daily school life.

L.S.A.s need to be able to assess the needs of the young people under their care and adapt their teaching and the classroom setting to provide a serene and welcoming environment (Jones et al. 2008). L.S.A.s in their talk put forward the need to be informed and discuss with other professional stakeholders on the best way to cater for their needs. Parents and educators were interviewed by Steimbrenner & Watson (2015) and they put forward not only the need to be given the specific training to cater for the diverse needs of the students they will be helping but also the need for time to discuss and relate with other stakeholders and professionals to be able to come up with the best possible strategies to promote positive attitudes to schooling (Steinbrenner & Watson, 2015). Training can be provided on how to use available resources such as the use of interactive and social stories (Carnahan et al., 2009). Teacher trainers need to ask questions about their role in ensuring that educational stakeholders are given the required expertise to be knowledgeable with regards to how to cater for diversity. L.S.A.s explained that they need knowledge about the content to be taught, how it is taught and knowledge about the young people in front of them.

Woodhead (2006) states that the educators have 'finite' time availability and energy whilst the school has 'finite' resources that the more young people identified as having additional educational needs that are put in mainstream the

bigger the difficulty to cater adequately for them. In the UNESCO (2011) document “ Everyone has the right to Education” the aim is to help countries develop strategies that can help educators with training to cater for the diverse needs of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Sera points out that she believes that Timothy is feeling stressed at school and this will result in a stressful environment for her as she needs to deal with his behaviour as a result of the unwelcoming situation he is experiencing.

In her interview Sera explains that it took a few months for her to start understanding Timothy and vice versa. Transition time is essential both for the young person and the L.S.A. to get to know each other and learn how to accommodate and work together. Single case studies suggest that using behavioural intervention strategies can be one way of catering and helping in the smooth transition and social interaction of these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Banda, Hart & Liu-Gatz, 2010; Cozier & Tincani, 2007; Nelson, McDonnell, Johnston, Crompton, & Nelson, 2007)

All L.S.A.s agreed that each young person identified as falling within the autism spectrum is unique. General provisions may not always be the key of successful instructional strategies, but rather promoting the visual and spatial strengths and using model expected skills, as put forward by Alice can be of great help (Flynn, 2016). The Index for Inclusion in U.K. (2016) identified three dimensions for successful inclusion: “creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies and evolving inclusive practice” (Index for Inclusion, U.K., 2016).

Through the analysis and my own experiences in school, I believe that it is the responsibility of all stakeholders to make every effort to provide a positive educational experience for all young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. I believe that practitioners, parents and researchers all need to collaborate in order to accommodate and take in consideration both the strengths and challenges of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. One of the reasons why Ian and Andrea are fitting in mainstream schooling is the dedication of the L.S.A.s who work hard to provide adequate resources for them. However, this has been achieved since they go beyond their job specification and

are willing to spend their own free time to help these young people. This is not always the case, and as the L.S.A.s talk point out, this is not always because the L.S.A. does not want to, but because at times time constraints limit the amount of work that can be done out of school hours.

5.4 Inclusion as the Need to Assimilate in Pre-Existing Policies

The streamline nature of the current policies and practices end up not catering for the wide and diverse needs of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Baumi, 2016; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014). We need to recognise the fact that every learner has diverse needs and so a curriculum that fits for everyone is not beneficial (Wolanine & Steel, 2004).

Research has shown that inclusive classrooms that are constrained by higher educational policies and not modified in order to cater for the diverse needs of the young people will hinder rather than facilitate education. It can be argued that positioning autism as falling within medical categories shapes the way we think about inclusion (Carson, 2009) as a disability which will be viewed as a problem of the person (Armstrong & Barton, 1999). This medical model will in turn cause problems when creating educational policies. Matthews (2009) argues that on the contrary when using a social model of disability medical labels should be avoided whilst promoting diverse teaching methods towards a more inclusive environment (Ness & Stromstad, 2003).

The following are a number of misconceptions that have been pointed out in the 2005 UNESCO document Guidelines for Inclusion:

- Inclusion as being costly.
- Before anything can be done in implementing inclusive practices their needs to be a societal attitude change.
- Inclusion is a concept, which is good in theory but is not practical.
- Inclusive practices require educational stakeholders to have skills and be knowledgeable to implement that are difficult to attain.
- Inclusion is a disability-specific issue.
- Inclusion is not the responsibility of the school or teaching staff but of the

Ministry for Education.

(UNESCO, 2005)

Overcoming these misconceptions is a big challenge because it requires change and people resist change. Implementing inclusive practices in school requires a change in the school culture as it challenges pre-existing values and attitudes (Simonson, 2005). Principles in the local National Curricular Framework (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) identified the need of a close partnership between school leaders and teachers to facilitate a whole school approach to inclusive education both at policy and practice level. Stakeholders however still indicate that there is still a problem with implementation because of lack of resources, teacher workload and training (Roberts & Simpson, 2016; Simonson, 2005). The inadequate preparation at present is a universal issue (Roberts & Simpson, 2016; Chopra, 2009).

5.4.1 Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

As evident from the analysis chapter, the need to conform to pre-existing policies and practices is one of the major setbacks in including these young people in mainstream settings. In this research young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum put forward the fact that material presented to them is too difficult causing boredom and frustration. Slee (2003) argues that inclusion has become a kind of truth that has become a routing practice in schooling. Young people who do not fit in the pre-conceived categories of inclusive practices are labelled as not conforming and looked at as outsiders within the educational system. This emphasis on conformity will make young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum lose their individuality, and their personality will be lost (Billington et al., 2000). Research with 15 young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum indicated that these young people will find it hard to conform to the typical behaviour of their developing peers and research indicates that they resist change and social pressures (Yafari, Verier, Reidy, 2014).

Through the perspective of the young people, research that does not involve them will lack their perspective (Posseurd, Breivik, Gillberg, & Lundervold, 2013;

Müller et al., 2008). Kilpatrick and Hunter in 2005 expressed the need to understand inclusion from the view of the direct stakeholders; only in this way will the education system be enacting truly inclusive principles. Thus young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum need to have available opportunities to participate in research on the creation of policies, educational intervention, and support as not much is available about their perspective on schooling and how this prepares them for an independent future (Parsons, 2015). In the research by Parsons, Guldberg, MacLeod & Jones in 2009 out of 100 empirical articles that were examined there were only 8 of them that presented participation from people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. This puts forward again the lack of involvement of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in research about their educational provisions. In his talk Timothy shows a level of maturity that would enable him to be actively involved in his school life, however this is not the case in practice. Even though Timothy, Andrea, Ben, Samuel and Ian were present during the I.E.P. meeting, and were asked about their educational experience at school, ultimately they had no say in the decision making process because their voice was not given the needed importance. Giagreco (2010) states that many times it is more a decision of the adults and their preferences on whether to place young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in mainstream or not rather than as a result of their child's characteristics.

On a positive note Jake was present and asked what subjects he wanted to sit examinations for, and his ideas were actually taken in consideration when reaching the decision. However it is quite interesting to point out that even though the S.M.T. allowed Jake not to sit for these exams, since he had shared support of the L.S.A. with another student he still had to attend lessons for these subjects. Thus it is important to critically think about the present curriculum and inclusive policies, and come up with policies that are innovative and take into consideration the current problems related to inclusion. Insider accounts will definitely give insight to professionals about the development of more inclusive policies and practices (Billington, 2006). It will help develop a positive self-image in young people and engagement in school policies minimising the power discrepancies between the teacher and the young people (Keddie, 2015).

Unfortunately, through all the analytical results of this thesis it is evident that these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum need to conform to what is regarded as normal behaviour, whilst the focus of the educational system is on their academic inclusion instead of on including them holistically in the school. Sitting down for a whole lesson as one example, is difficult and leeway needs to be given and more importantly policy makers need to keep these difficulties in mind (Mayton, 2005). This invisibility in decision-making is further enhanced by the differences between research priorities of funders and what really interests young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and their families (Pellicano et al., 2013).

5.4.2 Parents of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

I believe that there is still a lack of clarity when it comes to national legislations and policies. This can, unfortunately, lead to situations where infringements of rights are carried out. For example, Sandra explained that when the L.S.A. is absent her child does not attend school. She said that she would appreciate if the S.M.T. advises her at least one hour before school starts so that she does not get her child ready for school only to send him back home. She puts forward the idea that lack of communication between the L.S.A. and the parent can lead to difficulty in the school life of the child. Moreover, absenteeism because of this issue shows a lack of continuity between home and school. I ask, how come only one L.S.A. is trained to cater for the diverse needs of Ian, and why is it that if she is sick than Ian has to remain at home for reasons beyond his control? Here communication between parents and educational professionals is evidently essential as without it Ian is being hindered in his educational outcomes (Miller, 2015).

For a long time schools have been pushed to promote parental involvement in policy making. School policies have put forward the need to be accountable to parents and the wider community as well as involve them in the life of their children (Stanley, Beamish & Bryer, 2005). Sandra, Sonia and to a lesser extent Lucille are pro-active mothers, however their participation is still limited to how much they are allowed to do and say about the education of their children. Schools need to value the input that parents can give in skills, experiences and

knowledge that can help to promote a more inclusive environment (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014; OECD, 2011; Stanley et al., 2005).

As Lucille points out, the current curricular adaptations and having shared support causes her son to spend much of his school time idle resulting in missed learning opportunities. Because of this focus on academics in policy documents, schooling may at times become a negative experience. She believes that rather than spending time being idle during lessons that he does not comprehend, he should attend life-skills lessons that can be beneficial for his future outside school. Even though the L.S.A.s do give their input in the I.E.P. meeting, ultimately it is policies that rule what is actually enacted in the classroom. This is very frustrating because unfortunately it puts the L.S.A. and the parent in a difficult position because in reality even if she knows that by doing things differently her student would benefit, she cannot do so because the school policy which is in turn governed by the educational policies of Malta does not give her the leeway to do so. I believe a more decentralised approach needs to be adopted in order to give the possibility to let stakeholders work, as they believe is best for the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum.

In their interviews, parents put forward the idea that they would also really like to be more involved in the daily routine of the school rather than just having to abide to pre existing rules and regulations, with Dorothy wishing she could be a fly on the wall of the classroom to see what is happening in the daily life of her son. In the research of Billington et al., (2010) parents urged educators to look at their child not as a problem but rather as an individual, to create a non-judgemental environment and to look at them as a powerful resource that will promote dialogue to create policies that will cater for the needs of their children.

However, on a positive note parents explained that when there was a good communicative relationship with the L.S.A. of their child, then they could be better involved in the daily life of their child and could be more serene knowing that their child is being well-catered for within the current policy framework. This is in line with the work of Bennett who in 2015 put forward the need of parental involvement in early intervention programs for young people identified

as falling within the autism spectrum. Lack of this can have negative effects on the development and progress of these young people.

This again brings about the issue of the dominant discourse of normalcy that was discussed previously in the chapter. Sandra was afraid to send her child to mainstream schooling because she knew he would not fit it in the mainstream policies as he was too different and would not abide by typical school regulations (Bonello, 2015). Sonia put forward the idea that her son is not normal so he finds it hard to fit in these pre-existing policies. Aspis (1999) expresses the idea that powerful groups of people will continue to define what experiences are commonplace and accepted and thus others will be given the term ‘special needs’.

Foucault (1977) defines this as the function of modern disciplinary power. Policy-making is implicated in a network of power relations, which results in the ‘normalising judgments’ of disabled children (Foucault, 1977). Billington & Lindsay (2007) states that not only is the curriculum that young people are exposed to imposed from higher entities, but this curriculum also results in the need to conform, and thus causes the child to be denied individuality by suppressing their own personality.

5.4.3 L.S.A.s of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

- Terminology within policies has changed, but practice has not and the focus is still on fitting individual learners into the existing system. Inclusion is mainly linked to physical access to mainstream schools – an integrative rather than an inclusive approach that does not focus on rights as outlined in the UNCRPD and other international instruments
 - (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014, p. 41)

L.S.A.s’ interviews point out that even though almost all young people identified as having a disability are expected to keep up academically with the rest of the class, this is not always the case. Policies are too narrow and look at averages without taking into consideration the young people who are at the ends of the spectrum.

The more educational responses emphasize what learners have in common, the more they tend to overlook what separates them; the more they emphasize what separates them and distinguishes each learner, the more they tend to overlook what learners have in common

(Dyson, 2001, p. 25)

One of the constructs that emerged through the discourse of inclusion as the need to assimilate in pre-existing policies is the problem of having to adapt to policies, which constrain the way they can cater for their students. Jake's mother would prefer that her son could spend more time on main subjects, but Alice cannot accommodate for this. This makes it very difficult because the condition of these young people is different, and thus preparing tailor-made activities for her students is impossible to achieve (Poon Mc Brayer & Wong, 2013). She would like to better cater for the needs of her student but unfortunately needs to abide by school regulations governed by educational policies.

