

An Exploration of the Views of Young People with  
Dyslexia Attending a Special Reading School in Ireland

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to elicit the views of young people with dyslexia on their time attending a special reading school in Ireland. Although the majority of children with dyslexia attend mainstream schools, there are also four reading schools which children attend for two years before returning to a mainstream setting. The purpose of the research was to listen to children's voices with a view to using this voice to impact practice in schools. While "student voice" has gained momentum in qualitative research, there is still a dearth of studies regarding children's perspectives in the Irish context.

Focus groups were used to obtain data and some of the topics explored included the young people's understanding of dyslexia, the extent to which they felt included in the school, socio-emotional factors and what the young people deemed to be effective learning strategies. An interpretivist approach was adopted and Braun and Clarke's model was used to analyse the data.

Five clear themes emerged as a result and these included the themes of (a) Difference, (b) Inclusive Pedagogy, (c) Socio-emotional issues, (d) A Sense of Space and (e) The Role of Staff. While it was clear that the children were satisfied with the special school, their corresponding levels of dissatisfaction with mainstream schools was also evident. This presents a significant challenge to mainstream teachers and teacher educators to reflect on current practices. It is argued throughout the thesis that this reflection has the potential to inform action, ultimately benefitting all children, including those with dyslexia.

# List of Acronyms

BOM – Board of Management

CSIE – Centre for Inclusive Education

DAI – Dyslexia Association of Ireland

DES – Department of Education and Skills

EADSNE – European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

EPSEN – The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs

GAM – General Allocation Model

ICT – Information Communication Technology

IDA – International Dyslexia Association

IEP – Individual Education Plan

INTO – Irish National Teachers Organisation

NCSE – National Council for Special Education

NEPS – National Educational Psychology Service

SCOTENS – Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South

SEN – Special Educational Needs

SENO – Special Education Needs Organiser

SERC – Special Education Review Committee

SESS – Special Education Support Service

SLD – Specific Learning Difficulty

UNESCO - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

In this study, I have sought to elicit the perspectives of children on various aspects of their time in a special setting. It was a single site study and all of the children were aged between ten and twelve. I decided to focus on one site as this enabled me to carefully listen to and to interpret what the students had to say at a particular time and in a specific space and context. I am acutely aware, however, that if any of these variables were changed, then the knowledge which has been constructed may have been different. In no way, do I claim absolute truths; rather I present an interpretation of a specific context, bound by variables already mentioned. Like any study, there were limitations, which will be discussed in further detail at a later point.

The interpretivist paradigm, which I have adopted and will be discussed at length in chapter four, emphasises that understanding is realised more fully through social participation and “learning reaches its full potential from active participation in the culture (Dragonas, Gergen et al., 2015, xiii). Moreover, “meaning-making involves situating encounters in the world in their appropriate cultural contexts in order to know”(Bruner, 1996, p.3). In other words, it is in social conversations, embedded in a particular culture, where knowledge is created and reality understood. While positivism asserts that there is one, knowable reality (Mertens, 2010), the interpretivist holds the view that all reality is subjective and impacted by the researcher’s worldview (Silverman, 2010).

The study was set in the school the children attended and I met the group on two occasions. Having reviewed the literature and recommended methods (Mertens, 2010; Newby, Cohen, Manion et al., 2011; Vaughn, Schumm et al., 1996), I deemed that a focus group was an appropriate instrument, giving the children opportunities to discuss relevant issues. The overarching research question was *What are the views of young people with dyslexia on attending a special reading school?* and the related embedded questions are included at the end of chapter three.

In this chapter, I will begin by providing a rationale for the research and set the context by delineating current provision for students with dyslexia in Ireland. I will proceed to discuss my personal investment in the study before outlining an overview of the remaining chapters.

## **1.2. Research Rationale**

At present, the majority of students with dyslexia attend mainstream primary schools in Ireland and are supported in-class by mainstream teachers. Dyslexia is not included as a criteria for accessing individual “resource” support under the current model of provision. Therefore, in the main, children are “included” with their peers and are sometimes withdrawn for small group instruction by a learning support teacher. As well as provision for students in mainstream classes, thirteen schools have reading units, where students attend a reading class for a portion of the day and spend the remainder of the day with their peers. There are also, what are commonly referred to as special reading schools though they are few in number and are urban based. There are three such schools in Dublin and one in Cork, so whether or not a child has the opportunity to attend one of these schools is, to a degree,

determined by the child's location. This raises the issue of class which will be discussed at a later point.

Children who attend these schools do so for two years before returning to the mainstream classroom. The schools have long been a source and point of interest, particularly for those interested in inclusion and questions have arisen as to whether there is a place for such a segregated setting. There has been limited research undertaken in this area in Ireland (Casserly and Gildea, 2015; Casserly 2012; McPhilips and Shevlin 2009; Nugent 2008; Nugent, 2007). This research has affirmed the place of the special reading school, particularly in terms of student satisfaction. While this may be the case, the findings from this thesis indicate that the benefits of reading schools may be used to improve school provision for all children in all schools. Furthermore, this research highlights the sensory aspect of dyslexia, particularly in terms of resources and environmental factors. As this sensory component was not emphasised in previous research, it constitutes a unique contribution to knowledge. Moreover, the data suggests the need for mainstream schools to adopt inclusive practices for all, including those with dyslexia. This may also be considered an original contribution to knowledge.

The topic of student voice is of particular interest to me; this has influenced the strong emphasis on children's perspectives throughout the study. There is a view that this voice is not generally included in aspects which directly affect young people (Billington, 2006; Jones, 2005; Motherway, 2009; Nugent, 2008; Porter and Lacey, 2005 in Ryan, 2009; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007; Shevlin and Rose, 2008). This lack of voice in research and practice has fundamentally shaped my decision to undertake this project, where I aimed to provide a

space for these children to highlight issues important to them. The questions outlined at the end of Chapter Three emanated from a review of the literature.

### **1.3 Personal Investment**

My interest in special education, and in particular dyslexia, began when I practised as a mainstream primary school teacher. I spent many years in this position and worked in urban schools, one of which was designated “disadvantaged”. With large class sizes involving a variety of personalities and learning differences, I was regularly challenged to support students’ needs as much as possible. Due to the different ways of learning experienced by children with dyslexia, I strove to identify ways to include the children through a range of pedagogical approaches. However, even at this point, I was cognisant of the fact that my views of learner differences and of inclusion were probably more important than any methods employed to improve pupil experience.

I subsequently worked as a learning support/resource teacher (special needs teacher) where I used to withdraw children from the mainstream class setting for small group tuition for short periods. Though I also provided some in-class support, withdrawal was the most common practice. It was obvious to me that many of the children were uncomfortable about leaving their peers on such a regular basis, though this was recommended practice in the settings. The special reading school, which involves total segregation, has interested me as I assumed that, if students were dissatisfied with being withdrawn from their classes on a daily basis, then they would surely be discontent with being entirely withdrawn and placed in a separate setting.

In my current position as a teacher educator, I deliver courses in special education and regularly supervise practising teachers in their schools. Dyslexia is one of the core topics I

teach. Therefore, I contended that by conducting research with children, I may be provided with insights which would improve my practice along with the practice of teachers and undergraduates with whom I work.

#### **1.4 Chapter Overview**

**Chapter Two (The Irish Context)** examines policy development in special education since 1993. This was the year of The Report of The Special Education Review Committee (SERC) which was considered a blueprint for students with special needs in Ireland. Along with relevant policies, I also consider the roles of government bodies and discuss current provision for students with dyslexia.

**Chapter Three (Literature Review)** In this chapter, topics relevant to the research questions are discussed and critiqued. There is a particular focus on arguments pertaining to the existence of dyslexia, the social constructs of disability and the influence of political forces. The inclusion debate is highlighted as are contemporary issues in initial teacher education.

**Chapter Four (Methodology)** presents a theoretical framework for the research. The interpretivist paradigm is discussed along with the key theories which have shaped my views as an interpretivist.

## **Chapter Five (Methods)**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a rationale for using focus groups. I deemed that focus groups were the most appropriate instrument; however, I have critiqued their use as well as other methods. I have provided a timeline for the project along with sections pertaining to participant selection, data collection and analysis. I have also considered the ethical implications of the research. As young people's views were sought, careful consideration was given here.

**Chapter Six (Presentation of Data and Analysis)** The data is thematically presented and analysed. Having originally identified several areas, I managed to collapse these into five discrete themes.

**Chapter Seven (Discussions)** The findings from the previous chapter are juxtaposed with the literature from chapter three. The themes are critiqued in light of current practice and potential areas for improvement are discussed.

**Chapter Eight (Conclusions)** This chapter begins with addressing the embedded questions outlined at the end of chapter three. Some suggestions for improving practice are provided along with areas for future research.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have provided a rationale for the study as well outlining how it contributes to the existing knowledge base regarding dyslexia. I have included information on my

professional background, which has influenced my decision to undertake this research with young people. Finally, I have briefly outlined the content of the remaining chapters.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the Irish context in terms of provision for children with dyslexia.



# Chapter 2: The Irish Context

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the current Irish context as it relates to provision for children with dyslexia. I will begin by delineating the political landscape and discussing the function of government agencies charged with supporting young people. The contested area of specialist provision is discussed with reference to recent Irish studies.

## **2.1 Policy Development since 1993**

There have been several government measures addressing the needs of students with SEN, including dyslexia. In this section, I will outline and discuss the most notable and influential developments.

### **2.1.1 The Special Education Review Committee Report (SERC), 1993.**

Arguably the most crucial development regarding SEN in Ireland was the publication of the SERC Report in 1993 (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). The Committee undertook a comprehensive review of several facets with regard to the provision of special education. It recommended that schools should make arrangements for children with SEN through part-time or full inclusion. It also highlighted the services which may be required to support children, emphasising that all students were entitled to an appropriate education (DES, 1993). Another area considered in the report included the lack of teachers with a specialist qualification although to this present day, it is not compulsory for a special needs teacher to have a qualification other than their initial teaching degree or diploma (Ball, Hughes and McCormack, 2006). It was also at this time that the issue of parental rights for children with special needs

came to the fore in Ireland. In the same year that the SERC report was published, a landmark High Court judgement in the much publicised O' Donoghue case, emphasised the state's responsibility to provide a suitable education for all children, including those with special educational needs (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). This political issue, which brought the issue of children's rights into the public arena, may well have influenced the initiation of SEN legislation in Ireland.

### **2.1.2 The Education Act, 1998.**

The Education Act 1998 was Ireland's first Education Act to highlight SEN and enacted in law the imperative of an appropriate education for *all* children (DES, 1998; Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). It became obligatory for school communities to provide education for students with special needs (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). Schools could no longer refuse to admit a student without clearly explained reasons. It was made compulsory for all schools to have a comprehensive admissions policy regarding the admission of pupils with a disability, serving to maximise accessibility for all children (DES, 1998; Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). However, limits were placed on the degree of provision, with the availability of resources cited as a factor (O' Gorman and Drudy, 2010). This was unfortunate as the provision of appropriate resources is an essential part of inclusive education (Barton, 2003). Other issues included the imperative of schools publishing plans regarding accessibility and inspectors required to have specialist qualifications (DES, 1998). Despite the positive aims of the Act, it fell short of the recommendations previously outlined in The SERC Report (Kinsella and Senior, 2008).

### **2.1.3 The Report of The Task Force on Dyslexia, 2001.**

There has been a significant impetus in many countries to develop policy on dyslexia (Reid, 2009). In Ireland, The Task Report on Dyslexia 2001 was considered ground breaking as many

considered it to give clarity on the topic in terms of definitions and provision (SCOTENS, 2015). Like many policies, this report emanated from a political context nationally and internationally as in 1998, The National Assessment of Reading Achievement “estimated that around one in ten eleven year olds had significant challenges with literacy. The results from previous international research found that between 6.5% and 8.5% of Irish 14 year olds had literacy difficulties that were likely to impede their educational development and their life chances” (DES, 2001, xi). The Task Force was, therefore, set up to improve the falling literacy standards in the country. It received 399 submissions from organisations and individuals around the country stating their concerns and ideas regarding what should or could be included in the report (Ball, Hughes and McCormack 2007). While anybody was free to submit their ideas, there was no concerted effort to pay particular attention to the views and experiences of those very people for whom the report was written. This was in contrast to The Rose Report, U.K. (2009), which invited submissions from seventy five children. This lack of voice permeates the report, ignoring the importance of including children as stakeholders with valuable contributions to make to the design of services they receive (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007). Moreover, this insider knowledge could be used to inform policies and practices of the real issues experienced by those who are affected (Billington, 2006; Jones, 2005; Lundy, 2007; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009; Motherway, 2009; Slee, 2009).