Alice emphasised that she is constrained by higher policies and ends up practicing a *one-size-fits-all* mechanism since she is shared with two students and needs to adapt to both their diverse needs together. She has also time constraints and this again puts more pressure on her (Wilcox & Hoon, 2014). She continues pointing out how her student was missing out because of the 'unnecessary' lessons he was attending. The S.M.T. stated that nothing could be done because her student was shared in the same classroom and thus she had to be there for the other student and could not pull him out for those subjects, which were beyond his ability. Mia accentuates the fact that for her inclusion only exists at a physical level and the school is still reluctant to change practices and policies to provide tailor-made initiatives to ensure not only academic but also social inclusion exists. They find little or no co-operation from other school members (Madson & Makobela, 2002).

Eldar, Talmore and Wolf-Zukerman (2010) investigated the success and difficulties of inclusion of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum from the perspective of education inclusive coordinators. They put forward the need for the young people to be given the opportunity to give a meaningful contribution to the decisions of the school in order for it to be truly

inclusive. Moreover, special educational teachers expressed that the role of the teacher will also in turn change and different strategies need to be adopted like for example the collaborative and consultative model between teacher and students (Eisenman et al., 2011). Unfortunately, the lack of monitoring and evaluation many times causes stakeholders to lose opportunities for learning and unsuccessful initiatives may be repeatedly leading to the ineffective use of resources.

When teaching young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum we need to ask ourselves who should be teaching them, in which setting, what should they be taught and more importantly how to teach these young people (Simpson, et al. 2011). Policies need to focus on programmes that need to be implemented so that both general and special educators can be given the necessary skills to best adapt for these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Strong, 2014).

As discussed in the UNESCO report in 2005 and in the 2011 document ‘Everyone has the right to Education’ (UNESCO, 2011), even though special schools have the tendency to perpetuate the segregation of young people identified as having a disability this can be a setting that is more appropriate than how the policies of inclusion are being enacted in mainstream schooling because of the *one-size-fits-all* scenario and because it is not providing meaningful interactions with classmates and other stakeholders involved (UNESCO, 2011; 2005). Research on educators’ attitudes indicated that for educational policies to be truly inclusive they need to be in line with the views of the educational stakeholders who are in direct contact with the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Boyle, Topping & Jindal Shape, 2013). This issue has also emerged from the L.S.A.’s interviews and was also pointed out in the local external audit, since the national inclusive policy is a “copy and paste from the UK or elsewhere” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014, p.41).

L.S.A.s talk point to the need for policy makers to create an accessible and flexible curriculum, as they believe it is the key to creating a school that is for all. Unfortunately many curricula expect that young people at school learn the same

things with the same methods at the same pace (UNESCO, 2005), something which all three-stakeholder groups agreed as being detrimental to the inclusive process. I believe that much more needs to be done in this area.

A number of strategies can be taken in consideration when preparing a curriculum that aims at an access for all young people rather than a *one-size-fits-all* (Marshall & Goodall, 2015). Some of these strategies that are put forward in the UNESCO (2005) document Guidelines for Inclusion can include the following:

- 1. A curriculum that provides a flexible time frame for young people to be able to study and learn subjects at their own pace. This has been put forward by all L.S.A.s in particularly emphasised by Alice, Mia and Sophie. Giving options and possibilities to teaching professionals to choose their working methods is needed but as Alice explained she was constrained by policies and could not adapt, as she would have liked for the needs of her student. Analysis has showed that in order to cater for diversity, special pedagogies need to be prepared. These are defined as “forms of instruction informed by needs that are specific or distinctive to a group that shares common characteristics” (Lewis and Norwich 2005, p. 3).
 2. Giving opportunities to teaching professionals to be given support and services to be able to cater for the diverse needs of their students, an issue that was pointed out in all the L.S.A.s interviews (Olsen, Roberts & Leko, 2015).
 3. A curriculum that gives time for additional help within the classroom, something that the L.S.A.s and parental interviews showed to be lacking (Bouck & Joshi, 2015).
 4. A curriculum that focuses not only on academic subjects but also on vocational training. Again both parents and L.S.A.s agreed on the need of life skills to aid in building an independent future. The young people

identified as falling within the autism spectrum found subjects like Geography difficult to comprehend and did not want to study it any more. Unfortunately research by Bouck & Joshi (2015) indicate that the link between curriculum and post secondary outcomes is still lacking.

The local Minister of Education, Hons. Bartolo expresses the fact that it is unacceptable that education is still working on a *one-size-fits-all* mechanism, giving parents the false hope that just having an L.S.A. in class will resolve the difficulties of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Bartolo, 2016). Ultimately a curriculum that avoids a *one-size-fits-all* mechanisms (Bartolo, 2016; Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008) aims to promote human values and addresses the rights and responsibilities that all stakeholders need to have to be able to cater for the diverse needs of the young people in the classroom.

Ultimately, there is no one universal right place of instruction for all young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Finding the right key to cater for the diverse needs of the young person is an issue that all L.S.A.s agree with. Also, the most suitable setting needs to be decided on a one-to-one basis (Vaz et al., 2015; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014; UNESCO, 2009). Educators need to ask fundamental questions such as whether the teaching methods present are student centered and interactive, how is the curriculum related to other assessment methods within the educational system, and how is feedback regarding the present curriculum gathered (Booth & Ainscow, 2000). Ultimately professional training is required to make sure that professionals are adequately equipped to cater for the diverse needs of young people in the mainstream schooling (Garner & Forbes, 2015).

At times I feel that policy makers have little if no contact with the actual school experiences and that makes it difficult to comprehend what is actually taking place and what can be done to promote a positive experience for all the young people in the school. There is a major difference between official policies and enacted policies, and the difference between these two is often the way the stakeholders enact the policies. Policies about inclusive education in Malta are

unfortunately at times centralised and decided by educational officers with limited discussion with the direct stakeholders involved, which limits the school's ownership and support development of school level policy. The policy culture in education is primarily seen as a top down system and the stakeholders report the lack of consultation as well as the limited guidance on action planning for implementation (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014).

When the new curricular framework was implemented there was little discussion with stakeholders including us teachers on what we would like to change in the current policies and practices at school. When done properly, policy consultation can benefit teachers and parents to provide collaborative ways so that effective links, interventions and assessment criteria can be achieved (Ruble & Dalrymple, 2002). Many times "meeting individual learning needs" is often interpreted as supporting young people to achieve "externally set academic learning goals"(Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014, p. 45). How willing the school is to interpret and accept diversity issues is often an issue which effects inclusive policies and practices in the classroom setting. This approach reinforces the view that:

...learners with diverse needs must fit into an existing system, rather than the system being adapted to meet learners' individual needs.

(Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014, p. 46)

Charman et al., (2011) states that it is essential for schools to listen to its students own voice to be able to adapt an educational system with policies that aim to be individualized and move away from a *one-size-fits-all* scenario. Instead of expecting young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to change, we need to advocate moving beyond the conventional educational system which has policies that hinder their achievement.

5.5 Inclusion as a Way Towards an Independent Living

Schools have a crucial role in the transition of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum into the world of work (Chappel & Somers, 2010). The Salamanca Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) affirms that young

people identified as having additional educational needs need to be aided to transition from schooling to the world of work to live an independent future. Schools should help to provide them with the necessary skills and training to respond to the demands and expectation of life beyond schooling (UNESCO, 1994, p.34). Unfortunately research indicates that the quality of life for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum is poor when it comes to living independently and securing paid employment (Presniakova, 2014; Eaves & Ho, 2008; Billsteid et al., 2005). In fact employment rates are much lower for young people identified as having a disability who are not always adequately prepared from school for the world of work (Carter, Austin & Trainor, 2012). Very recently, on 18th November 2016 there was a conference here in Malta preceded by the Hons. Minister of Education Evarist Bartolo to delve into the way our schools are equipping young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to the world of work, what the gaps are and what needs to be done to improve the current situation. Again the lack of expertise and the need for time and training of L.S.A.s was high on the agenda.

5.5.1 Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

Transition is defined as

a co-ordinated set of activities for a student designed within an outcome orientated process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living and community participation.

(Hudson, 2003, p. 44)

The need of skills for an independent living is only pointed out directly by Timothy, who very interestingly expressed the need of education to help him to be able to be financially self sufficient in his future. Parsons (2015) explains that unfortunately young people who participated in her research were not satisfied with their current employment. The more positive the school experience, the more satisfied they were in their life outside of the school community.

Research analysing current literature and policies indicates that young people

identified as falling within the autism spectrum can be included in the working sphere if they are given the adequate support and skills to do so at school (Wehman, Schall, Carr, Targett, West & Cifu 2014). Unfortunately the full potential of these young people is not always used as academic subjects are beyond their ability and thus the curriculum is not targeting what these young people really need (Wehman et al., 2014). This causes stress and frustration because research and practices are not being focused on what matters to these young people, that is being taught life skills and providing services that can help them in their social sphere to live an independent future (Pellicano et al., 2013).

Timothy showed a level of maturity that possibly was still lacking in the other young people who did not give any taught to what will happen to them after they finish secondary schooling. Woodman, Smith, Greenberg & Mailick (2015) used a person-centered approach to research and investigate the changes in characteristics over a period of 10 years in individuals who have been identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Results indicated that promoting a positive link between school and home during the early years might impact on the adult independent life of these young people.

In a current research conducted by Anderson, McDonald, Deidre, Smith & Taylor (2016) with 31 young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, the researchers conclude that these young people equated adulthood with independence and responsibility. 90% of respondents expected to continue education and 62% planned to find employment. I believe that these findings have led to important conclusions including the need to put more effort in preparing these young people for the uncertainty of life beyond schooling, and to provide community services that can help them find a job to promote their independent living. The importance of these transition services have also been observed by Lee & Carter (2012) who also identify a number of important qualities for a positive transition to adult life. These included collaboration with families and community support, social skills for employment, and establishing job related services (Lee & Carter, 2012).

Moreover after employment has been found it is important to keep monitoring these young people. This can include assessing the situation and considering any issue that can be problematic for them, such as the need of interpersonal skills and the reduction of the chaotic environments that mainstream schooling offers (Wilczynski, Trammel & Clarke, 2013).

5.5.2 Parents of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

A major discourse that emerged through the parental analysis is the need for inclusion to help towards an independent future. Jack is worried that his son Andrea will need to learn how to take care of himself when he will not be there to protect him. He believes that school needs to give his son skills to live an independent life. This is also pointed out in Dorothy's talk when she explains that she tries her best to let her son do things on his own because she wants him to learn how to deal with situations independently. Dayna again talks about life skills subjects that will enable her son to thrive in the outer community. This is in line with what Van Bergeijk, Klin & Volkmar (2008) put forward after reviewing the articles and laws that govern inclusion for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum.

Schools are important, as they need to prepare adequately these young people to move into the world of work in order to provide for themselves independently. Moreover these young people need to be supported in finding a job and also participate in the community in order to improve their quality of life (Ozmen, 2013; Hendricks & Wehman, 2009). Promoting social communication will help future challenges in the adult life of these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum (Koegel, Kuriakose, Singh, & Koegel, 2012). Thus the transition from school to employment is seen as one of the transitions that need to be catered for at school (Buli Holmber, 2004).

Parents have a crucial role in helping their children develop values that will help them succeed in the community and the world of work. Their talk in this research advocate for their children to have the necessary support to become active citizens in society. They know their children's strengths and limitations so they can be a useful vehicle in helping to promote an independent living (Autism Community

Training Society, 2016). I believe that their input can offer precious information and raise awareness to help support the community and help their children be active citizens in the future. Working step by step and creating long and short-term goals will ensure that the process will be less scary and overwhelming both for the parent and the child himself (Organisation for Autism Research, 2006).

5.5.3 L.S.A.s of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

Sophie emphasised the need of more life skills subjects rather than giving them academic subjects, which they do not comprehend and from which they gained very little. This line of thought is also seen in Sera, Berta and Rose's interviews. They believe policy makers need to adapt the mainstream curricula and focus more on giving young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum the skills that they will need to live an independent future.

A study by Presniakova (2014) aimed to investigate the way educators perceive their role in providing transition from school to the world of work. Presniakova (2014) looked at three aspects of successful transition, which are strategies, practices and physical barriers. A qualitative approach was adopted and four educators working in inclusive mainstream secondary schools were interviewed. A number of barriers were identified including the gap in expectations between the parents and the school staff, the barriers because of the rigidity in structure, the difficulty of social skills in young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, and barriers emerging from society. A number of recommendations have been put forward including early planning, involving parents as much as possible, and innovative methods of assessment (Presniakova, 2014). Rose and Mia believe that the link between themselves and the parent is essential if they are to cater adequately for their students. Collaborating with parents will aid in developing an effective I.E.P. that takes into consideration the importance of a curriculum that includes training programmes to enhance work experiences. All parents and L.S.A.s in the research were actively involved in the I.E.P. Also the school can provide instances where these young people can be familiar to the world of work (Autism Community Training Society, 2016). Ultimately it is important that the parent is looked at as one of the experts on her child.