#### **2.1.4 The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004.**

This piece of legislation was certainly the most important in the history of the Irish state relating to children with special needs (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). It was intended to be fully enacted by January 2009 but due to economic reasons, some aspects of the Act have yet to be implemented. For example, the multi-disciplinary approach emphasised in the Act (DES,

2004) has not been fully realised. The Act states that a “pupil with special educational needs is to be educated in an inclusive setting, unless there are very good reasons why it is not practical” (DES, 2004, p.20; Griffin and Shevlin, 2007), thereby placing parameters on inclusion and possibly promoting exclusion (Kinsella and Senior, 2008).

Some of the core areas emphasised in The EPSEN Act, 2004 include assessment procedures, appropriate services and the statutory status of Individual Education Plans (DES, 2004). In contrast to The Education Act 1998, much of the language of the EPSEN Act is inclusive with words such as “participation”, and “support” used throughout. However, it cannot be claimed that the language is fully inclusive, with terms such as “restricted capacity” cited (O’ Gorman, Drudy et al., 2009). Though The EPSEN Act does, in parts, give rise to debates around the medical model of disability (O’ Gorman, Drudy et al., 2009), in many ways it has “changed the landscape” for children with SEN in Ireland (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007) as there is now a firm commitment to a rights-based provision (Kinsella and Senior, 2008). Furthermore, the definition of disability outlined in EPSEN has to a large extent, changed from a medical-deficit model to a social model, focusing on the effects of disability (O’ Gorman, Drudy et al., 2009). While the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach is mentioned and to be welcomed, in practice this is problematic when many of these professionals often work under the auspices of different government departments in Ireland, such as Education or Health.

The National Council for Special Education was founded as a direct result of recommendations made in The EPSEN Act (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). Its main functions involve co-ordinating provision, disseminating issues relating to best practice and informing parents on their rights (NCSE, 2006). Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) have been appointed by the Council and their functions include organising assessments and preparing individual plans for

children (NCSE, 2006). SENOs must have appropriate specialist qualifications along with experience in SEN (Carey, 2005).

#### **2.1.5 General Allocation Model, 2005.**

Under this model, students with dyslexia received specialist support which usually involved small group tuition, and generally on a withdrawal basis. Support was provided to students who attained less than the tenth percentile in standardised literacy and numeracy tests, as well as students who may have had a high incidence learning disability (Carey, 2005). The number of specialist teachers allocated to schools was determined by the number of children (DES, 2005), ignoring other variables such as socio-economic factors or the profiled needs of individual students, leading to an unfair system of resource allocation.

#### **2.1.6 Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life, 2011.**

As a result of falling literacy and numeracy standards among Irish children in PISA tests, the DES published this report containing a strategy to improve outcomes for all children (DES, 2011). It stated that “one in ten children in Irish schools has serious difficulty with reading or writing” (DES, 2011, p.12). It mentioned the importance of CPD for all teachers as well as the imperative of capacity building. There is reference to the EPSEN ACT 2004 and to students with SEN in the publication asserting that “they should leave school with the skills necessary to participate, to the level of their capacity in an inclusive way, in the social and economic activities of society and in order to live independent and fulfilled lives” (DES, 2011, p.1). Like other policy documents, the voice of the child is not included in the recommendation of

strategies. This is hardly surprising when very often policies are developed and determined by the needs of government rather than the experiences of children (Billington, 2000). Children are, therefore, reliant on government to make good decisions on their behalf (Caden, 2015). Furthermore, with aspects of the EPSEN ACT 2004 remaining unimplemented, one could be forgiven for being sceptical regarding serious consideration being afforded to young people with dyslexia, resulting from this report.

### **2.1.7 New Model of Provision, 2013.**

The need for a diagnosis in order to obtain resources has fortunately been addressed by The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in this new model of provision. In proposing a new model of resource allocation, the NCSE states “this model should be developed for the allocation of additional teaching resources to mainstream schools which is based on the profiled need of each school, without the need for a diagnosis of disability” (NCSE, 2013, p.6).

The new model involves a baseline support element in every school and

further support will be allocated to each school based on its social context and educational profile. Each school will construct its educational profile around three factors: incidence of complex special educational needs, standardised test results and social context of school (SCOTENS, 2015, p.11).

This model has been rolled out nationally in September 2017 and its emphasis on the social context of the school is welcomed.

## **2.2 State Agencies**

### *National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)*

NEPS, established in 1999, is an executive agency which is charged with the responsibility of providing an educational psychological service to all schools in the state (Carey, 2005). Though

there may be issues regarding schools in rural communities accessing the service, the agency has psychologists who operate in every county with primary, post-primary and special schools. Each psychologist is responsible for a certain number of schools and their work is consultative in nature (Ball, Hughes and McCormack, 2007). In order for a child to receive a diagnosis of dyslexia, they must first be assessed by an educational psychologist (Ball, Hughes and McCormack, 2007). As the label is often linked with specialist support, this raises the topic of social class as those seeking additional support for their children may be in a position to fund these assessments and to access private specialist provision (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015; Hartas, 2010; McDonald, 2009). This issue will be explored further in the literature review.

#### *Special Education Support Service (SESS)*

The SESS, which was set up in 2003, aims to provide continuing professional development to teachers in the area of SEN (Carey, 2005). It is a cross-sectoral agency with facilitators who have specialist knowledge of SEN. It offers both on-site and on-line courses in SEN and tailors these courses to the needs of individual schools/teachers (Ball, Hughes and McCormack, 2007). While the service is freely available to all schools, there is no obligation on teachers to undertake courses, even if they work directly with students with SEN. This is problematic as discrepancies therefore exist between the training schools receive. This may be associated with teachers' attitudes or with a lack of awareness that the service exists.

### **2.3 Reading Schools and Classes**

Some of the debates surrounding segregated settings will be discussed in the next chapter. However, at this point, it is important to outline current provision as it exists in the Irish context.

There are currently four reading schools in the country, catering for around 250 children (DAI, 2015). There are also approximately 20 reading classes (SCOTENS, 2015). Special schools operate on independent campuses whereas special classes are located on the campuses of mainstream schools (Casserly 2012). The criteria for access to a special “reading” class or “reading school” include:

assessment by a psychologist on a standardised test of intelligence should place general intellectual ability within the average range or above. There must be an obvious discrepancy between general intellectual ability and performance on a standardised test of reading ability (DES, 2001, p.35).

Students need to score less than the fifth percentile in standardised reading tests to be considered for a place. Children also need to be between eight and twelve years old while attending the special school and do so for a two year period before re-joining the mainstream school (DAI, 2015). It should be acknowledged that, due to the low number of schools and classes, access to this support may be determined by geographical issues and the ability to fund travel expenses. Much research of the Irish school system has demonstrated that choices are restricted depending on where one lives along with the wealth one possesses (Drudy and Kinsella, 2009). These types of barriers make it difficult to view such a system of segregation as equal.

Though limited research has been conducted regarding the effect of these schools, some comprehensive studies yielding rich outcomes have been undertaken. The most recent study by Casserly and Gildea (2015) investigated literacy attainments of students before and after placement in reading schools and units. They found that children made progress in academic areas and emphasised the satisfaction that students displayed with the special placement (Casserly and Gildea, 2015, p.304). In 2012, Casserly reported a study conducted over a four year period, examining the socio-emotional effects of special placement and again, pointed



to the notable levels of student satisfaction along with an increase in self-esteem and self-concept (Casserly, 2012). McPhilips and Shevlin (2009) evaluated provision in “three different settings; reading schools, reading units and mainstream”(p.63). The findings from the study are congruent with other studies, indicating academic and social benefits associated with special settings. Nugent carried out two studies; one examining parental perspectives and another the child’s views. The two studies highlighted positive effects of special schools with both children and parents reporting positive experiences. Firstly, Nugent’s 2007 study evaluated the perspectives of parents on segregated and mainstream settings for students with dyslexia. Data was generated from 113 postal questionnaires returned by parents. The findings suggested that “while parents expressed a preference for inclusive services in theory, in reality, once provided with services, parents were actually more satisfied with specialist segregated services”(p.52).

In Nugent’s second study (2008), she compared provision for children with dyslexia in terms of pupil experience. Students from mainstream schools, reading units and reading schools were interviewed. Parents were also surveyed. The results from the study pointed to the fact that “children in special (reading) schools and reading units seemed to be happier and to have more positive experiences than children attending mainstream resource provision” (Nugent 2008, p.189).

McPhilips and Shevlin’s (2009) research concurs with that of Nugent, Gildea and Casserly, asserting that there are notable social benefits for children with dyslexia who attend reading schools. Casserly and Gildea (2015) also highlighted the strong preference for the special school that many students with dyslexia indicated. To date, apart from Casserly and Gildea’s study (2015), there has been little research carried out in relation to how these children do

on exiting the special school. Finally, it is interesting to note the way that students often felt that teachers in mainstream settings did not understand dyslexia and they also described the mixed experiences that they had with their teachers (Casserly and Gildea, 2015; Casserly, 2012; Nugent, 2008). This pupil perception is certainly worth noting, particularly in terms of how mainstream schools may respond (Prunty, Dupont et al., 2012).

## **2.4 Planning for Students with Dyslexia**

Much of the literature points to the importance of whole class, inclusive strategies (Ainscow and Miles, 2008; Davis and Florian, 2004; McPhillips and Shevlin, 2009; Norwich and Lewis, 2001), possibly negating the requirement of an IEP. It is also argued that a system of IEPs emanates from the special school model and only serves to foster difference (Ainscow and Miles, 2008). However, this may be simplistic as other research highlights that many students with dyslexia benefit hugely from one to one tuition and an IEP would be required (Nugent, 2011; Rose, 2009; Scamacca et al, 2007; Singleton, 2009).

In Ireland, the model of assessment used to identify and plan for students with dyslexia is known as the continuum of support. This has three distinct processes.

- The first involves the classroom teacher identifying the student who is experiencing challenges. Following this identification, literacy screening tests are administered and a subsequent individual learning plan is put in place (Classroom Support).
- At the second stage, specific learning support is put in place, where the class teacher and learning support teacher work closely to devise a specific learning plan as well as

providing intensive, additional tuition (School Support)(SESS, 2015). At this point, the student may be withdrawn from the class for short, regular periods and the learning support teacher may also deliver some in-class support.

- The third process (School Support Plus) involves the parents and teachers agreeing that there is more than “maturational delay responsible for the child’s struggle with sounds, letters and words”(Ball, Hughes and McCormack, 2006, p.30). School Support Plus involves the school requesting the assistance of external professionals to support children (NEPS, 2007).

When it is concluded that the child does indeed require individual support (as well as whole class support), an IEP is developed. Although not common practice, it is recommended that children are included in the process of developing and evaluating the IEP in order to maximise its usefulness (Prunty, 2002). This type of collaboration may also serve to foster a more egalitarian culture, where students’ trust in teachers may be increased (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007).

Due to its non-statutory position, developing an IEP can be quite an arduous task for many teachers and principals. There is no compulsory formal training provided and while there are some resources available from the SESS (Special Education Support Service), many teachers simply don’t know where to start (Rose, Shevlin et al., 2012). There is huge uncertainty in Ireland regarding IEPs and this is “clearly related to issues of training and resource allocation” (Rose, Shevlin et al., 2012, p.112). There is also a lack of guidance on the format or content of such plans resulting in confusion about how they should be followed (Rose, Shevlin et al, 2012). It is important, therefore, that the government implements in law what has been set

out in the EPSEN Act 2004, which may bring about clarity, which at present is not the case (Rose, Shevlin et al., 2012).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined the current policies and provision for students with dyslexia in Ireland. Much important legislation has been passed and some efforts have been made to include children with dyslexia in mainstream settings. The reading school system has been discussed and while appreciating its benefits, these should be viewed as considerable challenges for mainstream contexts to adapt in order to improve pupils' experiences. The core issue of planning has also been considered and while the development of IEPs in mainstream classes is a contested issue, it is argued that, for some children, they continue to be a requirement.