In a study by Garner & Forbes in 2015 findings indicated that specialist teachers look at their approach as “distinctive but still inclusive” (Garner & Forbes, 2015, p. 229) which will aid in promoting skills that will help in an independent living for these young people (Garner & Forbes, 2015). The L.S.A.s analysis and qualitative data indicates that there needs to be emphasis on an interdisciplinary team approach where emphasis on early intervention, job support and repeated follow ups with all young people being part of the transition process is carried out (Westbrook, Carlton, Chad, Williams, Wendt & Cortopassi, 2015). This puts forward the need for the school team to work with vocational agencies that help in employment in order to provide vocational training that will help the chances of employment and independent living for these young people (Wilczynski et al., 2013). On a positive note we do have this opportunity in Malta. In Form 4, students are given the opportunity to have a one-week working experience called ‘Job Exposure’ so that they can become familiarised with the world of work. It is a very good opportunity for all young people as they can start becoming aware of their roles and responsibilities once they enter the world of work.

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5.6 How does the National Curriculum Framework and the Policy Documents for Inclusion Shape Inclusive Practices at School? Do They Fit With the Views of What Inclusion Constitutes to the Major Stakeholders?

The Maltese educational system speaks about the importance of inclusion and how schools are becoming more inclusive. However, what the educational system views as inclusion is not always in line with how the direct stakeholders construct it. This in turn leads to inclusion meaning different things to different people, (Parsons, 2015) as is evident throughout the analysis of the data collected. Unfortunately, the process of aiding in the learning and participation of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum remains a complex task and inclusion remains an area which requires further research (Bartolo, 2016; Davis & Florian, 2004; Osler & Osler, 2002; Barnard, Prior & Potter, 2000).

Schools will truly be inclusive when their curricula, resources and culture accept *a priori* that there is a wide spectrum of educational needs ranging from the special needs of the disabled child to the educational needs of the gifted child.

(National Curriculum Council, 2002, p. 3)

In 2007 Malta was one of the first UN members to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability. This was ratified in 2013. Throughout the years, there have been many efforts to increase the understanding of what inclusion is especially to introduce terminology that was respectful and celebrated diversity.

Acknowledging differences within the educational sphere mobilises support services and gives young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum access to resources enabling them to collaborate and create communicative partnerships with parents and other educational stakeholders. In doing so, it will be possible to gain insight into their diverse needs and cater adequately by providing a holistic and specific intervention programme (Jones et al., 2008). It also triggered legal protection, however, this can only be achieved if we recognise that ‘difference’ is present (Graham 2006; Powell, 2003).

The young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum have an L.S.A. and additional help and resources because their differences are recognised by the community. L.S.A.s and parental talk both agree on the issue that differences need to be recognised and moreover celebrated in order for the young people to be able to use their potential to the fullest. This is in line with the Maltese N.C.F. (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) that currently underpins our educational school system, where in Principle 2 the focus is on diversity and the need to learn from differences and create an environment where everyone feels welcome. All young people should be looked at as having individual needs and this does not apply only for young people who have been identified as having a disability (Shaddock et al., 2007). Even though a number of people believe that when working with disabilities work will be of a lower quality, this idea needs to be challenged and teachers should realise that teaching a diverse classroom will provide an opportunity to use innovative ways that can be challenging for the

whole class. Stakeholders need to be active participants in the creation of these policy documents because their first hand knowledge can give precious insight on how to cater for diversity in the classroom.

Diversity is not seen anymore as a “problem to be overcome but rather as a resource to support the learning of all young people” (Booth et al., 2000, p.12). Even though the N.M.C. (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012) workshop on inclusive education calls for more inclusive practices, it focuses on academic goals: such as the need to remove examinations, which select some and reject others.

I believe that one important point that emerges through the analysis is the messiness of the situation currently present. Inclusion will come to “mean different things to different people and that acts of inclusion will vary from setting to setting” (Nutbrown & Clough, 2013, p. 61). Creating policies is not an easy task, as they need to take into consideration the diversities present in the classroom. Even though there are guidelines that can be followed for inclusive education, this does not always fit with what the stakeholders believe inclusion should be. This thesis was a journey with a number of surprising and interesting outcomes. Stakeholder groups had commonalities with each other, yet each gave their own view of inclusion that was in line with their personalities, values and beliefs. This puts forward the idea that policies need to move from broad principles to looking at ways in which they can enact these diversities. Having said that, it is evident that this is not that easy as one clear-cut all encompassing definition cannot be created.

Generalisation is an impossibility. Some young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum want to interact with their peers, whilst others find the bustling and chaotic school life scary and stressful. Some parents are happy with the current inclusive practices whilst others believe that much more needs to be done. L.S.A.s all agreed that they need more training and support, as they are not coping with the current situations they have to deal with. How the S.M.T. deals with problematic situations may be right for one parent but not for the other.

In my eight years of teaching I have encountered many difficult situations, which I found hard to handle. I am sure that I have made mistakes, and I will make more in the future as teaching is a roller coaster ride where I am exploring and learning each and every day from the young people I have in front of me. I always keep in mind that I am not teaching a subject but a young person with his or her own characteristics and personality. I believe that consultation and collaboration between stakeholders is still very lacking, and policy makers are still working on their own with little consultation with us educators and parents who are ultimately the direct link on how these policies will be enacted.

5.7 Conclusion

One evident concept that emerged throughout this research is that inclusion comes to mean different things for different stakeholders. Discourses put forward by different stakeholders aim to tell the reader their own meaning of what constitutes inclusion and what implications these have to the daily school life. This will in turn lead to difficulty in forming a streamlined decision on policies and practices to promote an effective inclusive environment. The next chapter will conclude the thesis with the major conclusions that have come out of the research, its limitations and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The study set out to explore what constitutes inclusion to different stakeholders: for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s. Moreover the implications of these views for the school policy development and inclusive practices in the school were explored.

6.2 Major Conclusions that Came Out of the Research

The major discourses that emerged throughout the three stakeholder groups involved in the research were:

- Inclusion as relational,
- Inclusion as accommodation,
- Inclusion as the need to assimilate in pre-existing policies,
- Inclusion as a way towards an independent future.

The thesis has given insight into how participants construct inclusion, and what implications it has on policies and practices. One evident conclusion is that different stakeholders will construct inclusion in different ways, thus making policies and practices difficult to enact. Discourses are complex and contradictory and their contested character needs to be accounted for. No generalisations can be made, as the sample size in the research is small and in no way can be extrapolated to the whole Maltese population. Having said that there were still a number of discourses that emerged which in turn have implications for practice and policy as they can give important insights in promoting inclusive practices in mainstream schooling. Moreover it gave ‘voice’ to young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, who many times are not involved in research about their daily life in schools.

The tables below depict the discursive constructions emerging from the different stakeholder groups in relation to the wide discourses.

Inclusion as Relational	Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum	Parents	L.S.A.s
Inclusion as being happy, safe and secure or unhappy.		X	X
Inclusion as interacting in the social sphere and having friends.	X	X	X
Inclusion as a lonely place and causing a stressful and unwelcoming environment.	X	X	
Inclusion as being different and causing bullying.	X	X	X

Table 6:1 showing the discursive constructions that emerge from the discourse inclusion as relational through the different stakeholder groups.

It is interesting to note that inclusion as relational is the discourse in which the most discursive constructions have emerged from the three stakeholder groups. All three-stakeholder groups viewed inclusion as a way of interacting in the social sphere and having friends. One has to note that both for parents and L.S.A.s, inclusion as a way of making friends was a central construction. Parents were interested in making sure that their child could interact with peers of his own age, even though they knew that communicative barriers were still present because of their condition. However young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum were not always that keen about the friendship idea. Here again the complex and contradictory nature of discourses is evident.

Inclusion as Accommodation	Young people identified as falling within the Autism Spectrum	Parents	L.S.A.s
Inclusion as academics beyond ability.	X	X	X
Inclusion as learning about diversity.			X
Inclusion as catering for diversity.		X	X
Inclusion as participation with the help of visual aids to cater for diversity.	X		

Table 6:2 showing the discursive constructions that emerge from the discourse inclusion as accommodation through the different stakeholders.

Another major discourse that emerged through the research is inclusion as accommodation. Inclusive practices need to accommodate for the diverse needs of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum if they are to be truly included in mainstream schools. Again the need for tailor-made policies, of more flexible curricula, of social life skills programmes, and peer mediated interventions have all been pointed out as the way forward towards an inclusive environment that will aid the young people falling within the autism spectrum thrive in their future lives. Awareness is needed so that the peers of these young persons know why they are behaving in a way different than what is expected.

Inclusion as the need to assimilate in pre-existing policies	Young people identified as falling within the Autism Spectrum	Parents	L.S.A.s
Inclusion as a stressful time because of policy constraints.			X
Inclusion as <i>one-size-fits-all</i>.		X	X
Inclusion as having decisions taken by others and the need to conform and obey rules.	X		
Inclusion as being constrained by higher entities in the Department of Education.	X	X	X

Table 6:3 showing the discursive constructions that emerge from the discourse inclusion as the need to assimilate in pre-existing policies through the different stakeholder groups.

L.S.A.s talk about the issue that they are at times constrained on how they can cater for the diverse needs of the young people as they have policy constraints that they have to abide with. One case in point is when the L.S.A. needs to give shared support between two students who have different characteristics and needs. This is very difficult to achieve as they need to cater for both students and provide a serene and welcoming environment to both. This in turn has implications at policy level as it introduces the need to further analyse the present system of additional support for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, and research what can be done to improve the current situation.

Both parental and L.S.A.s' discourses viewed inclusion as having a *one-size-fits-all* mechanism. Through their talk they wanted to depict the problematic situation were because of constraints in the policy documents the notion of inclusion is not enacted with the young peoples identified as falling within the autism spectrum. A *one-size-fits-all* mechanism is not the answer as these young people have diverse needs that need to be taken into account. Further research needs to be conducted in order to consolidate the findings of this thesis, and to give insight into what can be done to promote inclusive practices in schools.

Inclusion as a way towards an independent living	Young people identified as falling within the autism Spectrum	Parents	L.S.A.s
Inclusion as a way to help live and independent future.	X	X	X

Table 6:4 showing the discursive constructions that emerge from the discourse inclusion as a way towards an independent living through the different stakeholder groups.

Both the parental and L.S.A.s discourses point towards viewing inclusion as a way to help the young people in their independent future. However, only Timothy pointed this out in his interview. All agree that they want the educational system to provide a way for these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum to deal with life outside the school setting in their future lives. Unfortunately this is not always the case, and as the analysis of their interviews point out, too often inclusion is equated with academic material, material that is many times beyond the capabilities of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum and thus not of benefit to them.

It is important to note that this was the first study of its type to be conducted on the Maltese Islands. The results obtained through the analysis are representative of the participants in my research, however they can still give insight on a number of issues that emerged and further research can delve into gaps in the current educational system that have been identified through this thesis.

The following are a number of changes that can be put forward in the educational system in relation to what has emerged through this thesis:

1. The move from a *one-size-fits-all* curriculum to a flexible curriculum that promotes life skills to help young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum engage in an independent living.

2. More training courses to teach educational stakeholders how to cater for the diverse needs of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum.
3. More dissemination of knowledge amongst the school community on what it entails to be identified as falling within the autism spectrum.
4. Peer preparation programmes to help in the social aspect of schooling within mainstream schools for these young people.
5. More involvement of these young people in activities outside the academic curriculum to promote the social aspect of inclusion.
6. More time for teamwork between the L.S.A. and class teacher to be able to cater for the diverse needs of these young people.
7. More autonomy to schools to adjust policies to how they deem most fit to cater for the diverse needs of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum.
8. More empowerment to these young people to have a say in the daily routine of their school days.
9. More parental involvement as they are a precious resource to be able to enact more inclusive practices with their children.

6.3 Limitations to the Research

A major limitation to the research is my own interference in the data collection and analysis process as I explained in the methodology chapter. I teach in the school where the research was conducted and know the young people, teachers, staff members and senior management team. I am both a teacher and an ex-student in the school community, and I thus bring with me educational

experiences that shaped who I am today and why I opted to delve into this research. As explained previously in the thesis this posed both advantages and disadvantages.

Another limitation was my involvement in the analysis of the transcripts, which also have my own interpretation and even though reflexivity was adopted throughout the analysis I cannot exclude my own input in the research. Also there were instances where because of the fact that the transcripts were translated from Maltese to English certain turn of phrases did not have an English equivalent.

Moreover two of the young people falling within the autism spectrum did not respond verbally, and thus empowering and giving them voice was more difficult than with the other young people in the research. I did my best in trying to make sure that my interpretation of their views was as accurate as possible. I gave the photographic cameras to all the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum because I wanted to help them express themselves by giving them a visual method of describing their surroundings. I do believe that the photography sessions were of great help because they gave the possibility to the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum who did not respond verbally to voice their own opinion in their preferred style. However, obviously the photographs did have my own interpretation, and even though I was rigorous, reflexive and transparent, my own subjectivity did have a part in the interpretation.

6.4 Further Recommendations

This research sheds light on what constitutes inclusion for the different stakeholders: young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s.

Further research can be delved into in relation to the findings including:

1. A study with a larger sample size encompassing different types of school in Malta including Church and Private schools in order to see if the results of this thesis are also found in different educational settings.
2. A critical discourse analysis into how policy documents view inclusion.
3. Research into what constitutes inclusion for teachers and the senior management team?
4. Possibly action research with young people falling within the autism spectrum in relation to what they would like to change can be carried out from the findings of this research.
5. Research investigating if we had to eliminate the present curriculum and start teaching these young people life skills would they be better equipped to live an independent life when compared to the current system as stated in some of the views in this research.
6. A future study of young people who went to mainstream versus specialised schools in order to see who is leading the happiest/independent lives after leaving school 10 years down the line.
7. A study in the jobs that these young people find in the future and whether what they are learning in the curriculum is actually relevant.
8. A study into how teaching methods can be expanded in order to include methods which aid young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in learning things and narrowing the gaps between them and their peers in a Maltese context.

6.5 On a Positive Note

This research was a journey for me. Through these past five years I had the opportunity to grow with my research. The reason why I decided to delve into this research was that I wanted to learn more about including young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum in mainstream schooling. I am a teacher and I believe strongly that the way I enact policies and carry out inclusive practices in my classroom can make the life experience of the young people in the class either positive or negative.

I hope that this research can be of help to other teachers who also want to enact inclusive principles in the classroom in order to make sure that the life of these young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum at school is easier and more productive, and that they feel a sense of belonging and of welcomeness when they think about their school days. I strongly believe that each one of us can make a difference, even if small, in the lives of these young people and that it will impact not only their school life but also their whole future.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval



Head of School Professor Cathy Nutbrown

School of Education 388 Glossop Road Sheffield S10 2JA

Telephone: +44 (0)114 222 8096 Email: mphil-phd@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Randee Ann

ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER Inclusion – but to what extent?

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved, and you can proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research. Yours sincerely

Professor Dan Goodley

Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel CC Dr Tony Williams

The School Of Education.

Randee Ann Gauci PhD Programme Malta

20 December 2013

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Goodley', written over a horizontal line.



Request for Research in State Schools

A. (Please use BLOCK LETTERS)

Surname: GAUCCI

Name: RANDEE- ANN

I.D. Card Number: 36 35 86 CM

Telephone No: 27 46 51 00

Mobile No: 79050114

Address: 'OASIS' NOS 5 SALVU CORSO STR.

Locality: SIGGIEWI

Post Code: SGW 2094

E-mail Address: opal@onvol.net; fraula96@gmail.com

Faculty: University of Sheffield Course: PhD Malta Year Ending: 2013
Faculty of Education Programme

Title of Research: Inclusion- but to what extent?

Aims of research: Long Essay Dissertation Thesis Publication

Time Frame: 2014- 2015

Language Used: English

Description of methodology: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH- critical discourse analysis
passive observations
interviews;

School/s where research is to be carried out: _____

KULLEG SAN BENEDITTU BOYS SECONDARY

KIRKOP

Years / Forms: FORM 1- 5

Age range of students: 10- 15

* Telephone and mobile numbers will only be used in strict confidence and will not be divulged to third parties.
I accept to abide by the rules and regulations re Research in State Schools and to comply with the
Data Protection Act 2001.

Warning to applicants - Any false statement, misrepresentation or concealment of material fact on this
form or any document presented in support of this application may be grounds for criminal prosecution.

Signature of applicant: RAUCCI Date: 7/01/2014



Approved under usual conditions

B. Tutor's Approval (where applicable)

The above research work is being carried out under my supervision

Tutor's Name: DR ANTON WILLIAMS Signature: A. Williams

Faculty: School of Education University of Sheffield

Faculty Stamp:



C. Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education - Official Approval

The above request for permission to carry out research in State Schools is hereby approved according to the official rules and regulations, subject to approval from the University of Malta Ethics Committee.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT Ministry for Education and Employment Floriana VLT 2000

Director (Research and Development Department)

Date: 14.1.2019

Official Stamp

Conditions for the approval of a request by a student to carry out research work in State Schools

Department

- 1. The official request form is to be accompanied by a copy of the questionnaire and / or any relevant material intended for use in schools during research work.
2. The original request form, showing the relevant signatures and approval, must be presented to the Head of School.
3. All research work is carried out at the discretion of the relative Head of School and subject to their conditions.
4. Researchers are to observe strict confidentiality at all times.
5. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education reserves the right to withdraw permission to carry out research in State Schools at any time and without prior notice.
6. Students are expected to restrict their research to a minimum of students / teachers / administrators / schools, and to avoid any waste of time during their visits to schools.
7. As soon as the research in question is completed, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education assumes the right to a full copy (in print/on C.D.) of the research work carried out in State Schools. Researchers are to forward the copies to the Assistant Director, International Research, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.
8. Researchers are to hand a copy of their Research in print or on C.D. to the relative Schools.
9. In the case of video recordings, researchers have to obtain prior permission from the Head of School and the teacher of the class concerned. Any adults recognisable in the video are to give their explicit consent. Parents of students recognisable in the video are also to be requested to approve that their siblings may be video-recorded. Two copies of the consent forms are necessary, one copy is to be deposited with the Head of School, and the other copy is to accompany the Request Form for Research in State Schools. Once the video recording is completed, one copy of the videotape is to be forwarded to the Head of School. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education reserves the right to request another copy.
10. The video recording's use is to be limited to this sole research and may not be used for other research without the full consent of interested parties including the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.

Statement of Consent

I hereby give my consent to the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education to process and record personal and sensitive data being given herewith in order to be able to render me with the service I am applying for.

I fully understand that:

- a) by opting out my application cannot be processed;
- b) authorised personnel who are processing this information may have access to this data in order to supply me with the service being applied for;
- c) edited information, that would not identify me, may be included in statistical reports.

I know that I am entitled to see the information related to me, should I ask for it in writing.

I am aware that for the purpose of the Data Protection Act, the Data Controller for this Directorate is:

The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
Floriana, VLT 2000

I have read and understood this statement of consent myself ✓

This statement of consent was read and explained to me _____

Signature: RA and ID number: 363596 (M) (Data subject)

Signature: _____ ID number: _____ (Reader if applicable)

Date: 14/01/14

Data Protection Policy

The Data Protection Act, 2001 regulated the processing of personal data held electronically and in manual form. The Directorate for Quality and Standard in Education is set to fully comply with the Data Protection Principles as set out in the Act.

- a) The Directorate will hold information you supply in accordance to your request to carry out research in State Schools and / or Directorates' documents.
- b) The information you give may be disclosed to other Departments of the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, who may also have access to your data.

Your rights:

You are entitled to know what information the Directorate holds and processes about you and why; who has access to it; how it is kept up to date; what the Directorate is doing to comply with its obligations under the Data Protection Act, 2001.

The Data Protection Act, 2001 sets down a formal procedure for dealing with data subject access requests which the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport follows.

All data subjects have the right to access any personal information kept about them by the Directorate either on computer or in manual files. Requests to access to personal information by data subjects must be made in writing and addressed to the Data Controller of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. An identification document such as a photocopy of the Identity Card, photocopy of passport etc. of the data subject making the request must be submitted with the request. Such identification material will be returned to the data subject.

The Directorate aims to comply as quickly as possible with requests for access to personal information and will ensure that it is provided within reasonable time, the reason will be explained in writing to the data subject making the request.

All data subjects have the right to request that their information be amended, erased or not used in the event the data is incorrect.

Appendix 2: Consent Forms

(i) Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

•



Hi boys I am Ms. Gauci (Science and Biology teacher). At the moment I am carrying out some research and would like your help in gathering the data. Here is a some useful information about what will happen if you decide to participate.

Do I have to take part?

Don't worry its totally up to you whether you want to participate or not and you can stop helping whenever you feel like it. If at any time you wish to withdraw you can do so freely without giving any reasons at all.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The research will be spread over two scholastic terms – from January to May 2014. You will be supervised during break time and extra curricular activities twice a week so that they you generate the data.

You will be asked some questions about what you like and dislike at school, what you wish to change and how you wish to change it. I will be also asking you some questions to help me come up with questions you would like to ask your



parents and learning support assistants.

I will be giving you a camera, some papers and pens and other materials to use to create some interesting drawings and pictures.

If you have any questions you can contact me at school, my



staff room is FC.

So, will you help me out?



1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated *[insert date]* for the research and was given the possibility to ask questions.
2. I understand that responses will be confidential and I am free to decide whether to participate or not and I can stop anytime I want without the need to give any reasons.
3. I agree to the use of videos, pictures and photographs for the purpose of the research project.
4. I agree to participate in the above research.

Name of Participant
(or legal representative)

Date

Signature

Lead Researcher

Date

Signature



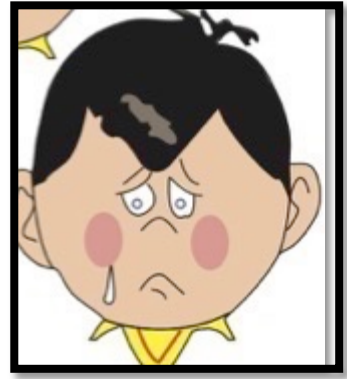
**Asking questions about
your school day**





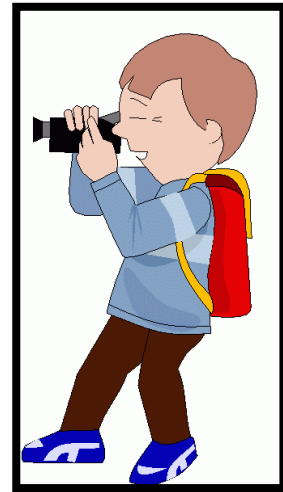
LIKE

What you



DISLIKE

**You can take photos to show me
what you think**



(ii) Parents of young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum consent form

Date : 14/01/2014

Dear Parent/ Guardian

I am Randee – Ann Gauci (*Integrated Science and Biology Teacher at Kulleg San Benedittu*). As part of my post graduate Doctoral Degree I am carrying out research in order to delve into the everyday school experiences in mainstream schooling for students falling within the Autism spectrum.

Research Project Title:

Inclusion- but to what extent?

In order to do this I would like to involve you and your child in this research to help me generate data that will enable me to get first hand information about his daily life experiences, to be better equipped to help create more innovative and inclusive practices for a better learning environment. Before deciding it is of utmost importance for you to comprehend the reason why this research is being done and what it will involve.

Please read carefully the following information and discuss it with others if you like. Ask me anything that is not clear or if you need any more information. Take your time to decide if you would like to participate in the research or not. Thank you for taking time to read this.

What is the projects' purpose?

The research aims to shed light on the current inclusive practices and how these effect young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. These are a few questions that my research will try to answer:

- Should inclusion in mainstream classrooms be for all young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum?
- Who decides what constitutes inclusion?

- What is written in the policy documents with regards inclusion in mainstream for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum?
- How are young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum benefitting or being hindered by the current inclusive practices?
- Were young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum asked their opinion with regards the inclusive practices?
- What is the opinion of parents and teachers about the current inclusive practices?

How will the data be collected?

Data generated will include video clips, photographs, drawings, sketches etc. Young people will be left free to reproduce the data in any way they are comfortable with so that they can express their opinion in their preferred way. They can use visual aids to clearly indicate their feelings at school. Digital media will be provided and the young people will be supervised at all times and will not miss any academic lessons. Semi structured interviews will be used to obtain information from you.