In the next chapter, literature which relates to the specific research question will be discussed and critiqued.

# Chapter 3

## Literature Review

### 3.1 Introduction

Having delineated the current Irish context, I will now proceed to an examination of pertinent literature in the area. In this review, important topics relating to the research questions will be explored and critiqued. The review will begin by considering the dyslexia debate, focusing on the existence of dyslexia. While it is argued that it does indeed exist, it is maintained that dyslexia, as it is understood, is largely socially constructed. For this reason, the social model of disability is discussed in detail, with external variables such as class, political influences and cultural biases highlighted in order to appreciate the complex nature of the term.

The contentious area of labelling is discussed and critiqued, and while various perspectives are presented, the overall argument is in support of maintaining “the label” as a positive entity for those affected. As there are several cognitive theories of dyslexia, it is considered imperative that these are critiqued, with a particular focus on the phonological theory, the magnocellular theory and the cerebellar theory. The question of learning styles as they relate to dyslexia is one that has been discussed for some time and some of the relevant scientific literature is analysed to shed light on the topic. While much of the literature points to the negative impact of dyslexia on students’ self-esteem and self-concept, it was deemed necessary to include a section on socio-emotional factors and how children’s concept of self-worth and confidence is influenced as a result of having dyslexia.

Inclusive education is a contested term and while often debated, little agreement has been reached on what it involves. To this end, the inclusion debate is discussed in light of current research, both in the Irish and international contexts. There is a clear assertion that, while specialist support is sometimes necessary, there is a firm obligation on mainstream schools to understand and adopt inclusive policies and practices going forward. Such practices need to be grounded in evidence-based pedagogies, which strive to include all children, irrespective of ability or differences. While a strong argument for inclusion is put forward, there is also an acknowledgement that some children will require more intensive and frequent instruction, based on their individual profile. In other words, while dyslexic children may certainly benefit from inclusive strategies, they may also benefit from specialist support due to impairment.

The multi-faceted nature of dyslexia and the evolving concept of inclusion form the basis of this literature review and, by unpicking assumptions and critiquing arguments, a comprehensive overview of the relevant topics is presented.

### **3.2 The Dyslexia Debate**

In this section, the dyslexia debate is considered and while controversies surround the term, it is argued that dyslexia does exist but is socially constructed. It is not simply a case of abandoning the word as some would suggest (Elliott, 2006; Elliott and Gibbs 2008; Elliott and Gigorenko 2015), but understanding the social constructs which translate specific impairments into disabilities (MacDonald, 2009; Oliver, 1996).

Many definitions of dyslexia highlight the cognitive deficits regarding literacy along with the mismatch between IQ and achievement (BDA, 2017; DES, 2001; IDA, 2013). The International

Dyslexia Association clearly states that dyslexia is “a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is often characterised by challenges with word recognition along with poor spelling” (IDA, 2013, p.1). The British Dyslexia Associations states that “In general, a student may be diagnosed with a SpLD where there is a lack of achievement at age and ability level, or a large discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability”(BDA, 2017) while The Report of the Task Force, Ireland notes that

Dyslexia is manifested in a continuum of learning difficulties related to the acquisition of basic skills in reading, spelling and/or writing, such difficulties being unexpected in relation to an individual’s other abilities and educational experiences(DES, 2001, p. xii).

While these definitions often point to the discrepancy between intelligence and achievement and this controversy will be addressed at a later point, “it is now well established that dyslexia is a neurological disorder with a genetic origin” (Ramus, Rosen et al., 2003, p. 841). The Report of The Task Force, Ireland, 2001, states that dyslexia is controversial as “several studies have failed to find differences between dyslexic students and other poor readers” (DES, 2001, p.23) and this is supported by Elliott and Gibbs (2008) who argue the very existence of dyslexia. They cite “that many signs of dyslexia are no less characteristic of non-dyslexic people with reading skills deficits. In our present state of knowledge, it does not seem helpful for teachers to think of some literacy learners as dyslexics and others as ordinary poor readers”(p.482). This argument is also supported by Elliott and Gigorenko (2015) who assert that it is not meaningful to conceive of a subgroup within a larger group of weak readers who all find accuracy and fluency difficult. However, to ignore learner differences and assume that all poor readers are the same and would benefit from the same intervention is both premature and inaccurate (Ramus, 2014). Elliott and Grigorenko (2015) contend that the concept of dyslexia is futile and that the use of the word should be discontinued as the

uncertainties and inconsistencies between definitions serve to increase rather than reduce the difficulties experienced by children. This may be a simplistic and reductive approach to an important debate and perhaps what should be considered instead is more research on the specific types of dyslexia and other causes of poor reading (Ramus, 2014). While it is acknowledged that more resources should be targeted at the majority of poor readers, the specific impairments associated with dyslexia may require further consideration (Ramus, 2014).

It is true to state that many of the challenges encountered by children with dyslexia, such as memory, processing and verbal fluency, may be common to other non-dyslexic children (Elliott, 2006; Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015 ). However, to use this position to assert that all poor readers benefit from the same interventions is premature and exaggerated as “in fact there is always a substantial minority of children who do not seem to benefit much”(Ramus, 2014, p.3373).

Many researchers agree that it is not a straightforward case of identifying innate cognitive impairments which can be simply remediated. In order to understand and respond appropriately to children with dyslexia, one must also take account of cultural, biological, social and psychological factors (Prevett, Bell et al., 2004). The “causal modelling framework” proposed by Frith (1999) and which highlights biological, cognitive and behavioural levels defines dyslexia as a “neuro developmental disorder with a biological origin and behavioural signs which extend far beyond problems with written language” (Frith, 2002, p.45). The biological level describes the often genetic origin, the cognitive level leads to processing difficulties and the behavioural level manifests in poor reading and writing (Riddick, 2011). As there may be significant differences between the biological and behavioural levels, the environment plays a crucial role (Riddick, 2011). Frith (2002) argues “that the single most



important factor in the remediation of dyslexia is, without doubt, the protective influence of culture (p.64)". In other words, how dyslexia is perceived and addressed is largely determined by social forces (Reid and Valle, 2004). As it is agreed by many that the environment is indeed an important factor, it may be deduced that dyslexia does exist but is largely socially constructed. While children with dyslexia may have specific impairments, the concept of disability emanates from negative attitudes towards the impairment (Armstrong and Squires, 2015; Barnes, 1991; Oliver, 1996; Riddick, 2011) and this will be discussed further at a later point. However to argue that dyslexia does not exist and that the term has "outgrown its conceptual usefulness" (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015, p.177) does little to support children who may have specific difficulties or differences.

### **3.3 Cognitive theories**

The three main cognitive theories of dyslexia according to Ramus, Rosen et al. (2003) consist of the phonological deficit theory, the cerebellar theory and the magnocellular theory. Over the last four decades the phonological deficit theory has been the main cognitive explanation (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015).

#### *The Phonological Deficit Theory*

The most notable predictors of literacy development in young children appears to be those related to phonological awareness and a phonological deficit is seen by many as the underlying cause of dyslexia (Pumfrey and Reason, 1991). Of the three cognitive theories, this attracts the most attention, mainly because it is understood within a literacy context (Poole, 2010). Phonology is concerned with how speech sounds are perceived and produced, with children with dyslexia having particular difficulty with the phonological domain of language (Hatcher and Snowling, 2002). Processing sound involves "translating printed text

to spoken sound and to the inner voice” (Armstrong and Squires, 2015, p.32). The main difficulty for children with dyslexia associated with phonology is in the area of verbal short term memory (Hatcher and Snowling, 2002). Importantly, the development of phonological skills may be contextually-sensitive; some children spend their formative years in homes where they are not exposed to a language-rich environment. This may affect their ability to recognise the links between sound and symbol (McDonald, 2009).

Support for this theory emanates from the fact that students with dyslexia perform particularly poorly on tasks which “require phonological awareness” (Ramus, Rosen et al., 2003, p.842). Children who have difficulty differentiating sounds within words may have difficulty with the alphabetic principle that letters represent sounds and according to the phonological deficit hypothesis, these are the children most likely to have dyslexia (Reid, 2009). From a critical standpoint, one weakness of the phonological deficit theory is that it does not take account of the motor and sensory difficulties experienced by many children with dyslexia (Ramus, Rosen et al., 2003, p.843). Poole (2010), while accepting that this theory accounts for many manifestations, is also critical that it does not explain coordination and balance difficulties encountered by some children.

### *The Cerebellar Theory*

In order for children to become fluent readers, they need to develop automaticity. Much cognitive effort is required before this is reached (Armstrong and Squires, 2015). The claim of this theory is that the child’s cerebellar is impaired, resulting in cognitive difficulties. As the cerebellum is connected to speed, learning and automaticity of motor skills (Fawcett, 2002), this cerebellar immaturity may result in a delay in automaticity of these skills (Ramus, Rosen et al., 2003). In a study with adults with dyslexia, there was significant evidence of reduced

activation in the cerebellum compared with adults without dyslexia, providing support for this theory (Fawcett, 2002). However, like the phonological theory, this theory does not take account of sensory and motor difficulties (Ramus, Rosen et al., 2003). Also, there is no consideration for any contextual issues impacting the person.

### *The Magnocellular Theory*

The magnocellular system deals with eye movements as one reads and, for the typical reader, the eye moves from one piece of text to another without difficulty. However, for some children this is a challenge and therefore believed to be linked to a deficit in the magnocellular region (Armstrong and Squires, 2015). Though it may appear that when reading, one's eyes move smoothly across the page, they do in fact move in small successive jumps in order to make sense of text and children with dyslexia find this difficult (Reid, 2009). The theory contends that magnocellular system affects other senses as well as visual and does in fact account for all manifestations of dyslexia and may therefore be considered a "unifying theory" (Ramus, Rosen et al., 2003). According to this theory, which takes account of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic aspects, children with dyslexia have reduced activation in the magnocellular pathways (Knight and Hynd, 2002). Critics of this theory highlight its inability to explain how many children with dyslexia do not have motor or sensory issues (Ramus, Rosen et al, 2003).

### **3.4 Social Model of Disability**

The first models of dyslexia were firmly medical, highlighting literacy deficits as the basis for the condition (Riddick, 2010). The difficulty rested within the child and it was the school's responsibility to remediate or fix these difficulties. The medical model aimed to correct the child's inadequacies in order to fit into the existing system (Riddick, 2010, p.229). This model, highlighting the individual's deficits, contrasts with the social model, which emphasises that

disability arises when impairments are viewed as the person's deficit (Armstrong and Squires, 2015; McDonald, 2009; Oliver, 1996). It espouses a more holistic approach which identifies disability as a result of societal constructs of what it means to be different (Hughes, 2010). The social model aims to separate disability from impairment, which may be considered "a functional limitation within an individual whereas disability refers to the loss of opportunities to participate in life on an equal basis to others as a result of physical or social barriers" (Barnes, 1991 in Glazzard and Dale, 2012, p.27). Impairment may be also described as a characteristic which affects an individual's mind, body or senses (Hughes, 2010; Reid and Valle, 2004) whereas a disability is a result of the barriers which society has put in place (Oliver, 1996; Reid and Valle, 2004). The social model appreciates diversity in all its form, recognising that disability is a construct emanating from society's difficulty in accommodating differences (O' Gorman and Drudy, 2010).

According to McDonald (2009) "dyslexia is created by institutional and environmental processes similar to that of physical disabilities. Under this approach, disabling barriers are constructed for people with dyslexia by the rise of a text based information society" (p.349). The medical model views impairment as the core problem and it is therefore the individual's responsibility to change and to fit in (Hughes, 2010). It fails to recognise the person as a whole and merely focuses on the difficulties encountered. On the other hand, the social model accepts people's differences as fundamental human experiences, which has implications for changes in teaching approaches and assessment (Armstrong and Squires, 2015, p.132). Moreover, the medical model locates the problems in the heads of those who experience such differences, which leads to the view that the problem rests with disabled people, not society (Goodley, 2011). If it is society's responsibility to view the range of different human experience as normal, then one could derive "that there is no such thing as disability, only

disabling environments” (Riddick, 2010, p.9). These disabling environments may be created by attitudes or a lack of access to support (McDonald, 2009).