Your Involvement

Data protection and anonymity will be ensured at all times and your child's welfare is for me of utmost importance. If at any times your child feels distressed he can immediately stop participating in the research. All data collected will be shown to you prior to being used.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether to participate or not. If a favourable answer is received you will be given this information sheet to keep together with a consent form you will be asked to sign. If at any time you wish to withdraw you can do so freely without giving any reasons at all.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The research will be spread over two scholastic terms – from January to May

2014. Your children will be supervised during break time and extra curricular activities twice a week so that they can generate the data. I will be also using cameras to capture moments during their everyday school routine. Focus groups and brainstorming activities will also be carried out during break time. They will be given a simplified version I am attaching with this information sheet to explain in simpler terms about the research. An approximate of three sessions for semi-structured interviews will be conducted with you. The date and time will be arranged at your convenience.

What can be the benefit in taking part?

Even though you will have no benefit immediately as a result of your participation in the research, I hope that this thesis shed light so that young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum can have a more welcoming and seren environment.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

Your data will be used as results for my doctoral degree thesis which will hopefully have further implications in the educational sector.

What if something goes wrong?

Should you wish to ask any further questions feel free to contact me on the following email address or mobile number. If at any step of the research you wish to put forward any suggestion or query feel free to contact me on 79050114 ; opal@onvol.net. In the rare case that you are not satisfied with the response you can contact the Head of School via telephone on 21642427 or else the Education Department on 2598 0000.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

The University of Sheffield Ethics Review Board has reviewed and approved this project as well as the Ethics Committee at the Ministry for Education and Employment.

Final Note Whilst hoping to recieve a favourable answer I thank you in anticipation for your help. It will be truly appreciated.

Randee – Ann Gauci

Mr. Raymond Portelli
Head of School

Title of Project: Inclusion- but to what extent?

Name of Researcher: Ms. Randee Ann Gauci

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated *[insert date]* for the research and was given the possibility to ask questions.

1. I understand that responses will be confidential and I am free to decide whether to participate or not and I can stop anytime I want without the need to give any reasons.

3. I agree to the use of videos, pictures and photographs for the purpose of the research project.

4. I agree to participate in the above research.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Lead Researcher

Date

Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

- **Learning Support Assistants**

Date: 14//01/2014

Dear _____ (*Name of Learning Support Asisstant*)

I am Randee – Ann Gauci (Integrated Science and Biology Teacher at Kulleg San Benedittu). As part of my post graduate Doctoral Degree I am carrying out research in order to delve into the everyday school experiences in mainstream schooling for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum.

Research Project Title:

Inclusion- but to what extent?

In order to do this I would like to involve you in this research to help me generate data that will enable me to get first hand information about his daily life experiences, to be better equipped to help create more innovative and inclusive practices for a better learning environment. Before you decide it is of utmost importance for you to understand the reason behind the research and what it will involve.

Please read carefully the following information and discuss it with others if you like. Ask me anything that is not clear or if you need any more information. Take your time to decide if you would like to participate in the research or not. Thank you for taking time to read this.

What is the projects' purpose?

The research aims to shed light on the current inclusive practices and how these effect young people diagnosed as falling within the Autism Spectrum. These are a few questions that my research will try to answer:

- Should inclusion in mainstream classrooms be for all students within the autism spectrum?
- Who decides what constitutes inclusion?
- What is written in the policy documents with regards inclusion in mainstream for students diagnosed within the Autism Spectrum?
- How are students within the autism spectrum benefit or being hindered by

the current inclusive practices?

- Were children within the autism spectrum asked their opinion with regards the inclusive practices?
- What is the opinion of parents and teachers about the current inclusive practices?

How will the data be collected?

Data generated will include video clips, photographs, drawings, sketches etc. Young people will be left free to reproduce the data in any way they are comfortable with so that they can express their opinion in their preferred way. They can use visual aids to clearly indicate their feelings at school. Digital media will be provided and they will be supervised at all times and will not miss any academic lessons. Semi structured interviews will be used to obtain information from you.

Your Involvement

Data protection and anonymity will be ensured at all times and the young peoples' welfare is for me of utmost importance. If at any times the young person feels distressed he can immediately stop participating in the research. All data collected will be shown to you prior to being used.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether to participate or not. If a favourable answer is recieved you will be given this information sheet to keep together with a consent form you will be asked to sign. If at any time you wish to withdraw you can do so freely without giving any reasons at all.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The research will be spread over two scholastic terms – from January to May 2014. Young people will be supervised during break time and extra curricular activities twice a week so that they can generate the data. I will be also using cameras to capture moments during their everyday school routine. Focus groups and brainstorming activities will also be carried out during break time. Your students will be given a simplified version I am attaching with this information

sheet to explain in simpler terms about the research. An approximate of three sessions for semi-structured interviews will be conducted with you. The date and time will be arranged at your convenience.

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Even though you will have no benefit immediately as a result of your participation in the research, I hope that this thesis shed light so that young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum can have a more welcoming and seren environment.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

Your data will be used as results for my doctoral degree thesis which will hopefully have further implications in the educational sector.

What if something goes wrong?

Should you wish to ask any further questions feel free to contact me on the following email address or mobile number. If at any step of the research you wish to put forward any suggestion or query feel free to contact me.

79050114 ; opal@onvol.net

In the rare case that you are not satisfied with the response you can contact the Head of School via telephone on 21642427 or else the Education Department on 2598 0000.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

The University of Sheffield Ethics Review Board has reviewed and approved this project as well as the Ethics Committee at the Ministry for Education and Employment.

.... **Final Note** Whilst hoping to recieve a favourable answer I thank you in anticipation for your help. It will be truly appreciated.

Randee – Ann Gauci

Mr. Raymond Portelli
Head of School

Title of Project: Inclusion- but to what extent?

Name of Researcher: Ms. Randee Ann Gauci

Please tick applicable boxes

2. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated *[insert date]* for the above research and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that responses will be confidential and I am free to decide whether to participate or not and I can stop anytime I want without the need to give any reasons.

Should you require further information you can contact me on 79050114

3. I agree to the use of videos, pictures and photographs for the purpose of the research project.

4. I agree to participate in the above research

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Lead Researcher

Date

Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Appendix 3: Social Stories and powerpoint to explain the research to the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum



First of all Do I have to take part?

Don't worry boys its totally up to you whether you want to participate or not.

Even if you decide to participate you can stop whenever you want.



What will happen if I take part?

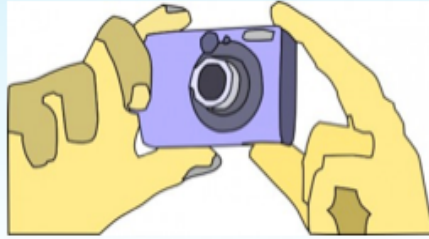
• I will give you the following:

A digital camera



What will you be doing?

You will have 3 weeks to take photos during your school day



Of what will you take photos?

What you like in school - for examples places you enjoy, things you like etc.

Lessons you like



Activities you enjoy during the day





Places you like



What you do not like in school

Lessons you do not like

Activities you do not like during the day



How to use the Digital Camera

Be careful on how to use it.

The camera can take up to 50 photos but we will choose the best 30 together in the end of the two weeks.

I will now show you how to use it

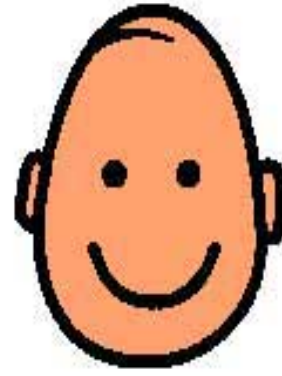
What happens after I take the photos?

I would like to talk a bit with you so that you explain to me why you took those photos.





Take photo



What you like



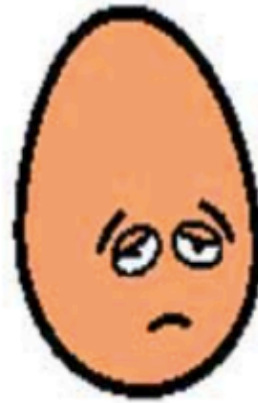
school



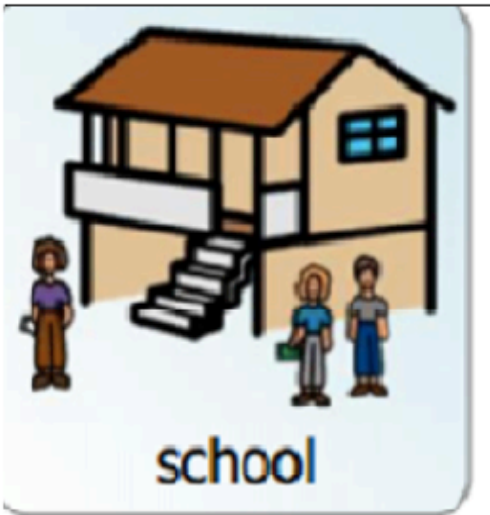
Lessons you like



Take photo



What you do not like



school



Lessons you do not like

Samples of interview transcripts

- (i) Young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum**

I: Good morning. I am going to ask you a few question about the photos that you took. If you have any questions just ask me ok?

R: Ok Ok

I: Did you enjoy the photography sessions?

R: The camera did not work well, then ok.

I: Yes you are right we had a problem with the first camera but then we replaced it. Did you find it difficult to use then?

R: So and so, the L.S.A reminded me how to use it.

I: So we are going to look at the photos you took and you can tell me why you took them ok?

R: Ok.

I: So lets look at the first photo, the school yard?

R: Because we stay in break.

I: You like break time?

R: It's ok.

I: You play with your friends during break?

R: No.

I: Why?

R: I don't know , I don't like them. They make fun of me and shout and push me.

I: I 'm sorry about that. Have you told your L.S.A. about that? [no response, moved on to the next question]. So what about this photo?

R: That is the lesson but I forgot what subject.

I: Why did you take the photo you enjoyed yourself during the lesson?

R: Yes

I: Why?

R: Because we painted with the paints.

I: You like painting?

R: Yes.

I: Great, how about this photo of the school corridor?

R: There are a lot of people.

I: You like it or not?

R: No, there are a lot of people.

I: Ok, how about this photo, the school diary ?

R: We write our homework and they give us warnings.

I: Do you have any warning?

R: Yes because I don,t like to do the homework.

I: Why?

R: Because I want to use the computer and the homework is difficult and they did not let mummy tell them.

I: Does the L.S.A help you?

R: Yes at school.

I: How?

R: Because she explains again the lesson.

I: Ok now what about this photo, is this during a P.E. lesson?
R: Yes, they are playing a game.
I: You like P.E?
R: Not always, because sometimes we have to change here and it is difficult.
I: Why?
R: I dont know.
I: Do you take long to change?
R: Yes
I: Ok ok
Now how about this photo?
R: That is during a free lesson we are colouring.
I: You like to colour with your friends?
R: No they take my things I colour on my own.
I: Oh ok
You did not take any photos of the students in your class, why?
R: I don't like them.
I: Why?
R: They shout and push and I don't like to play with them.
I: Ok what about this photo?
R: The computer lab, I go every week during the break. I run when the bell rings because there aren't a lot of places.
I: What do you do in the computer game?
R: We play games and the teacher explains new things, I really like it, it is the best part of the day.
I: So if you had to change something at school what would you change?
R: Homework I dont like homeworks
And to always come with the P.E. kit
I: Anything else you would like to add?
R: No
I: Ok thanks a lot.
R: Can I go?
I: Yes.
R: Ok bye.

**(ii) Parents of young people
identified as falling within the
autism spectrum**

I: Good Morning first of all thanks for accepting to help out in the research.

R: Thanks a lot for taking interest and feel free to contact me anytime you need any help, even during summer and now that Ian will be starting a new school next scholastic year, please don't hesitate.

I: Thanks so much once again. So first question, how did you decide whether Ian would go to mainstream or to special school?

R: The reform, you have primary, secondary and post secondary where resource centres are involved, now primary PMLD go to San Miguel (resource centre in Malta) and then the PMLD of San Miguel go to Hellen Keller.

The mainstream, they go secondary, when there are severe learning difficulties, Down syndrome etc., they go to Guardian Angel (other resource centre in Malta) from Form 1 till Form 5 and then these move to Wardija which is a post secondary school and they can spend up to 5 years there. Now for the case of children which are primary but are not PMLD however are still challenging enough not to fit the mainstream in any way, and for example have severe autism, they are trying to fit them in San Miguel. They (educational officers) are trying to create a class for them.

Now, the first step I did was in year 1. I went to visit special schools because you know, I used to see Ian and his severity and, he would not be how can you say it, able to fit in mainstream. At that time for a year 1 student he was still using a nappy, he was still non verbal, his behaviour was quite, you know, how can you say it, active a lot, so I could not imagine him in a class setting were he is going to sit down. In kinder garden it was ok but then I sort of browsed around to see, they took me to see Guardian Angel (a special school).

I said well ok, this is another option, if he does not manage (in mainstream school). Obviously the decision was not only mine, it was also my husband's and he made a straight line and said no way special school. He always said I'd rather have him see some good even though he will not get much of it but at least he sees something good not nothing.