Armstrong and Squires (2015) noting the social construction of dyslexia, assert that it only exists as a disability as it relates to how one functions in life. The social model transcends the notion that intelligence and dyslexia are linked; rather it focuses on the child’s potential to access, participate and benefit from everyday experiences (Armstrong and Squires, 2015, p.114). Importantly, the social model does not disregard the particular differences children with dyslexia experience. These differences may be viewed on a continuum of human experience. However, these challenges become exasperated when barriers are put in place in the form of a literacy-based society (McDonald, 2009).

While there may be strong evidence for the cognitive basis of dyslexia (Reid, 2009), Riddick argues that

a phonological impairment could lead to a disability because of society and particularly schools attitudes to literacy. A particular dilemma for non-evident disabilities (such as dyslexia) is that individuals often have to fight hard to have them recognised before they are in a position to challenge the society that has helped to produce them (p226).

Understanding how dyslexia has been socially constructed may help one to view the associated challenges as differences rather than disability. Furthermore, instead of viewing dyslexia as a disability, the social model could be used to understand these differences in order to change policies and practices (Armstrong and Squires, 2015).

Cultural norms in terms of literacy largely determine how specific impairments associated with dyslexia become a disability (Frith, 2002; Riddick, 2010). Interestingly, in the sixteenth century, there was a more flexible approach to spelling and it was acceptable to use different

spellings for the same words (Riddick, 2011). Over time, the focus on literacy skills became closely associated with being a productive citizen, capable of having control over one's environment (Pumfrey and Reason, 1991). In recent times, there "has been the recognition that good literacy skills underpin economic competitiveness" (Armstrong and Squires, 2015, p.23). Perhaps there is a need to re-examine approaches to literacy if the goal is to improve *all* children's outcomes and view learner differences as opportunities (Riddick, 2010). Furthermore, is it reasonable to expect that all children should be able to read and spell perfectly? (Riddick, 2010, p.226). If dyslexia is socially constructed and learner differences are at the core, maybe the solution is to develop effective evidence based strategies tailored to a variety of differences?

The social model, however, is not without its critics. While it does highlight the imperative of understanding social forces which construct disability, it ignores the "within child" factors or actual impairments which the child has to endure (Lindsay, 2003; Low, 2001). The move away from the medical model to a social understanding of disability is laudable though understanding the impairment or difference is as important as understanding how society transforms this difference into a disability (Low, 2001). Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that the impairment does exist in so far as children may process information differently as a result of variations in cognitive processing or sensory issues (Reid, 2006; Reid and Valle, 2004). Herein lies the challenge for teachers to accommodate all learners irrespective of differences (Reid, 2006). Schools need to resist the temptation to pathologise these differences (Reid and Valle, 2004); rather they should embrace these as an opportunity to understand and address the variety of human experiences in order to develop inclusive policies and practices (Nutbrown and Clough, 2013).

### **3.5 Political, Cultural and Economic Factors**

Mass literacy is a relatively recent concept and has been historically associated with the powerful who maintained this power through literacy (Elliott and Gibbs, 2015 ). Comer and Hill (2000) cite that “ literacy, along with numeracy, is often understood as the fundamental “basic skill” that is fundamental to educational, social economic success” (p.79). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a view that there was a social and political danger in having illiteracy in the general population, which saw a drive in the political system to ensure that as many as possible became proficiently literate (Elliott and Gibbs, 2008, p.485 ). Literacy became closely connected to economic success and standards were put in place for citizens to obtain these standards. As a result of this, those who did not acquire the skills as competently as others in the mainstream were perceived as unsuccessful or different (Armstrong and Squires, 2015). Consequently, modern culture became shaped by books and other forms of print (Reid, 2009) and those “different” individuals unable to access this culture as a result of impairment became regarded as disabled (Pumfrey and Reason, 1991). These impairments have proven to be a “major difficulty because of the move towards mass literacy and the consequent negative connotations attached to being illiterate”(Riddick, 2011, p.224). Being literate has become, in many ways, a measure of success in our present education systems (McDonald, 2009, p.354) and to be illiterate is, on the hand, viewed as being unsuccessful. As the targets for literacy success are largely politically driven, they are a response to industry which relies heavily on written communication skills (Armstrong and Squires, 2015). As these political decisions are made regarding standards and how schools are judged, it may explain why there is a pressure on teachers to over-identify children with dyslexia. In the U.K, schools are evaluated by the number of children who attain literacy levels set out by government in the form of league tables (Armstrong and Squires, 2015). The more children who reach the

expected standards, the better the school is seen to be doing. However, children with SEN do not feature in these tables, which drives schools to over rely on labelling as a way of inflating school scores (Armstrong and Squires, 2015). This may disguise other factors, including inadequate teaching and poorly planned provision. This pressure to diagnose dyslexia is closely linked to political decisions surrounding the provision of specialist teaching and support (Armstrong and Squires, 2015; Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015). While specialist support is necessary (Nugent, 2011; Scamacca et al., 2007), it should be provided according to the needs of individual learner differences, not as a result of government led standards.

If it is acknowledged that all children are different, what is needed is a recognition of a pluralist society, with different ways of acquiring skills in different forms of literacy (Pumfrey and Reason, 1991). With an emphasis on social collaboration and individual strengths and needs, schools could move towards a more equitable system where impairments do not equate to disability, but may be regarded as an opportunity to celebrate learner differences (Riddick, 2010). This calls for a broader definition of literacy, embracing “cultural and linguistic diversity” in the classrooms meeting the needs of all children, including those with dyslexia (Reid, 2009). Finally, schools should be welcoming, inviting environments for all and should push against uniformity which “drives the sorting, labelling and construing of difference as a deficit that lies within the student” (Reid and Valle, 2004, p.474).

### **3.6 Social Class**

Socio-economic factors regarding the diagnosis of dyslexia along with access to support is a fundamental consideration (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015). For many, to obtain the label is indeed a way to access such support, which may explain the over representation of middle class children assessed and diagnosed with dyslexia (Elliott and Gibbs, 2008). Children from



poor backgrounds with low levels of parental participation may be less likely to benefit from specialist teaching compared with their middle-class counterparts (McDonald, 2009) which is hardly surprising when one considers the financial advantages possessed by the middle classes, who may use their wealth to seek diagnosis as a way of accessing specialist support (Hartas, 2010).

The measurement of literacy, as a consequence of political decisions, has become a large industry with many organisations capitalising on the desire of middle class parents to support their children's standards of literacy (Comer and Hill, 2010). This industry has benefitted many organisations such as The Dyslexia Institute, who have profited from the deficit model, largely supported by the middle classes with access to financial resources (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015). The attitudes of middle class parents towards specialist support for dyslexia may be notably higher than working class parents (McDonald, 2009). This is understandable when working class parents may lack the means to access private specialist provision, resulting in disillusionment with the education system (McDonald, 2009). Furthermore, a lack of exposure to books along with lower parental expectations could negatively impact on children's literacy skills. However, they may not receive access to the specialist support afforded to those with the label as their failure may be understood as circumstantial (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015).

### **3.7 The Discrepancy Debate**

The mismatch between intelligence and achievement is highlighted in policy (BDA, 2017: DES, 2001; IDA, 2013) and the way dyslexia is diagnosed by assessing the difference between the child's IQ and their achievement is an area which has drawn much attention (Armstrong and Squires, 2015; Long and McPolin, 2009; Reid, 2009). Traditionally psychometric testing carried

out by educational psychologists was common practice in the U.K. Since the early nineties specialist teachers have received training in assessment and in dyslexia intervention (Armstrong and Squires, 2015). However, In Ireland the educational psychologist is still the key person responsible for administering tests in order to diagnose a mismatch between intelligence and achievement (Ball, Hughes and McCormack, 2006).

As intelligence is viewed as an important attribute in The West (Pumfrey and Reason, 2001), many assumptions about intelligence have a significant influence on discourse around schooling (Armstrong and Squires, 2015). Intelligence and literacy have been synonymous for some time and individuals who are not literate many be considered at a disadvantage in many ways (Pumfrey and Reason, 1991). The idea of intelligence “arose as a result of a crisis in education that required Western governments to determine which children would need specialist teaching that could not take place in mainstream schools” (Armstrong and Squires, 2015,p.111). While these thought processes go back to the beginning of education systems in The West, it has created a narrow view of intelligence as something which some people have more of and others less (Armstrong and Squires, 2015, p.111). It is often used as an absolute term, rather than a relative one and a construct of intelligence has been designed, where observable, measurable behaviours are classified as being intelligent (Pumfrey and Reason, 1991). However there is no universal construct of intelligence and, in some cultures, social notions of intelligence may be considered more important than cognitive ones (Sternberg and Grigorenko, 2006). In fact, the emphasis in The West on mental processing is not shared by all cultures, who often attach more importance to “intra-personal intelligence, humility and freedom from judgement” (Sternberg and Grigorenko, 2006, p.28).

Systematic and “scientific approaches to intelligence arguably began when the French scientist Alfred Binet was commissioned to develop tests which could identify mentally defective children” (Armstrong and Squires, 2015, p.112). Many education systems have continued to use this narrow view of intelligence when working with children in mainstream and special settings. However, there is no scientific evidence linking “intelligence” to dyslexia (Long and McPolin, 2009). Moreover, this quantitative approach to determining intelligence ignores qualitative differences. If all children have different attributes and learn at different paces, then a qualitative approach may be adopted to support children learning to read (Pumfrey and Reason, 1991). Also, the heavy focus on quantitative approaches required for clear diagnostic criteria presents problems as there are no unequivocal diagnostic symptoms of dyslexia (Singleton, 2002). Sometimes assessment is carried out to give a label in order to access resources, making reasonable adjustments for examinations (Ball, Hughes and McCormack, 2007). What is needed is a description of the child’s particular difficulties with a focus on strengths and different ways of learning as a way of planning intervention (Armstrong and Squires, 2015). Also, the use of narrow IQ tests may be disadvantageous for children without dyslexia as they may be prevented from accessing aspects of the curriculum due to low teacher expectations and difficulties accessing specialist support (Elliott and Gibbs, 2008; Reid, 2009). Furthermore, there is no evidence that the use of psychometric tests alone to diagnose dyslexia leads to an improvement in practice (Elliott and Gibbs, 2008; Reid, 2009). Elliott and Gibbs (2008) argue strongly against the use of IQ tests in diagnosing dyslexia stating “ it is not possible to set strictly unambiguous criteria of demarcation at either the genetic or the functional boundaries of what is, or what is not dyslexia”(p.476). However, while there may be some grounds for administering cognitive tests to understand children’s skills in specific areas, the use of IQ tests may be insufficient to diagnose dyslexia (Elliott and Gibbs,

2008). This idea is supported by others who attach importance to assessing cognitive skills in order to plan intervention, but not to diagnose dyslexia (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015).

Finally, the idea that innate intelligence and dyslexia are bound together is untenable, and the focus should be on the child's potential and unique differences (Armstrong and Squires, 2015). By adopting a person-centred approach to assessment, children are more likely to reach their potential and their levels of self-efficacy are also more likely to increase (Long and McPolin, 2009). To this end, as an IQ score may not be used to properly measure a person's potential, the whole notion of a discrepancy between a narrow view of intelligence and achievement to diagnose dyslexia is misconceived (Stanovich, 1991).

### **3.8 The Label of Dyslexia**

The area of labelling for students with dyslexia continues to be controversial. Arguing against the label, Elliott and Gibbs (2008) cite that its advocates "will readily agree that the nature of the underlying difficulties experienced by dyslexics can be highly diverse"(p.477), indicating a lack of uniformity and commonality. It continues to be a contentious topic as some research in the area has concluded that students with dyslexia value the dyslexic label (Cameron and Billington, 2015; Riddick, 1995). Riddick (2010) though citing that it is a complex issue, maintains "that at least having the label dyslexia challenges people's incorrect assumptions about them and for example, stops teachers calling them lazy or stupid"(p.7). In this research conducted by Riddick (2010) where children were asked what they thought of being called dyslexic, some of the answers included "I'm not branded as thick now", "I quite like it. I used to wonder why I couldn't keep up" and "I'd rather know I've got dyslexia than think I was an idiot" (p.83). However, "critical literature on labelling has highlighted how the process of labelling demonstrates an unequal power relationship between those who label and those

who are labelled" (Thomas and Loxley, 2007 in Glazzard and Dale, 2012 p.27). According to Reid (2013), a label is "disadvantageous and may lead to a resignation that dyslexia can only be dealt with by experts. This is a misguided assumption and may lead teachers to feel they possess neither the skills nor the training to deal with dyslexia in the classroom" (p.11). This idea is supported by Elliott and Gibbs (2015) whose study with primary teachers pointed to the fact that, as a result of lower teacher expectations, children with the label were less inclined to benefit from reading intervention than those without such a label (p.323). Such an effect of labelling on teachers' expectations is noteworthy (Armstrong and Squires, 2015; Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015; Madriaga, 2007; Ramus, 2014). Furthermore, the label may serve to exclude those, who for social or economic reasons, fail to acquire the label (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015, p.11). Also, the remit may be so broad that resources may be poorly utilised and spent on assessments which may not inform best practice (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015).

However, while labels may be socially constructed and emanate from political contexts, it does not mean that labels are "redundant" (Cameron and Billington, 2015, p.1226). While Elliott and Grigorenko (2015) favour abandoning the label, they fail to include a discussion on what having a label means for those who receive it (Cameron and Billington, 2015). Although the dyslexia label is complex and does include challenges (Evans, 2013), it also serves students to access support and accommodations (Cameron and Billington, 2015; Evans, 2013). That is, of course, if they choose to disclose it. Many older students at university remain reluctant to do so, citing a lack of understanding in the wider community as the main reason (Evans, 2013; Madriaga, 2007). In order to understand the label and its relevance, there needs to be a genuine engagement with people who are affected (Cameron and Billington, 2015).

In spite of being socially and politically laden, a label may also serve to “mediate between the individual and their cultural context and explain certain difficulties that they have and thus help to prevent inaccurate or negative attributions” (Riddick 2010, p.231). Also, though generalisations about a disability are unhelpful, this should not be a reason to avoid naming the difference (Kauffman, Anastasiou et al., 2016, p.6) as “labelling merely implies having a word or words to describe the differences or categories” (Kauffman, Anastasiou et al., 2016, p.4). Having a word or category may be also be helpful to caution against the “dogma that all poor readers are alike”(Ramus, 2014, p.3374). Though the term dyslexia has indeed been socially constructed over time and may be considered to be “the artefact of social processes” (Elliott and Gibbs, 2015, p.324), in practice having the dyslexia label may also be perceived as advantageous for some who may otherwise be accused of being intellectually inferior as a result of challenges with culturally valued skills such as literacy (Cameron and Billington, 2015).

### **3.9 Socio-Emotional Factors**

Socio-emotional issues as they relate to dyslexia strongly feature in the literature and are worth noting. The impact dyslexia has on children’s self-concept and self-esteem are of particular relevance (Prevett, Bell et al., 2013). Lawrence (2006) in Riddick (2010) “states that whenever the teacher enters into a relationship with a student, a process is set into motion which results either in the enhancement of self-esteem or in the reduction of self-esteem”(p.36). This relationship, whether positive or negative, has the potential to lead children to internalise opinions teachers have of them, often resulting in a negative self-concept (Freire, 1972).

Burns (1982) in Riddick (2010) conducted an extensive review of research in the area and maintained that how a child performs in school is closely linked to how they view themselves. He cites that “where an individual has poor academic performance and low motivation in school, this is often linked to a poor self-concept”(p.36). The fact that children with dyslexia attending reading schools tend to have a more positive self-image and perform better academically is noteworthy (Casserly, 2012; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009). However, rather than completely accepting the special school model, this should be regarded as a challenge to mainstream educators to provide a high-quality and appropriate education addressing *all* learners’ needs (Florian and Rouse, 2009).

As a reduction in self-esteem can result in lower motivation, along with an increased risk of anxiety and depression (Battle, 2002 in Riddick, 2010), there is an onus on all in the school community to explore ways to provide an affectively secure environment. A good starting point may involve listening to the students’ voices in order to understand how they view themselves (Billington 2006; Glazzard and Dale, 2013; Prevett, Bell et al., 2013). Though the issue of student voice has gained momentum, there is still a dearth of research which places children at the centre (Nugent, 2008). However, when striving to include children, one must be mindful to encourage meaningful participation and reflection, and not to “treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building” (Freire, 1972, p.41).

Much of the research over the past twenty years has pointed to the negative effects of dyslexia on students’ self-esteem and self-concept (Glazzard and Dale, 2012, p.26). Very often students view their failures as a lack of ability rather than as a result of external factors (Glazzard and Dale, 2012). Having experienced failure due to unequal power relations and

schools' inability to meet their needs, it is hardly surprising that many children begin to "distrust themselves" (Freire, 1972, p.39).

There is evidence that children with dyslexia are often bullied or teased because of having difficulties arising from dyslexia (Casserly 2012: Nugent 2008). Riddick (1996) conducted a small scale study documenting the experiences of children with dyslexia in mainstream settings. She noted that "the children described themselves as disappointed, frustrated, ashamed, fed up, sad, depressed, angry and embarrassed by their difficulties" (Riddick in Nugent, 2008, p. 191). This is in line with Demchuk's findings (2001) which reported that students who were withdrawn from the mainstream class for extra support often stated feeling ostracised and different.

Edwards (1994) in Mortimore (2008) describes the self-doubt and alienation experienced by adolescents with dyslexia. She gives an account of a group of young men who recalled being humiliated and bullied by both children and teachers, citing

Dyslexia has been the bane of my whole life. From the day I started school until the day I finished I hated every minute of it. Teachers can be the most evil of people. I'm not so ashamed now. It's horrible from a child onwards being told you're stupid. I've got butterflies in my stomach now just talking about this (p.78).

Casserly's four year research project (2012), in which she focused on the socio-emotional effects of dyslexia on students, showed enormous benefits for children in special settings. The research was conducted with students attending reading schools/classes before they returned to mainstream schools. Her research indicated that along with the reading benefits derived from the special settings, there were other benefits in terms of "increased positive socio-emotional manifestations and confidence" (p.79). Students were happier, enjoyed



school more and typically had “higher academic self-concept as compared to children in mainstream schools, indicating that learner self-concept may be context specific” (p.88). It was also reported that children were acutely aware of their ability levels and differences (Casserly 2012), possibly perpetuated by a system of inequality and oppression (Freire, 1972). The later study by Casserly and Gildea (2015) also demonstrated high levels of student satisfaction with the special setting and they insist that the current model should continue until such time as more progressive strategies are adopted in mainstream contexts.

As much of the research points to the socio-emotional benefits of special schools (Casserly and Gildea, 2015; Casserly, 2012; Motherway, 2009; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009; Nugent, 2008; Nugent; 2007), the experiences of these children and parents could form a rich source for practitioner reflection in mainstream schools. Although most of these studies are small scale, often involving one setting (Nugent, 2008), the fact that children did tend to be happier in these contexts is worth noting for practice in the general classroom.

### **3.10 Inclusion**

In this section, the contentious and much debated topic of inclusion is discussed. The key argument is that, while specialist support is sometimes required, many mainstream schools remain complacent about inclusion, preferring to leave specialist intervention to the experts. The practice of placing children with special needs in mainstream classrooms has been a topic of debate among educational professionals for over twenty years in Ireland and elsewhere (McCormack, 2007) and it is “firmly established as the main policy imperative with respect to children who have special educational needs”(Lindsay, 2003, p.3). Integration, which was primarily about placing children with special needs in mainstream classes with little regard for meaningful participation of these children was replaced by inclusion, which highlights the

imperative of mainstream schools to adapt to the needs of individual children (Lindsay, 2003; Mitchell, 2009). Barton (1997) in Runswick-Cole (2011) states that inclusion “is not about dumping pupils into an unchanged system of provision and practice. Rather, it is about how, where and why, and with what consequences, we educate *all* pupils” (p.113). It may be termed a process by which schools attempt to understand social constructs and respond to all students to improve overall school effectiveness (Goodley, 2011).

Following the historical movement of inclusive education in the last twenty years, special schools have become less favourable and the legislative framework which currently exists makes a mixed model of provision possible (Norwich, 2008). However, fewer special schools now exist (Norwich 2008). By the early nineties, schools were under pressure to identify children with SEN in order to secure funding (Rouse and Florian, 1997). This political drive towards inclusion has raised some interesting debates around school efficacy. Many schools have reported that implementing policies and practices supporting inclusion is a means of raising academic standards for *all* (Florian and Rouse, 2001). It is interesting to note that research over the past few decades has not shown any “clear support for the positive academic or social effects” of special schools or inclusion in regular schools (Norwich, 2008, p.137).

Various conceptualisations of inclusion exist with some defining it as a continuum of provision with several placement options available with others preferring an outright abolition of special schools (Norwich 2008, Westwood, 2013). It is a concept riddled with ambiguities though at the core should be increased participation for all, which involves responding to pupil diversity and difference (Ainscow and Miles, 2008; Smith, 2014).

A broad view of inclusion is arguably the most effective, where specialist provision is required in some instances, though a strong emphasis should be placed on mainstream schools to adapt to diversity and to reject complacency (Norwich, 2008). One needs to be mindful of the complexity involved in terms of individual needs and, therefore, “full inclusion may not be the best option for some students; other provisions such as resource rooms, special classes and special schools are still required” (Westwood, 2013, p. 3).

Concurring with this assertion, Vislie (2003) in Goodley (2011) maintains that

Inclusion is of relevance to all phases and types of school, possibly including special schools, since within any educational provision teachers face groups of students with diverse needs and are required to respond to this diversity (p.141).

However, one needs to be mindful not to view this as a reason to exclude and to remain complacent in mainstream contexts (Ainscow and Miles, 2008).

Inclusion continues to remain a “controversial concept in education because it relates to educational and social values, as well as appealing to our sense of individual worth” (Meegan and McPhail, 2006, p.53). It is about committing to meeting the needs of *all* children. It recognises the right of every individual to be treated fairly and to have equity in access and participation (Meegan and McPhail, 2006). One of the most comprehensive definitions of inclusion has come from the Centre for the Study for Inclusive Education, U.K. (CSIE), which defines inclusion in terms of valuing all students and staff equally, increasing participation of all students, “fostering mutually sustaining relationships and recognising that inclusion in education is connected to inclusion in society” (Runswick-Cole, 2011, p.112). Hall (2013), while acknowledging the difficulty in defining inclusion, is firm on her assertion that inclusion is closely connected to the quality of participation by all. This issue of participation is also

highlighted by Norwich (2008). If participation is a core tenet of inclusion, then teachers and schools need to be equipped with appropriate knowledge and skills.

Daniels and Garner (1999) as cited in Mitchell (2009) assert that inclusive education is based on a rights discourse and it is fundamentally about “establishing individual rights as a central component in policy making”(p.39). While accepting that inclusion is a rights issue, it is important to point out that it this may give rise to tension in practice (Lindsay, 2003). It raises the important issues of teacher efficacy and understanding in mainstream settings. There are other important issues here such as assessment, staff development, community links and the issue of teaching styles (Rouse and Florian, 1997).

Barton (2003) also stresses the human rights aspect of inclusion, arguing that special education promotes exclusion and does nothing to challenge attitudes in mainstream schooling. He also contends that in order for inclusion to succeed, “disablist assumptions and practices need to be identified and challenged in order to promote positive views of others” (p. 59). Segregation is often viewed to contribute to the oppression of the disabled (Ainscow and Miles, 2008, p.17), which highlights that “inclusion is a process requiring ongoing vigilance” (p.20).