I always used to tell him that Ian's programme would have to be tailored made for him in special school more then in mainstream. And he remained mainstream. Luckily he always had great support, when he had better support, (in different years) he did better and made more progress. The support makes a big difference that was given from the S.M.T. (senior magement team) and the L.S.A (learning support assistant)

The difference from one L.S.A. to another caused a difference in Ian's progress as well, so yes emm basically he remained mainstream.

I: So after your experience would you choose mainstream all over again?

R: Yes I would choose mainstream. However I am convinced that he would have benefitted from special school but in different areas, emm I mean I can't say in a special school he would have gained nothing. They would have been targeted other things rather then academic. Ian academically never moved that much forward and it seems that his academic was never sort of in my priority list, it was never, I mean, I always wanted him to learn, but if he did not achieve from 1 to 10

I was never that bothered like if he did not behave in the class.

I was always concerned, and that is why I looked at special schools at that time, that I would have trouble from the parents, the school, the teacher, you know, because he does not want to stay in class. I knew what I had, I knew that he was not the easiest child on earth, so I used to imagine, I did not want a negative response, for example that they tell me he doesn't want to stay, he is yelling, he is screaming, he is disrupting the class, so sort of not to pass through that, I'd better send him in a setting (special school) where this does not matter, how much he screams sort of. But in reality it served that he became contained, he knew he could not scream, he had enough support in class not to scream so he learned not to scream, he learned not to do certain things that are not socially acceptable, even though he does them at home but at school he does not do them. I imagine at least, because otherwise I would have had a negative response that he was doing a certain behaviour.

When it came to Form 1 I had the same dilemma, now the moving on what shall I do, special school or here? In the meantime there was the start of the new reform and you know yet again we had the same problem, my husband wanted him to stay mainstream and I wanted him to try both worlds. We, when we did the I.E.P., the first one, the agreement was that, he would start the first term, because to makes things worse between year 6 and Form 1 Ian snapped into a very bad depression, so sort it was literary a very bad time. We sent him summer school at GA (special school) to take him out of the house, because he used to stay in bed, he became incontinent, it was very bad, he used to self injure himself a lot so they used to suggest me to take him once a week to the special school to sort of get used to the environment he needed.

Then we made a decision, it was not only my decision but of the professionals as well that if does not get used, settle, between first and second term i pull him out, and my husband agreed, if there is no alternative then ok we pull him out. But fortunately, he was never pulled out, in summer he goes to GA, he goes about 6 times, just so that once a week he has somewhere to go, emm he does not always stay. Now this year we tried the transition to guardian angel to go once a week but he did not accept it, he did not accept it at all. We saw certain behaviours and we had to stop, it could be because he was going to both schools, it could be that he did not like the place, emm I mean when he was there he used to be disruptive and then when he came here (mainstream school) he sort of used to transfer this and ended up being disruptive here as well. He also does not behave at home, all the time crying, so we stopped it, we stopped the transition. His time in mainstream is now ending, obviously he is not academically good enough to continue into mainstream like pathwayts etc., we did not even consider it because it would have been to much to ask because for him it is impossible because pathways (educatioanl programme after mainstream schooling) is not adapted for him, so sort of the only option was a resource centre. I hope he will get used to it.

I: Well, here he got used to it.

R: Yes here he got used it.

I: What provisions for inclusion in mainstream do you believe should be enacted ?

R: Apart from the provisions, it is not enough to have a good L.S.A., its the mentality towards the child with disability that needs to change. On the other hand, I believe that there are children that they would never fit in mainstream because it is too overwhelming for them , the system is not adequate for them, but I think even if you change the system these children will never be able to fit in mainstream, because you have a structure,, it is very difficult, like when I say Ian is not good for pathways there are children who even the early years in mainstream are not good for them because you need to change too much (to the current educational system). Now I believe that if you have a child and the mum is happy that he is in mainstream classes but in reality he spends the day always in a room by himself because he cannot attend assembly because it is too much for him, he cannot attend the lesson because it is too much for him, he is disruptive, his behaviour is too much, that is not mainstream. I ask, so where is he gaining most in a resource room alone all by himself or in a resource centre where they are catering for his needs , for his behaviour, where he has more provisions , the class is smaller and he has more support from the L.S.A. ?

I: That's what I always say just placing physically a student in mainstream is definitely not inclusion.

R: I mean , Ian remained in a mainstream setting, I did not fight for him to pull him out of mainstream because he was getting, I was seeing that he was benefitting , ok the class wasn't big enough but when we talked about it there were changes , when they were 06 and 07 (there were two foundation classes with a lot of absenteeism and so many times they ended up just two in the class so the S.M.T. had to make a decision to join the two classes as they decided it was not healthy for the students to spend their school days isolated in a classroom with just two students)

So that used to worry me a lot, emm, but I think there needs to be change in the mentality from above (Department of Education) in relation to what can we do more for this child. Then there needs to be a good communicative team that so that decisions are not dumped on the parents but decided together. Many times for example, case in point I heard about it a few days ago, listen this boy is not good for mainstream, you'd better see what you can do.

The mummy , emm, was shocked, traumatised, dont know how it resolved but she was in a very bad state for a couple of days because it never occurred to her that her child had to attend a different educational setting.

I: But you said it was you who decide if it should be mainstream or special school?

R: Ultimately I decide

I: The school cannot decide to send the child to a special school?

R: No but I believe that we need to start a new programme which there is not currently present and I believe this is essential. We need to start with support for parents, like psychological support, whatever, that the parent you open her eyes and

help her to take an informed decision, because I cannot say I want my child mainstream, or I don't want him in special school because there are disabled students and I want him mainstream so ... it does not make sense. If I did not have enough support who told me, listen Ian, he would fit in mainstream given this kind of support and I had my own support so I could emm the decision does not break me emotionally and personally.

I: What do you think about parental support and involvement?

R: Of course, continuation at home is very important, imagine if I he comes at home and for example the miss (L.S.A.) at school works for the whole day not to snap, I cannot go home and say it's ok nothing happens if he snaps

Its something sort of within himself, but there are behaviours that they work on here (at school).

Or indepenance and then I dont try at least, I am in a hurry etc etc so he cannot do it himself, I do it for him so we hurry up , I mean if I know the teacher is working on tucking of the clothes, I at home will stop dressing him up to help him, he must do the tucking himself so that he learns to do it at home as well. I mean also if I start a new system at home it needs to continue at school.

I: Communication.

R: Yes communcation

I: This brings me to another question, how is the relationship with Ian's L.S.A.?

R: I have never had problems with any L.S.A. A particular experience when I had no communcation with the L.S.A. because she did not try to communicate so then I felt that I was intruding on her, I mean she never gave me her phone number, never gave me nothing within a year, that year was the worst year within the school envirnoment.

Emm, for example a case in point, something very small, Ian is already at his grandma, I'm already going to work , things which make a bid difference for Ian, grandma is taking him to school. They phoned me from school on the mobile telling me that the L.S.A phoned sick at 7 45 (school starts at 8 15)

He was already on the way , how are we going to contact grandma to tell her , so grandma went to school when he arrived at school they told him Ian has no school because the L.S.A. is not here and she had to take him out of school as he had no one to stay with him . She phoned me and told me to come because he was falling to the ground, she said come quickly for him because he is going to hurt himself. My husband was at a conference , she maanged to contact him as well, he left the conference and came quickly for him. All this could have been prevented if she had my mobile number and sent me a message listen, I am sick today. There were other situations where the L.S.A. was sick ,its true the administration tells them do not give the mobile number but I believe that if you trust the parent enough that she will not cross the boundaries and I'm not going to phone every day asking listen how was his day? Did he eat? Today ekk ? If I have a problem I will phone her or a decision that needs to be taken in the morning you know but I appreciate that she sends me at 6 in the morning to tell me I woke up sick rather than having

dressed him you know , very small things.

I: Would he stay with another L.S.A.?

R: Emm, I rather not try, to be honest, because to come for the day and stay snapped all day. I always, my aim towards Ian in school, in all the settings, not academic, not how much he learns etc, but that he is happy, that his frame of mind is relaxed. I mean if I for example we have parents who fight with the L.S.A. for homework (she works as an L.S.A. in a special unit at the Ministry for Education and Employment so she is referring to parents she meets there). I'm the opposite I always tell them do not give homework to Ian. So Ian attends 9 lessons, 5 days a week, he comes home, until he eats, he settles down then he has a private home tutor 3 times a week so he is getting something from him. Then activities, we went to shop, we did something, we did a play, we saw a video, emmm its difficult to put in homework when I know that if I take out a handout he will get annoyed. I believe that he, we are already lucky that he can deal with a day, if you know what is autism exactly and you know how much they have to deal with things to come to school, to be able to get out of the house and come to school I think it would be very unfair on him if I make him do something which he does not really like, he does not really like academics (laughing)

I: I think its something which is common to all children, very few like doing homework

R: I don't know but mine, the two of them (children) do not like to do their homework

My sister does not like it at all, she's 18 and still does not like doing it.

I: How is the relationship of Ian with his peers in class?

R: I believe that , emm, his limitations are his limitations, I mean but the fact that a hello and goodbye exists I think that is very good considering that he, emm even at home if someone comes at home he flees from the room, if the door knocks he flees to his room. I mean if there is a party he hides , he does not like people around confusion and panic. The fact that he got used to this system (school), emm I think it is a miracle.

I: When I used to teach him he used to gesture good morning and bye and he would show his interest.

The fact that he is accepted , and I think he can identify his friends, when we met them outside and they talked to him he smiled and when he had photos and I showed them to him he smiled so I believe that he is not gonna build a relationship but there is an interaction.

I think Ian can arrive to having an interaction, if you accept the interaction, if he does it voluntary it is already a big step. Then obviously socially, emm, there was never a friend that approached us or approached us in any way to tell us he would like to go on further than the school, not in these years for how long he has been in school from kinder, he never had friends and he has no friends. I mean nobody seeks to go out of his way and apart from the school or for example I never recieved a note can i come see Ian at home.

I: But could it be that maybe children are not aware of the fact that they could

come to Ian's home to visit or maybe the parents are reluctant to do so? What do you think is the reason behind this behaviour?

R: It could be and sort of, emm, he is ok he's got cousins and he's got us.

I: When I came teaching here, honestly I had no idea how to handle the class, one of the main reasons why I continued to study on inclusion is because I believed I was not doing enough. But I used to be amazed by how the students in the class would involve Ian in group work and activities. If he had a behaviour not deemed appropriate in the class they would not make a big deal out of it it was just a normal routine for them.

R: I think maybe this is a big accomplishment of benefit of inclusion in mainstream schooling, being in a class where the children are treating him as any other child. I believe that from day 1 in kinder, the teacher, using the peer preparation programme helped in this. He was small and still used the nappy, he cried, and was non verbal, he was a baby. The psychological assessment before entering kinder was of 8 -9 months, so you can imagine. So she (the teacher) described him, how are you going to describe to kinder garden students (4 year olds), we have to take care of this child because he is still a baby, he walks, he is tall but he is still a baby.

And these children, especially the girls, they were so eager to help, I mean, we used to say but how does he let them, because when I used to go for him at school, one used to get him the jacket, the other the bag, literally they took care of him. They used to hold his hand wherever they went. I mean he was never left alone and he remained like this till year 5, year 6, there were always the girls who took care of him. And there was a boy who is now in this school as well that, emm, he used to identify a lot in Ian.

But having said that, I mean birthday party he was only invited once. You know, sort of everybody assumed that he was not going because at that time I was really sad about something. When they did not invite him to the class Holy Communion party because he did not do Holy Communion with them. I mean they do a party with all the class, the parents, they went to the romparound (playing area in Malta), he would have loved it.

But they did not invite him, they did not even ask me listen we are going feel free to come, feel free not to come, we know he is not going to do his Holy Communion because we had not managed to have him receive Holy Communion, they did not invite him. I used to say, but what does my child have so bad that he would not get invited. We always try to compensate but it is not the same but once I remember once there was a parent and she invited him to a birthday party she told me make sure you bring him.

I told her he has a big phobia of Mc Donalds, I told her I really really appreciate it, I also gave him a present, I told her I really appreciate it that you invited him but he cannot make it there because he does not go in Mc Donalds. He passed through a phase that even if we pass by a Mc Donalds outlet he used to scream and shout, I mean he passes through phases, but still all the birthday parties, all the christmas activities that there are at school, during primary they all do

something, I used to say out of 20 in 7 years only one invited him

The mentality, I mean, I think, to give the benefit of the doubt they say that maybe I would think sort of, I am going to invite him just for the present.. You do get into a dilemma I think

Yes, but even for example they are gathering money for the presents, not emm they come over and in primary they would say you are going to give them a present on your own. Like you are the mummy of the child with special need so you are not supposed to contribute with the group. I used to tell them no I want to contribute with you, obviously I will give the L.S.A. (a present) myself but sort of.