Many such arguments against separate schools emerged from inclusive ideology, pointing to the associated stigma along with the poor quality of provision available. Without clear evidence that the learning outcomes for children in special settings are enhanced, then the argument has been firmly for full inclusion (Norwich, 2008). While some parents view special education as positive (Nugent, 2007), Barton (2003) maintains that this should not be viewed as a reason to continue with such schools – rather it should be viewed as a challenge to

mainstream schools to provide high quality education for all. While this argument is valid and needs to be addressed, it does not provide evidence that there is no longer a need for any specialist support, in any form. Indeed there is a challenge for all educators to radically change in terms of curriculum, organisation, resources and planning (Ainscow, 1994; Barton, 2003; Brown, 2006; Florian and Rouse, 2009) though further research into the effectiveness of specialist support is also warranted (Norwich, 2008).

The Warnock Report, 1978, was one of the most influential documents relating to the inclusion of children with special educational needs in British history. It had implications for policy and practice not only in Britain but also, internationally. It challenged the deficit laden terms used at that time, which included “backward”, “remedial” and “educationally subnormal” (Garner, 2010, p.62). Furthermore, Warnock rejected that there were two types of child; the handicapped and the non-handicapped. Instead, she promoted the more positive concept of disability which involved recognising the strengths and needs of all children (Garner, 2010). The report recommended that a continuum of special needs be introduced. It also suggested that “children’s educational needs should be judged on the basis of multi-disciplinary professional assessments and formally recorded” (Hodkinson and Vickerman, 2009, p.67).

The rationale of the report was set out as follows:

The purpose of education for all children is the same; the goals are the same. But the help that individual children need in progressing towards them will be different. Whereas for some, the road they have to travel towards the goals is smooth and easy, for others it is fraught with obstacles (DES, 1978, section 1.4).

It is interesting to note that, since the report, Warnock has been subjected to much criticism in recent years due to her suggestion that inclusion has gone too far (Hodkinson and Vickerman, 2009). Some would say that she has reneged on her position since the report in 1978. However, she has merely suggested that governments got it wrong in terms of understanding and implementing inclusive policies (Hodkinson and Vickerman, 2009). Her main assertion is that inclusion in the mainstream school is not for everyone and that the special school has its place. She says that “it is their (children) right to learn that we must defend, not their right to learn in the same environment as everyone else” (Warnock and Norwich, 2010, p.36). In her book *Special Educational Needs; A New Look*, she cautions that if learner centred education is important, then we should realise that “for some children participation is impossible in the context of the mainstream school” (Warnock and Norwich, 2010, p.33). She speaks of inclusion in terms of “where one feels one belongs”, which, at present, may not always be the case in the large mainstream school. This version of inclusion is endorsed by many practitioners who believe that some children may benefit from learning in separate settings (Norwich, 2008; Ross-Hill, 2009). While this may be the case, one must ask questions regarding the commitment of mainstream schools to support the needs of such students, perhaps resulting in a reduced level of withdrawal and a view that inclusive education is the responsibility of all in the school community. Also, as there is clearly a tension between the rights- based approach and issues relating to practice, such as teacher-efficacy (Lindsay, 2003), teacher education must be a priority. This is particularly important when “the narrowness of curricula means exclusion for many non-normative children” (Goodley, 2011, p.142).

The United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child (1989), emphasised that human beings should be viewed as having a distinct set of rights rather than passive objects in need

of care and charity (UNESCO, 1989). The Salamanca Statement, 1994, formulated at a conference in Spain, contended that “inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights. Within the field of education, this is reflected in the development of strategies that seek to bring about a genuine equalisation of opportunity”(UNESCO, 1994, p11). The conference, which was attended by 25 international organisations and 92 governments, called for inclusion to become simply the norm (Hodkinson and Vickerman, 2009, p73). Since the publication of The Salamanca Statement in 1994, it would be fair to say that many governments around the world have embraced inclusive education in principle (Mitchell, 2009).

However, with some authors espousing the benefits of full inclusion (Barton, 2003; Miles and Ainscow, 2008) and others advocating for a continuum of provision (Norwich, 2008), it is difficult to see how a resolution, which will appease all, will be reached.

### **3.11 School Culture**

It is important to consider the values underpinning school systems in order to understand the tension which exists between special and mainstream schools (Norwich, 2008). The quality of provision to address students’ needs and the sense of belonging considered so important by Warnock constitute important issues. However, the degree to which these two values can co-exist is largely determined by the variety of needs along with the commitment of schools to provide appropriate and differentiated instruction (Norwich 2008). Principles such as individualisation, instructional intensity and explicit instruction should be considered for all learners as a means of inclusion, though the application of such principles is often stymied by “inadequately prepared personnel”(Mitchell, 2009) . It is important that all stakeholders are encouraged to reflect on what they maintain inclusion to mean in order to foster a positive

climate (Brown, 2006; Cheminais, 2001; EADSNE, 2015). This involves reflecting on their political and ideological positions and identifying and appreciating learner differences (Cheminais, 2001; EADSNE, 2015).

In rethinking policies and practices, which attend to students' differences, schools may begin to witness an overall improvement in provision for *all* children, as inclusive practices are closely linked to school effectiveness (Florian and Rouse, 2001). In addition to working closely with other teachers, schools who value the input of external professionals and develop close working relationships with others may be more likely to provide a quality education for *all* (Cheminais, 2001; EADSNE, 2015). This quality is also enhanced when high expectations feature in the school culture (EADSNE, 2015). These high expectations may be realised through positive interactions between teachers and children, resulting in increased participation, where specialist provision is regularly made available in the mainstream classroom rather than by exclusively adopting a withdrawal system (Ainscow and Miles, 2008).

### **3.12 Inclusive Teaching**

Much of the research regarding the inclusion of children with special needs points to the fact that these children do not need radically different approaches to other children (Ainscow and Miles, 2008; Davis and Florian, 2004; McPhillips and Shevlin, 2009; Norwich and Lewis, 2001). There appears to be a tension between the position that all learners benefit from the same interventions and the position of support for specialist teaching (Norwich and Lewis, 2001). While most studies do not support specific strategies for children with SEN (Ainscow and Miles, 2008), some experts in the area of dyslexia maintain that, while effective whole class strategies may benefit all children, sometimes more intensive, structured and ongoing



phonics interventions may be necessary (Brady, 2011; Hulmes, 2011; Pavey, 2012; Rose, 2009; Scamacca et al., 2007; Singleton, 2009). While this may be the case, it is incumbent on all mainstream schools to strive to include all learners as far as possible (Davis and Florian, 2004).

Inclusive teaching is the responsibility of everybody working the educational community and teachers who view inclusion as part of their role are more likely to succeed in helping students to engage in meaningful tasks (Florian and Rouse, 2009; Rix, Hall et al, 2009). The success of inclusion is, therefore, largely determined by teachers' attitudes and how they interpret inclusion in their own contexts (Allan, 2003; Starczewska, Hodkinson et al.,2012). By considering what it means to be inclusive, teachers enter the political arena as issues of power and fairness arise, which may include incorporating the voices of children and parents (Allan, 2003). It is imperative that teachers begin with an understanding of learner differences and acknowledge that it is their responsibility to recognise and address these differences (Florian and Rouse, 2009). It is also vital that schools challenge views of difference, not only as it relates to SEN but also to socio-economic differences, race and gender (Miles and Ainscow, 2008). Furthermore, schools which do understand and adopt inclusive policies, recognising differences, are more likely to succeed in raising standards for all children (Florian and Rouse, 2009).

While recognising differences and the importance of specialist support in some cases, it is important to point out that much of the research points to common pedagogies which support all learners (Nind and Wearmouth, 2006). Such studies which have focused on SEN specific groups have drawn similar conclusions to what is considered effective for all children such as children working at their own pace, having a choice of activities, social interaction and

developing responsibility for learning (Norwich and Lewis, 2001; Smith and Barr, 2008). Therefore, teachers in mainstream schools do need to view inclusion as a core aspect of their work and not the sole responsibility of the experts (Florian and Rouse, 2009). It may be beneficial for schools to adopt a “connective pedagogy”, providing opportunities for children to make connections between experiences in and out of school, social-emotional aspects along with different ways of learning (Smith and Barr, 2008). These connections facilitate *all* children to make sense of tasks presented to them (Smith and Barr, 2008; Westwood, 2013). Therefore, it may be important to consider the fact that “successful schools focus on connections” (Smith and Barr, 2008, p.414).

This has implications for training for practising teachers who may require expert knowledge, positive attitudes and appropriate resources (Starczewska, Hodkinson et al., 2012). They will also need to understand how to apply knowledge of learner differences to a variety of learning contexts (Florian and Rouse, 2009). Importantly, pedagogical approaches are heavily influenced by teachers’ perceptions of learners and difference. Therefore, even the most progressive forms of approaches are unlikely to be effective in the care of someone who believes in a deficit system where children are beyond remediation (Ainscow and Miles, 2008).

It may be useful to consider the concept of teacher collaboration (Allan, 2003). Evidence exists that if teachers adopt a whole school approach and aims are collaborative, then children are more likely to be included (Rix, Hall et al., 2009; Westwood, 2013). Moreover, research indicates that improvements are unlikely to happen without exposure to quality teaching, capable of catering to differences (Ainscow and Miles, 2008). It is essential that a common space is created where teachers have the opportunity to reflect on and critique

practice, ultimately benefiting all children (Smith and Barr, 2008). One such procedure considered worthwhile is that of *lesson study*, where teachers collaboratively plan, discuss and review lessons (Ainscow and Miles, 2008). Practitioners have the opportunity to provide feedback as well as listen to the views of children, thereby providing a critical aspect to lesson development. Collecting evidence is key in lesson study and this often involves video recording (Ainscow and Miles, 2008). This type of ongoing and participatory professional development for teachers is a core aspect of inclusive practice (Allan, 2003; Smith and Barr, 2008). The assertion that schools should always be a site for reflective practice and that teachers should engage in critical reflection permeates much of the literature (Nind and Wearmouth, 2006; Smith and Barr, 2008). While collaboration between teachers is important, establishing and maintaining relationships with other professionals in the school and professionals from other sectors may result in better outcomes (Smith and Barr, 2008). This wider community of practice could follow on from schools firstly building and reviewing collaborative ideas in their own settings (Ainscow and Miles, 2008). Establishing strong parental partnerships, which includes involving parents in decision making is also an essential feature of inclusive practice (Smith and Barr, 2008).

While it is acknowledged that there is dearth of evidence which highlights effective teaching approaches to include all children (Rix, Hall et al, 2009), some aspects are considered particularly important. For example, much of the research points to the effectiveness of a multi-sensory approach (Davis and Florian, 2004; Rix, Hall et al., 2009; Westwood, 2013) as well as the concept of peer interaction (Nind and Wearmouth, 2006; Rix, Hall et al., 2009; Smith and Barr, 2008). The use of purposeful group work, where roles are clearly delineated and maximises social opportunities, is regarded particularly beneficial as children may begin to develop social and cognitive skills in a socially relevant and meaningful manner (Nind and

Wearmouth, 2006). Where children are afforded opportunities to make relevant connections based on prior knowledge through interacting with others, they may begin to perceive themselves as active agents in their own learning, improving confidence and self-efficacy (Rix, Hall et al, 2009).

When both teachers and children view themselves as active in the learning process, a more egalitarian culture may be created where children view learning as relevant to their own experiences (Allan, 2003). Davis and Florian (2004) note that teachers often make pedagogical decisions which resonate with their own experience of learning. It may, therefore, be worthwhile to also provide children with opportunities which connect with their own lives by adopting group work as an effective strategy. When practitioners begin to use group work in a holistic manner, it may also reduce the need for specialist support (Nind and Wearmouth, 2006). Moreover, children who struggle may benefit from mixed ability grouping, particularly cognitively and linguistically (Ainscow and Miles, 2008; Norwich and Lewis, 2001). Paired reading, as a whole class strategy, is beneficial in this regard (Topping, 2002; Topping, 1987). The Reading Recovery programme for younger children, where early intervention is crucial, also has notable benefits (Norwich and Lewis, 2001; Rose, 2009). While such approaches support all children, there are some for whom targeted individual support may still be necessary (Nugent, 2011).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a common approach to learner differences, involves using a variety of resources and approaches which best suit learner preferences (Westwood, 2013). The aim of UDL is to include all children in the learning tasks without compromising standards. The differentiation of instruction needs to incorporate different ways of engaging with tasks, understanding how students demonstrate learning and assessing learning in

different ways (Westwood, 2013). With a focus on learner differences and diversity, the emphasis is firmly on accommodating all learners, as much as possible. While such approaches are recommended for inclusive practice, there may be students with dyslexia who continue to require intensive, structured programmes which need to be continued over a long period of time (Norwich and Lewis, 2001). Also, research into students in mainstream schools receiving specialist, structured intervention for short periods of the day and spending the rest of the day with their peers has been shown to be particularly successful (Norwich and Lewis, 2001). However, it is imperative that teachers fully understand any systematic, structured programmes (Davis and Florian, 2004) and that any withdrawal from the mainstream class is minimal and purposeful.

While a differentiated and adapted curriculum may be used with all students, some research has shown that small-group (less than four) and individual teaching was the most effective type of instruction for children with dyslexia (Nugent, 2011; Scamacca et al., 2007; Singleton, 2009). As noted in The Rose Report (2009), “some children with dyslexia may respond very slowly even to the most effective of teaching approaches. These children will require skilled, intensive, one-to-one interventions”(p.14). Davis and Florian (2004) also acknowledge that some children do benefit from specialised teaching; however, they assert that the responsibility lies in the mainstream classroom and what may be required is an adaption of common pedagogical approaches. This adaption of strategies is central to inclusive teaching, though children with dyslexia may also require more intensive and frequent approaches, which may not always be possible in the mainstream context (Scamacca et al. 2007). One example is the evidence based strategy of precision teaching which has notable benefits for children with dyslexia (Chiesa and Robertson, 2000; Downer, 2007; Nugent, 2011; Roberts and Norwich, 2010). Other intensive and frequent approaches include programmes such as

Toe by Toe, which has significant benefits (Macay, 2007; Reid, 2009). While the benefits of some phonics programmes may be appreciated, it does not negate the responsibility of mainstream teachers to attend to strategies which enable all children to participate meaningfully in tasks. When re-evaluating inclusive teaching approaches, it must be done with *all* children in mind. In other words, what is considered effective SEN teaching is, for the most part, effective teaching for all (Davis and Florian, 2004; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009; Smith and Barr, 2008).

### **3.13 The Question of Learning Styles**

The issue of learning styles has been debated for some time with some authors such as Reid, Mortimore and Exley pointing to the importance of understanding the various fixed modes of learning (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) while others are vocal in their opposition to the concept (Kirschner, 2016; Krank, 2001; Newton, 2015; Olsen, 2006; Reiner and Willingham, 2010). The latter group have firmly based their arguments on scientific research in the area.

Reid (2005; 2009) asserts that all learners can be taught to read initially through their learning style and maintains that children construct knowledge in their own way according to the dominant style. It should be acknowledged that children do indeed learn in different ways but perhaps this could be attributed more to their interests, backgrounds and abilities rather than to learning styles (Reiner and Willingham, 2010). There is also a contention that children with dyslexia may learn better when their learning style is understood (Exley, 2003; Mortimore, 2005; Reid, 2009). As there is significant research addressing specific differences associated with dyslexia, what is needed is attention to the differences associated with dyslexia rather than a blanket approach to learning styles, which is in effect placing children in categories (Reiner and Willingham, 2010). Also, there may be a danger that children who are labelled as

having one dominant style may be reluctant to take on tasks which they may perceive to include other learning styles, which may result in a loss of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Newton, 2015).

Even a proponent of learning styles such as Mortimore (2005) offers a word of caution when it comes to matching learning styles to teaching methods as there are so many constructs of learning styles and “very little agreement” (p.145). What does seem to be agreed upon is that all children learn differently and external factors may account for this. There is also the notion that if one doesn’t agree with learning styles theories, then they are propagating that all children are the same, which is not true (Riener and Willingham, 2010). It is not disputed that children do learn differently at particular times (Kirschner, 2016; Krank, 2001; Newton, 2015; Olsen, 2006; Riener and Willingham, 2010). However, this is determined by other factors such as the environment, interest, subject and previous knowledge rather than an innate learning style (Krank, 2001). Some children may learn visually in one context while kinesthetically in another (Krank, 2001; Riener and Willingham, 2010). This learning “preference”, rather than style may be understood by identifying the actual differences between children (Krank, 2001; Newton, 2015; Olsen, 2006; Riener and Willingham, 2010) and this preference for learning should not be confused with a learning style (Kirschner, 2016).

The strategies which teachers use may indeed influence how a child engages with the subject and Reid (2003) considers it “logical” to appreciate the individual learning styles when planning these strategies. However, the scientific literature has put this logic to the test and has been unable to find any support for the connection between learning styles and effective teaching (Kirschner 2016; Krank, 2001; Newton, 2015; Olsen, 2006; Riener and Willingham, 2010). In fact, there doesn’t appear to be any evidence to prove that teaching tailored to

individual learning styles improve learning (Olsen, 2006). What is important, however, is that practitioners understand how all children learn in different ways and in different contexts, which may require a return to the originators of educational theory, such as Piaget and Rousseau (Krank, 2001; Olsen, 2006).

It is considered necessary to find effective teaching and learning strategies for all students who experience such a complex variety of learning differences (Mortimore, 2008). However, rather than focusing on one mode of learning for each child, it may be beneficial to consider their prior knowledge and issues from the environment as these may be more indicative of how new information should be presented (Olsen, 2006). Furthermore, to incorporate a multi-sensory approach for all children may be more effective in terms of learning and in including all children (Westwood, 2013). This may be more appropriate, as meaning and understanding are constructed in different ways, not as a consequence of teaching to one sensory domain (Newton, 2015).

In Exley's study (2003) which investigated whether teaching to students' preferred learning styles would improve results in literacy and numeracy, it was reported that students made significant gains when their learning styles were understood (p.65). However, the children's learning preferences for certain tasks at particular times, not innate learning styles, may account for this.

While the scientific research does not support the idea of learning styles, there is still overwhelming support among teachers that teaching to a child's learning style improves learning (Newton, 2010). However, it appears that the opposite may actually be the case; as it has no basis in educational research, teaching to a child's dominant learning style could lead to a decrease in effort and performance (Olsen, 2006). While Reid (2003) emphasises that



children with dyslexia should be aware of their own style of learning, perhaps a broader understanding is required; that children are aware of the various ways they learn in different situations and at different times (Krank, 2001; Newton, 2015; Olsen, 2006; Riener and Willingham, 2010). It may be preferable to provide opportunities where children are able to make sense of various tasks presented to them in a multi-modal manner (Westwood, 2013).

### **3.14 Teacher Education**

In order to develop inclusive practices, teachers need to be adequately trained and according to Florian and Rouse (2009), the issue of inadequate preparation for inclusion is an international problem. Although training varies from country to country, the concept of equity and participation by all is a shared concern (Florian and Rouse, 2009). While much progress has been made in inclusive theories, in practice the responsibility of working with children with different needs rests with the specialist teacher and is not perceived as a school-wide issue (Florian and Rouse, 2009). Inclusion needs to be considered a whole school endeavour and this should begin with teacher education (Barton, 2003). Also central to pre-service training is the concept of “transformation”. This involves students scrutinising and re-evaluating taken for granted attitudes and assumptions regarding dominant structures in education as a way of opening up new possibilities (Smith and Barr, 2008).

The widespread practice of ability grouping in schools does not lead to improved outcomes for children and its use should be abolished (Florian and Rouse, 2009). If this has been evidenced in mainstream schools, then it may also be inferred that ability grouping by way of special schooling should not be advised. That is not to disregard the reported benefits of reading schools in Ireland (Casserly and Gildea, 2015, Casserly 2012; Nugent, 2008; Nugent,

2007; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009). However, the reported success of these schools, in terms of student satisfaction, could act as a catalyst for general school improvement as part of initial teacher education (Miles and Ainscow, 2008). Up to recently, there has been a tendency to address students' difficulties outside of the mainstream class and this has resulted in an education system with "undeveloped ideas" to support all children throughout the school (Smith, 2014). There is now an urgency for schools and universities to reflect on ideas and practices which benefit *all*.

The language of inclusion and the terminology used should also be given priority in teacher education as "terminology is important because language reveals assumptions about why and how people are perceived as having difficulty in learning" (Florian and Rouse, 2009, p.595). Exploring the use of discourse regarding shared understanding of the different ways language is used, depending on the situation, may help students to recognise that language often serves to reinforce certain norms (Temple, 2005). As language is political and understanding what is said may be subjective, it has the power to include or exclude (Freire, 1972). Pre-service teachers need to be aware of this power relationship inherent in language, realising that texts are constructed with an audience in mind (Luke, 2012; Temple, 2005). Therefore, an element of critical thinking is required, recognising that prejudices have the power to control but language, when used correctly, has the power to liberate (Temple, 2005). Understanding how and why language is politically constructed may be important for those who seek any sort of transformation of what is considered normative (Luke, 2012). This attention to language may help to shape or change "our sense of reality" as a result of meaningful dialogue (Smith and Barr, 2008, p. 414). It is, therefore, relevant to all teachers and teacher educators when aiming to include all children.

The actual content of initial education programmes is often neglected with a focus on attitudes and strategies (Florian, Young and Rouse, 2010). Perhaps, there is a need to re-evaluate this content ensuring that it is underpinned by an inclusive philosophy and influenced by the social model of disability (O' Gorman and Drudy, 2010; Rix, Hall et al, 2009).

In the U.K. and Ireland, it is not a requirement for teachers to have a separate qualification to work in special education as "creating a separate cadre of special teachers was seen as a barrier to inclusion in that it absolved the rest of the education system for taking responsibility for all children's learning "(Florian and Rouse, 2009, p.595). While this is a serious issue, having a teacher on staff with a specialist qualification to work with children with specific differences may not only benefit the children concerned but also other staff members who may seek additional knowledge (Cheminais, 2001; Travers, 2002). Therefore, though inclusion is a school wide endeavour and it is incumbent on all to accept responsibility for improving participation and learning for all children, specialists can also assist in developing policies and practices (Florian and Rouse, 2009; Norwich, 2008). A model could possibly exist where specialists with additional qualifications are consulted in order to increase participation in classrooms in collaboration with mainstream teachers (EADSNE, 2015; Florian, Young and Rouse, 2010).

Lambe and Bones (2008) conducted a study in Northern Ireland on student teacher beliefs regarding inclusion, following a placement in a special setting. This group of student teachers, who viewed inclusion as a rights discourse, were appreciative of the contribution of the special setting and became less convinced that inclusion could work given the current structures in mainstream education. The study reported that the students viewed the special setting as more supportive, better resourced and having a more positive environment.

Furthermore, “the findings also indicate attitudes towards inclusion and inclusive practices may be positively affected by consideration of resources and class size” (p.115). Importantly, this issue of smaller class size is also noted by Westwood (2013) as a factor in pupil satisfaction. While appreciative of the findings from their study, Lambe and Bones assert that special schools are rooted in tradition and social class and point to the need for comprehensive teacher education, which pushes against ideological and cultural norms as a way of including all children. It may be beneficial for providers of initial teacher education to consider the results of this study and other similar studies espousing the benefits of special schools (Casserly and Gildea, 2015; Casserly, 2012; McPhillips and Shevlin, 2009; Motherway, 2009; Nugent, 2008; Nugent; 2007) in order to develop truly inclusive practices in mainstream contexts.

### **3.15 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have provided a critical account of important issues regarding dyslexia and inclusion. In order to understand dyslexia, one must consider the complex social and political forces which have shaped its existence and, to this end, I have engaged with the debate, particularly how it relates to inclusion and specialist provision.

While some research has indicated the positive aspects of special schools, it is argued that these findings could be used to promote more meaningful engagement in mainstream contexts. On the other hand, though much of the literature does not support specialist provision, there are some children for whom specialist teaching is a requirement. In other words, although many children with dyslexia will learn in the same way as non-dyslexic

children, there are occasions where some may need additional support due to impairments or learning differences.