There were even a few instances when they used to come and tell me listen we are collecting 2 euro for the class for example, you are going to give on your own.

There, we are still at the stage where the boy attends school, even my own experience as an L.S.,A in classrooms the child is yours. I heard it a lot, emm this is one of the, I think this comes from higher up (Education Department), the child is not the sole responsibility of the L.S.A. Ok there are cases like Ian who definitely needs somebody attached to him, glued during the classroom activities but, emm, for example once we had a psychologist who suggested when she was, with Paula (L.S.A. before the present one) he had a very big attachment with her, it was nice, with his attachment I stopped worrying because I knew he was well cared of at school, I need not worry. On the other hand the psychologist was seeing a mishap, the attachment she had with him as she used to come to the psychologist sessions with us, he did not sit next to me but next to her. She had suggested, see whether you can work it out with the S.M.T. that , emm, maybe, you during a lesson, for three minutes, you either go out of the class or you withdraw yourself quite completely so that the child stays in the group and I mean I knew the dilemma she would have had and I know because I was in a school environment. She told me that she was going to find a lot of resistance because I mean it seems she is not doing her work properly when in reality it was the most healthy thing we could do for Ian. Sort of we wanted this for Ian's independence, at least eventually he got there and he got some independence.

In fact in the beginning with Rose (the new L.S. A) I was afraid , the only concern I had was that she was so young . If he would be on to her (laughing) like he was with Paula it would be a bit awkward for me to deal with certain situations especially since last year he starting exploring more about himself growing up . I though ow she is so young.

But Paula gave a very good hand over to her and so he managed. I mean he managed to keep proximity with Rose. He keeps the assigned distance, we worked a lot on no touching in summer so he learnt he cannot touch anyone, and no kissing because he wants to kiss everyone even the tutor who is a male after he finished the lesson so I am working on it.

Because he is innocent, I told the service manager, she is so young (new L.S.A) !! But I mean these are concerns, even when it comes to assigning an L.S.A. I from the parents side, all these things need to be taken in consideration. A lot of

homework needs to be done. For a child to enter mainstream its not just the L.S.A, the person has to be selected, yes, because unfortunately not all L.S A.s have the same character, use the same approach. The person need to be chosen to be around the child for it to be a success because otherwise obviously there will be a challenging behaviour.

I: You think that the foundation classes were of benefit?

R: Definitely

I: I agree with you. I think Ian would have found it very different in maintream full class. I could cater for Ian becuase he was in a small class with materials catered for his needs with minimal syllabus constraints.

R: Definitely the structure needs to be planned. Just to say that he is mainstream but then he has to stay in a class on his own because he cannot cope with the lessons does not make sense.

For me there should be foundation classes in every school, because it is not even done in every school, it should be orgained properly, and it is adapted accordingly and even the class teacher, if you enter a class and know the level of education you can work on that accordingly. Not you have to work on one level, and on another level, on three different levels, in just 45 minutes. Like Ian, surely he would be present then he would get annoyed, frustrated, be edgy and that we need to decide what we are going to do.

Then the other children would find it difficult to understand his behaviour. For example when they removed the foundation classrooms, he had Italian and Physics in the timetable, the first things I said was these have to go. Now these have to go since there was no foundation classroom meant free lessons and free lesons means idle time, and that means time to move around, time to move is equal to time to cry and disrupt.

I think foundation classes should be in every school, and they are chosen for these classes accordingly depending on for example, you can have a student with severe autism who is brilliant in maths. During the maths lesson, he has a pull out session to go to the mainstream class with support from the school system.

I: Did Ian particiapte in the I.E.P.?

R: Yes he always attended, he does not respond, but he looks if you pass a comment and he reacts yes so he knew, he always sat near the L.S.A. Yes he always attended.

I: If you had to change anything, or something you would like to see enacted what would you do?

R: I think one of the things that needs to be done more frequently is the peer preparation programme because you are dumping the child and they (other students) see him as akward because they know nothing about him, if they know a lot about him they would not see him akward and there should be activites where these children can excel. For example If Ian never excels in anytinhg, there is nothing like hand painting in the foyer where the children with disability can participate you know.

I: Once I did the solar system with them.

R: Yes but that's in the class you know sort of something to say, for example the other children can say look they can do that. When they had a swimming session it was canceled because the others forgot to bring the swim gear and Ian could have been very good at it, he could participate but he still ended up not having the lesson.

Even for example when I came to do the talk on autism awareness (a talk during the morning assembly to all secondary students) the head told me don't mention the name of the student. I told him, why, he is there, they know he is different, they know he looks weird, on the other hand it's better to give a name to that weirdness. Autism is not something physical so its difficult for the children to understand.

I: Once there was a student who had an atypical behaviour in the classroom and I stopped to lesson to explain the reason behind it. When they understood they felt guilty for having made fun of him. I mean if the children are not aware.

R: And nowadays, autism has increased. Having said that I think that changes have been put forward and we are progressing towards better inclusion. Much more needs to be done however.

I: Anything else you would like to add?

R: Not really I think I said enough (laughing)

I Thanks once again for the patience to come over and discuss these issues with me. I greatly appreciate it.

(ii) Learning Support Assistants

I: Good Morning. Thanks a lot for accepting to participate in this research and taking your time to answer a few questions.

R: It's not a problem, not at all.

I: How long have you been an L.S.A. with this student?

R: It's the first year.

I: Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about your involvement in the photography session.

R: Ok

I: How do you feel was the experience of your student during the photography session?

R: He needed to be pointed out, do you like this item, do you not like this item but it was fun, we enjoyed it. He took a few pictures.

I: How much help did you give him?

R: As I said he had to be prompted, like do you like this, because he could not remember all the things he could take pictures. For example during the maths lesson, do you enjoy the maths lesson, are there friends in here, there are your favourite friends in here, who would you like to take pictures of, otherwise he would have taken very few pictures without my prompting.

I: How much do you believe the photography sessions helped to bring out the true feeling of your student?

R: Emm, I think he did, he did like the things because there were things he said no I don't like forget it.

I: And he took photos of what he did not like?

R: Yes he did, he was supposed to show you the ones he did not like and why he took them. He did not tell you the ones he did not like?

I: A few of them, yes he did. Ok so next do you think anything could have done different?

R: I reminded him enough, we went around the entire school to take what he likes and does not like, emm it's from his own condition kind of thing, he just can't make a quick decision, he likes depends on other people to prompt him to make a decision on his own, you have to try and explain to him certain things to get out his ideas. It seems that they are prompted a lot in these decisions but he does end up saying no I don't like this, or he does not say anything at all. When he says nothing it means he does not like it and he will not do it. If you say for example we need to do this study, he won't say no because he does not like not to please you but he will just do his own thing at home and not do it at all.

I: Ow quite interesting

Now, next question, what is your opinion regarding the current inclusive practices in Malta?

R: Inclusive practices, emm I see it more being the role of the L.S.A. to include the student in the lesson. I have had to instruct teachers for example on small things. If the child is not capable of writing down notes that are dictated rather than written, I have asked the teacher please can you write

them on the board so that, emm, he can participate with the rest of the class in taking the notes. Sometimes I have to take the notes for him so that he is not left out because he cannot cope with writing the notes being dictated to him.

I: Was it ever a question whether to put him in the C.C.P. programme (Core Curriculum Programm) or mainstream?

R: Lets put it this way. His parents would like him to be pulled out more from certain mainstream classes but because he has shared support within another student in the classrom I can't take him out of the class because another student has to have support at the same time in class so if I had Romeo (her another student) who also wanted the same thing in the beginning I could take him out of the geography lesson and come here (both students were not having geography so taken to the resource room to do out of class activities) to do some extra help which was very beneficial to him.

I as an L.S.A. would think that that, would be a very good thing for him, to have some extra support on basic Maths, Maltese and English rather than in subjects like science which a bit difficult for him as well. I would personally feel it would be more helpful to him to have emphasis on the main subjects and maybe include the science as part of the english. I would be helping him in here (resource room) rather than learning science as a subject.

I: What entities effect this decision to keep him in mainstream classes?

R: Its a policy decision. Most of the rules here are aimed as streamlining and are not catered toward the students unfortunately. That is what I think.

I: Ok so how are inclusive practices enacted in the school? Maybe you can give a few examples of inclusive practices in the school.

R: Mmm, thats a hard one. Emm honestly I had to remind teachers more then once about certain issues to cater for the student so really they are not helping me a lot in a good way. They are aware of certain needs the students have but sometimes when they fall behind in the lessons, schemes of work and things like these, they quickly get caught up in the struggle to finishe their work and that makes students feel that the lesson is disorganised and clustered because they don't know what is happening as a lot of material is thrown at them much quicker. So you know what I mean, I dont find a lot of inclusive practices being actually practiced in school.

I: I do find the syllabus a major constraint. I know he is not doing the exam but honeslty having other 15 students who are doing the exam puts me in a very difficult position because I have to work to finish and at the same time try to cater for everyone, which honestly is very difficult.

R: If it was up to his mother, we would have taken him out of that class, that's why I gave you that sheet last time (to fill about progress etc) because she wants him to become one to one (to have support on a one-to-one basis

rather than shared support in the classroom). But that's from the Department (of Education), they make the decision not us.

I: Its not even the decision of the school?

R: No it's the decision of the board (Statementing Board for Additional Educational Needs), of the what you call, the disciplinary board, the statementing board.

I: Ah ok I know which one you are refering to.

R: It's there decision through the pyschology report and their assesments and they decide what kind of statementing the student requires.

Now Jake does not even have special accomodations for the exams. You know there are a lot of gaps within the system, I mean it causes gaps definitely. Because he does not have a psychology report that says he needs special arrangement in the exams but unfortunately he does not have one.

His assesment went through CDAU (Child Development Assesment Unit) which was when he was two or three. And the new assesment was not done through a pyschologist. So the school here at secondary level has no reports available, so he is not entitled for special arrangement for exams. It does not make sense.

I: Of course it doesn't

R: They told me he knows how to read, yes its true he is capable of reading but not capable of understanding, of comphrefending what he is reading. Yet if someone reads to him he is better able to comprehend what is being read beccause he is listening rather than paying attention to reading. And so he could maybe answer a few questions. So he is at a disadvantage again. And I wasn't allowed to tell his parents about this. So they are not aware of it.

Now from next year the I.N.C.O. (Inclusive Co-ordinaator) it's up to him to asses the situation, I have made them aware from my side but as an L.S.A. there are certain steps you can take, and certain steps you cant take.

I: What is your role in providing an inclusive environment to your student?

R: I would say it is the main role really. We concentrated this year on small goals, like counting backward form 100 to 0. At the beginning I thought it was not going to happen, we did a lot of repetition a lot of handouts, paper work, verbal, oral, and thank God last week it just clicked together and he was able to do it. He was able to count back from 100 to 1, managed the accomplished the months of the year and the days of the week. So for me it was a big accomplishment with him, even for Jake, he was very happy about it.

Small accomplishments but for him they are everyday needs.

I: How is his relationship with his peers?

R: He is a very quiet boy, he does not like to mix with other students, he likes to sit by himself on the bench a lot during break, he likes to go to Italian movies club during break as well. When prompted he started going to KREA (Religion crafts club) during break but didn't find it very interesting so dropped out of the activity very quickly.

Emm what else did he do, during breaks he did some reading because he was prompted a lot by me, we worked a lot on reading exercises, on sentence by sentence comprehension because he tends to read and keep reading. He does not stop at full stops and doesn't comprehend the meaning of what he is reading. So my work with him was read one sentence at a time so we could understand one sentence and then move on.

I: Does he participate during lessons?

R: I have to give him a lot of prompting, he does not tend to speak out before consulting with me, he checks with me if the answer is correct or not and I have to try and encourage him quite a lot to participate. He asks me is it good? I prompt him, come on tell her, tell the Miss your answer, put up your hand. So this is what we are trying to accomplish. With prompting he does manage to participate within the lesson.

I: So how much say does the student have on how he is catered for? For example did he have a say on which exams he would sit for and which not?

R: Yes he did have a say within the I.E.P. (Individualised Educational Plan)

I: So he was present during the I.E.P. ?

R: Yes he was and his mother was there and his sister was there too, and mind you his situation is different because he is fostered but this is his mother to him and his sister to him, however it is actually his cousin.

The first thing they asked him was what exams do you want to sit for and it was his decision. He will sit for the main subjects Maths, Maltese and English. He attends I.C.T. lessons because he enjoys computer and he decided on what option subjects he wil attend lesson for, Design and Technology and Italian, because he enjoys them. No it was definitely his decision.

They want him to be happy and so they wanted it to be his decision.

I: Any suggestions on what can be done to be more inclusive? Practices, policies, school setting anything?

R: What I would suggest for, my particfular student , more extra lessons to work with him to be able to strenghten his basic skills in Maths, Maltese and English meaning speaking wise and actual comprehension. This is what I woud love to work with him. Because during the lesson itself there is no time, you have to work on the lesson, Unfortunately at present the lesson is not catered for him, he is not getting what he can out of the lesson, he needs more basics.

I: Anything else you would like to add?

R: Not really.

I: Thanks a lot for your time and participation.

R: You're more than welcome.

Appendix 5: Examples of photos taken by young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum with their cameras



Display by students in the foyer taken by Samuel



Computer lab display taken by Ian



Activity using real money - photo taken by Timothy



Lesson in a science laboratory- photo taken by Jake



Photo taken by Andrea during a Maths Lesson



Fish in the foyer – photo taken during break time by Jake



Photo of the school grounds taken by Ian

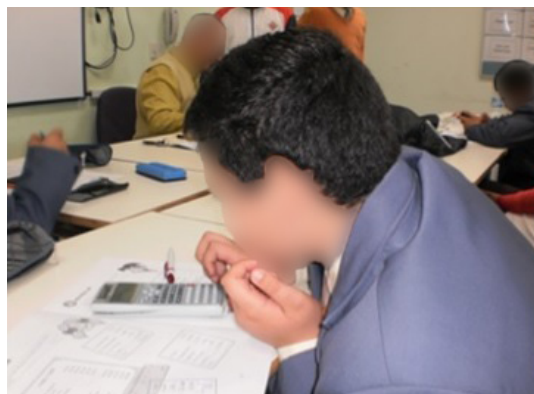


Photo taken by Ben during a Maths Lesson

Appendix 6: Sample of analysis work

Sample of discursive comments of the young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum

Inclusion and the feeling of safety, inclusion as a place where you can feel taken care of. (Timothy, 4-6).

Inclusion as a site where rules need to be obeyed (Timothy, 14-16).

Inclusion and the change in routine (Timothy, 19-21).

Inclusion and the need to communicate with others (Timothy, 25-27).

Inclusion and visual learning, feeling part of the lesson. (Timothy, 35-36).

Inclusion as the way forward, inclusion as a way to independence (Timothy, 40-43).

Inclusion and the learning of new things (Timothy, 47-48).

Inclusion and the need of routine, structure and conformity (Timothy, 55-57).

Inclusion and the school community. The effect other students have on the young person (Timothy, 63-65).

Inclusion as an extra help, the need of reassurance and feeling safe (Timothy, 79-80).

Inclusion as the realisation of being different (timothy, 85-87).

Inclusion as the feeling of being an outsider (Timothy, 85-87).

Inclusion and the need to be better (Timothy, 85-87).

Inclusion as participation (Timothy, 90).

Inclusion and a sense of loneliness (Timothy, 95-97).

Inclusion and feeling left out (Timothy, 95-97).

Inclusion as a site of bullying (Timothy, 95-97).

Inclusion and social relations (Timothy, 106-107).

Inclusion and the taught of the future (Timothy, 119-121).

Inclusion as a stressful place (Samuel, 19).

Inclusion as a place of feeling unwelcome (Samuel, 19).

Inclusion as active participation in lessons with other students (Samuel,25).

Social inclusion (Samule, 31).

Inclusion as academically too difficult (Samuel, 37).

Inclusion as a lonely place (Samuel, 57).

Social inclusion, being with peers and enjoying oneself (Jake, 12).

Inclusion as conforming to certain routines even if one does not feel like (Jake, 22).

The active participation in classroom activities (Jake, 31-32).

Inclusion as the carrying out of activities that can be later done at home. The link and continuation between home and school. (Jake, 49).

Inclusion as academic achievement. (Jake, 52-53).

Inclusion and the creation of friendships that go beyond school grounds (Jake, 57).

Peer communication during out of class activities including break (Jake, 63).

Inclusion and the lack of interaction and communication during academic lessons. (Jake, 71).

Inclusion as a comprising of decisions put on the students rather than decided with them. (Jake, 81).

Time out sessions during lessons (Jake, 85).

Academic inclusion with the help of the L.S.A. in classroom activities (Jake, 94).

Inclusion and the need of more sensory adaptations (Jake, 100).

Inclusion and the focus on different teaching methods (Jake, 100).

Inclusion and the fear of the unknown (Jake, 109).

Not wanting to try new things, staying back (Jake, 109).

Inclusion as a physical setting and the need to feel welcome (Jake, 136).

Inclusion and the lack of social participation (Ben, 14).

Social inclusion and the creation of relationships with peers (Ben, 32).

Inclusion as a set of rules that need to be obeyed. (Ben, 42-44).

Inclusion as academic participation and the learning of new things, active participation in learning. (Ben, 53,57).

Inclusion as being a notion where rules by higher entities need to be obeyed. (Ben, 66).

Inclusion as being decided by the L.S.A. student not free to do what he wants. (Ben, 66)

Inclusion as a limiting factor to independence (Ben, 68).

Social interactions with peers (Ben, 70).

Inclusion as learning social skills apart from academic ones (Ben, 72-73).

Inclusion as being happy (Ben, 75).

Inclusion as having friends (Ian, photo).

Inclusion as having hands on activities.(Ian, photo).

Inclusion as having visual aids (Ian, photo).

Inclusion as having out of class activities. (Ian, photo).

Inclusion as staying with peers during break time (Ian, photo)

Inclusion as academics being too difficult (Ian, photo).

Inclusion as having friends (Andrea, photo).

Inclusion as being happy at school (Andrea, photo).

Inclusion as playing with friends during break time (Andrea, photo).

Inclusion as having games and activities in class lessons (Andrea, photo).

Inclusion as having a lot of homework (Andrea, photo).

L.S.A.s Sample

1. Inclusion as teamwork or lack of it

- Berta, 12 Inclusion as a demanding experience.
- Berta,66 Inclusion lacking teamwork between school staff members.
- Sera,10-13 Inclusion as a relationship between different stakeholders.
- Sera,10-13 Inclusion as an ever changing relationship between the L.S.A. and the young person.
- Sera 44-46 Inclusion as teamwork.
- Sera 71-71 Inclusion as the need to balance the relationship between the young person and the L.S.A.
- Alice, 70 Inclusion causing friction between teacher and L.S.A.
- Rose 10-11 Inclusion and the working together as a team.
- Rose, 29 Inclusion as being the sole role of the L.S.A.
- Mia, 18-19 Inclusion as team work between parent and L.S.A.
- Mia 41-42 Inclusion as having a lot weight on the L.S.A.
- Alice 39-41 Inclusion as a lonely path for the L.S.A.
- Berta, 61-62 Inclusion as being greatly affected by the dedication and commitment of stakeholders involved.
- Inclusion as a social sphere.
- Berta 34-36 Inclusion as help in the social sphere; the notion of inclusion as a way towards a more independent future.
- Sera, 102 Inclusion as social integration.
- Sera, 183-184 Inclusion as streamlined with a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Rose 10-11 Inclusion and the working together as a team.
- Rose, 65 Inclusion and the creation of a circle of friends when working together.
- Mia 55-56 Inclusion as a site to make new friends when working together.
- Mia 51-52 Inclusion as social interactions.

2. Inclusion as a stressful and difficult time for parents, young people and L.S.A's

Berta, 8	Inclusion as causing a stressful situation.
Berta, 12	Inclusion as a demanding experience.
Berta, 40	Inclusion as causing a stressful situation.
Sera, 75	Inclusion as a stressful time for L.S.A
Sera, 84	Inclusion as a frustrating situation for parents.
Alice 71-72	Inclusion as a stressful environment for young people.
Sophie, 24-26	Inclusion as a site of frustration.

3. Inclusion as a lonely place, a site for bullying

Sera, 104	Inclusion as causing bullying.
Sera, 107-108	Inclusion and the feeling of not being understood.
Sera, 130-145	Inclusion as a lonely place to be.
Sera, 124-125	Inclusion as a weird behaviour.
Sophie 11-12	Inclusion and the fear of the unknown.
Sophie 18	Inclusion and the problem with lack of showing emotions.
Sophie 49-50	Inclusion as a lonely place with no friends.
Sophie 52-53	Inclusion as not being understood.

Appendix 7 : Information about the context of the School

The research context is a Maltese government secondary school located in the south of Malta. The school caters for approximately 800 students coming from 8 different localities in its close vicinity. The school is a heterogeneous co-educational mixed ability school that caters for young people aged 11 to 15 years coming from diverse backgrounds including racial and ethnic changes. Bending is present at the school and the headmaster has a strong ethos for ownership and involvement in activities for all the stakeholders involved. There are 150 staff members, which include the S.M.T teachers, L.S.A.s and clerical staff.

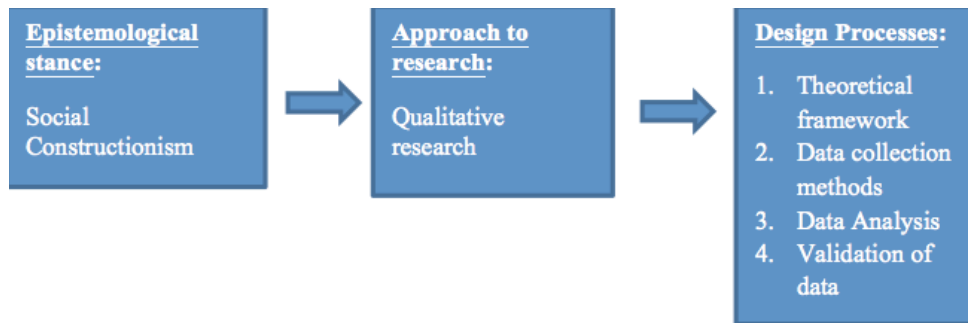
As in line with other government and Church schools in Malta the school were the research is conducted follows the National Curriculum Framework: Towards an Education for all that has been implemented as from the 2012-2013 scholastic year.

The school is committed to be an education community that is “personal in ethos, global in perspective and one which empowers its students to achieve their full potential and to take up their roles as responsible and participating citizens” (Bondin, 2016).

The school mission statement for the school is one that wants an educational community that focuses primarily on the young people’s academic as their emotional wellbeing. The aim is for the school to provide a safe and welcome environment where the young people’s self-esteem and self-confidence are put as a priority. In doing so it enables the young people to improve their attainment levels with the use of approaches that are tailor made for their different learning styles. When doing so the school aims for the young people to become responsible and participating adults in society and be empowered to develop leadership and interpersonal skills.

Parental involvement is also high on the agenda of the school where the importance of home-school links is accentuated and parents are made to feel empowered and welcome in the teaching and learning processes of their children.

Appendix 8: Data Collection and Analysis Stages



Methods Approaches (4th ed.) (p. 35), by, [Creswell, J. W., 2014, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage](#)

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The Research Process

Stage	Process
Initial process	Identifying research topic and literature review
Recruiting research participants	Participants were identified through convenience sampling
Data collection process	
1 Choosing a data collection method	Photography sessions for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum. Semi-structured face-to-face interview for young people identified as falling within the autism spectrum, their parents and their L.S.A.s
2 Interviewing process	Interviews were carried out with participants
3 Follow-up process	Participants were contacted and feedback was obtained
4 Transcribing process	Data was transcribed verbatim
Data analysis	Data was analysed through critical discourse analysis

<i>The Data Analysis Process</i>	
Step	Process
1. Formatting of transcripts	Transcripts were formatted in a way that facilitates data analysis whereby columns, page numbers and indexes were applied.
2. Checking of transcripts	Transcripts were checked and re-checked in order to ensure validity.
3. Reading of transcripts	Transcripts were read twice in order to familiarise myself with the data

Stage	Description
Stage 1: Discursive Constructions	All instances in the text, both implicit and explicit, of the discursive object inclusion were noted.
Stage 2: Wider Discourses	All the discursive constructions were grouped into wider discourses and I came up with four of these being: Inclusion as relational Inclusion as accommodation Inclusion as the need to fit in pre-existing policies Inclusion as a way for an independent living
Stage 3: Action Orientation	Important questions to be asked in this stage are what will be benefited by constructing inclusion in one way and at that position in the text, what function will it have and how does that relate to the constructions that are produced in other parts of the text?
Stage 4: Subject Positioning	After the different constructions of inclusion within the texts have been identified and these located in the wider discourses, the position of different

	stakeholders within the discourse were located and identified (Davies & Harre, 1999).
Stage 5: Practice Position	Relationship between discourse and practice
Stage 6: Subjectivity	The last stage investigates the relation between discourses and subjectivity.