The affective component of dyslexia features heavily in the literature, particularly the high levels of satisfaction with specialist settings. This may require further investigation as a means of teacher reflection. It may have significant implications for inclusive teaching and teacher education for inclusion. Along with practitioners being equipped with pedagogical skills, what is equally important is a reflection on inclusive principles and the impact of culture on understanding learner differences. The “language of inclusion” is also of particular relevance. It may be necessary to explore the use of language, including how children articulate their understandings of issues impacting them.

The issues discussed in this Literature Review provide a rationale for the four research questions, which are outlined below.

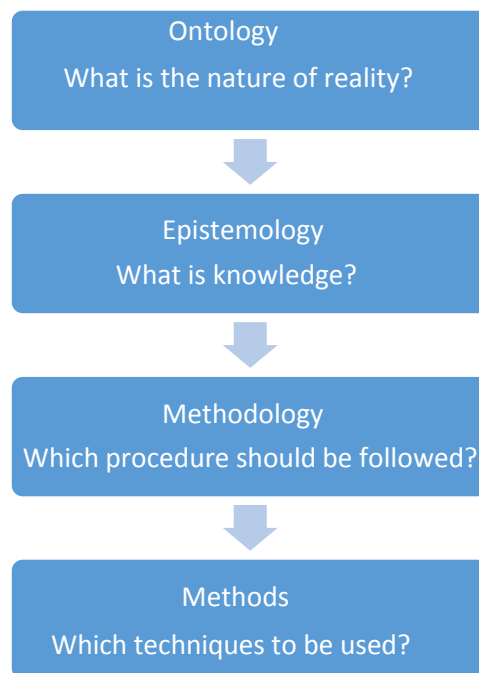
- **How do the young people understand dyslexia ?**
- **How included do the young people feel in this reading school?**
- **How relevant are socio-emotional issues for young people in the school?**
- **Which teaching approaches are deemed most effective, according to the young people?**

In the next chapter, I will present the methodology chosen along with a rationale for this methodology.

# Chapter 4: Methodology

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I aim to provide a theoretical framework for the study with a focus on specific theoretical underpinnings which have influenced my positionality as an interpretivist. This positionality has influenced the choice of research methods, which are focus groups. It is acknowledged that all research is rooted in a set of assumptions (Patton, 1987) and the diagram below outlines how these assumptions connect with each aspect of the research process.



(Arthur, Waring et al., 2012, p.16)

Educational research is “concerned with asking and answering relevant and researchable questions” (Boeije, 2010, p.1) and this involves identifying methodologies and methods which

help to best access knowledge (Arthur Waring et al., 2012; Boeije, 2010). Also, educational research often aims to create “a link between research and practice” (Elliott, 2006, p.170); the emphasis on improvement in practice may be important to the educational community (Carr, 2000) and it is central to this project. Both this chapter and the next aim to provide a rationale for both the methodology and the methods employed.

I will begin with a short overview of the pertinent areas of ontology and epistemology, delineating how assumptions about knowledge and reality are closely linked to the researcher’s value system (Boeije, 2010; Silverman, 2010). I will move to discussing interpretivism, asserting that knowledge and reality are subjective and are best understood through social interactions. Following this, I will discuss my personal journey to date, aiming to make my positionality explicit and transparent.

I have included a detailed section on power in educational research, outlining how and why I have identified with critical theory, feminism and queer theory in seeking to challenge the status quo by listening to students’ voices. I will begin with a section on “Governmentality and SEN” before discussing how these theories have influenced my positionality. As the concept of power is central to this project, I deemed it necessary to explore some of these theories which have shaped my thinking when addressing issues of injustice and inequality.

## **4.2 ONTOLOGY**

The issue of ontology is central to qualitative research (Boeije, 2010; Cohen, Manion et al., 2011; Silverman, 2010). This refers to how the researcher views the world and how this will inevitably influence the research undertaken. It is largely determined by the researcher’s values, which may be divided into three distinct categories; moral values (what a person feels is the right thing to do), competency values (the most effective way to go about doing

something) and personal values (what a person hopes to achieve for themselves at the end of the research)(Rokeach, 1973). As a researcher's value system may influence one's methodology, it may be claimed that research is rarely, if ever, value free (Blunkett, 2000). Although some researchers may claim a value-neutral position, in reality, it is not possible to study education without some level of commitment to goals and values (Carr, 2000). Explicitly stating one's ontological position does not diminish the value or credibility of the research. On the contrary, in openly and honestly positioning oneself, it gives credence to one's work and allows for a reflexive approach (Carr, 2000). This positionality in research is key and while a statement of positionality does not guarantee quality research, it is nevertheless important to provide an insight into where the researcher is coming from (Winter, 2013). In other words, who I am, where I have come from and where I am in relation to others, influences how I see the world and what research I may or may not deem important (Carr, 2000). Furthermore, identifying one's assumptions about the world and how these assumptions are crafted by experiences, may help one to become more open to the experiences of others (Takacs, 2002). However, there are researchers who would disagree with the above (Hassan, 2016; Wylly, 2009), stating that "there is a basic difference between fact and value, science deals with the fact and the value belongs to an entirely different order of discourse" (Hassan, 2016, p.319). This contention, separating value assumptions and "facts", ignores the view that educational research often seeks to explore social phenomenon in a social world, and "only through values do certain problems get identified and studied in particular ways" (Siverman, 2010, p.352).

Ontological positions exist on a spectrum with constructivism at one end and positivism at the other (Arthur, Waring et al., 2012). A constructivist views reality as completely subjective



and acknowledges that various realities are constructed by individuals, depending on experiences. (Silverman, 2010). A criticism of this view may be that if multiple realities are created, there is a danger of “navel gazing solipsism”, resulting in a belief that reality is *always* subjective (Mertens, 2010). However, this should not be viewed as a weakness; what is important is that the research is rigorous and transparent (Denzin, N.K., and Lincoln, Y.S., 1994).

A researcher who adopts a constructivist approach is likely to undertake qualitative research which respects and values the experiences of those who are being researched (Arthur, Waring at al., 2013). When the ontological position of the researcher assumes that multiple realities exist, methods such as interviewing or focus groups are appropriate techniques to obtain data (Silverman, 2010). These instruments may afford participants the opportunity to attach meaning to their reality through purposeful interactions (Boeije, 2010).

#### **4.3 EPISTEMOLOGY**

King and Horrocks (2010) define epistemology as “the philosophical theory of knowledge”(p.8). What is it we can claim to know? According to the constructionist paradigm, the researcher and participants are interlocked in an interactive process, constructing meaning and truth. The assumption is that all data and interpretation of this data is rooted in the experience of the person and this “truth” is purely subjective though no less meaningful and valid (Mertens, 2010, p.19). Knowledge is actively constructed and is not something passive which is discoverable (Schwandt, 2000 in Mertens,2010).

Unlike constructivism, positivism, as an epistemological programme, originates in natural science (Flick, 2009). “It is historically associated with the French philosopher, Auguste Comte

who was the initial scholar to employ the word to describe this philosophical position” (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011, p.7). Comte’s position was to “consider social phenomenon as *things* or *social facts*. When viewing society as a *thing* or *fact*, observations stay away from biased moral judgements and instead focus on the static dynamical properties of social forces”(Hassan, 2014, p.319). Although positivism asserts that values do not inform the research process, this omission of positionality does not guarantee that a position does not exist (Carr, 2000). To this end, even advocates of positivism such as Wyly (2009), concede that “epistemology, methodology and politics can never be completely disentangled and they are never inherently neutral” (p.314).

#### **4.4 INTERPRETIVISM**

A key interpretivist contention is that there is no such thing as an “Archimedean position” or objective way to know because as soon as one starts to articulate what “there is”, they move into the world of discourse (Gergen, 1994 in Nightingale and Cromby, 2002). Therefore, knowledge and reality are socially constructed and not objective entities (Nightingale and Cromby, 2002). Interpretivist research can be either constructivist or constructionist. While these two terms are often used interchangeably, the distinguishing variable is that constructivism relates to how individuals assimilate and construct knowledge whereas constructionism asserts that knowledge is culturally and historically constructed through social processes (Castello, 2016; Martin and Sugarman, 1997; Young and Collin, 2004). In other words, both constructivism and constructionism share the view that knowledge and reality are constructed, though the latter emphasises the importance of social contexts and group dynamics (Castello, 2016; Martin and Sugarman , 1997). While ambiguity exists between the

two, this may be as a result of their recent emergence and because the ideas are still evolving (Young and Collin, 2004).

For constructionists, all claims to knowledge derive from particular groups with specific values (Dragonas, Gergen et al., 2015, p.xi). The social conversation is the primary human reality and knowledge is constructed from these conversations (Burkett, 2003). According to this view, all meaning emanates from the relational process and skills of participation are of real importance (Dragonas, Gergen et al., 2015, p.xi). This may have particular implications for education, which has the potential to be a highly interactive process, benefitting all children.

Dewey (1938) asserts that living in the world means that one engages in a series of situations where interactions are always occurring. It may be derived, therefore, that any claim to knowledge or reality which is independent of interactions is untenable. These interactions are largely influenced by cultural factors, and Bruner (1996) maintains that “although meanings are in the mind, they have their origins and their significance in the culture in which they are created”(p.3). Furthermore, the evolution of the mind is closely linked to a way of life which shares a common symbolism which represents reality (Bruner, 1996). This view, as it relates to education, emphasises policies and practices which acknowledge a hidden curriculum, the unspoken values which impact children in schools (Dragonas, Gergen et al., 2015, p.xi). In Western education systems, the focus on educating the individual ignores the potential to learn collaboratively (Corcoran and Billington, 2015). What is possibly required is an exploration of policies and practices which not only recognise, but promote socio-cultural intellectual development (Corcoran and Billington, 2015). Supporting this quest for improvement in policies and practice, the interpretivist view provides a framework which may act as a guide for research communities, determining what problem is to be solved and

identifying appropriate methods to do this (Usher, 1996, p.15 in Donoghue, 2007). The subjective nature of this paradigm is explicitly value-laden and emphasises “social interaction as the basis for all knowledge” (O’ Donoghue, 2007, p.9). To this end, the interpretivist has the potential to utilise their skills to make sense of how others understand the world through meaningful dialogue (O’ Donoghue, 2007). They may give a voice to those who are often spoken about, recognising the importance of the social reality articulated by participants (Goodley, 2011; O’ Donoghue,2007). This certainly influenced my position when conducting this research.

Importantly, the interpretivist does not separate themselves from what is constituted as reality as one is highly dependent on the other. They acknowledge that there are multiple realities where the mind plays an important role in shaping and determining categories (Arthur, Waring at al., 2013). As knowledge of the world is understood through a person’s lived experience, the objective of interpretive research is to interpret and attach meaning to this lived experience (Weber, 2004). However, a critique of this position raises the question that if experiences are always subjective, is the interpretation of the experiences more important than the experiences themselves? (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). Furthermore, is the focus on interpretation likely to miss what was actually being said and is the captured reality likely to differ depending on the researcher? (Silverman, 2010). This raises an interesting point as a key interpretive view is that knowledge and reality are subjectively constructed by the researcher, who has a role in making inferences and extracting hidden meaning from conversations (O’ Donoghue, 2007). In fact, the search for meaning through the presence or absence of a relationship, along with appreciating the context, is a core aspect of the researcher’s job (Chi Lin, 1998; Goodley, 2011) and this ability to notice what has not been stated explicitly becomes an important skill (Goodley, 2011).

Finally, as meaning is derived from social processes (Goldkuhl, 2012; Hollway and Jefferson, 2013; Silverman 2010), it is imperative that the interpretive research process is both systematic and ethical, and this will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### **4.5 Rationale for Interpretivism in this Study**

In the case of this research, I sought to discover children's views of schooling, interpreting what they said or implied in light of the research questions and the related literature. The questions were chosen as these topics inform much of the literature, are related to professional practice and are under-investigated in the Irish context. While it is acknowledged that a tension may exist between interpretivist research and questions which may be considered "discoverable", I aimed to keep an open mind throughout the process. It should also be noted that, while I had some prior knowledge of what the children may have considered important, at no stage did I claim to assume to know what they would or would not say; rather I sought to use the interpretive approach to attach meaning to their ideas.

#### **4.6 A Personal Reflection**

As a researcher, I bring several aspects of my identity to the research process. Up to quite recently, I was not aware that my life experiences would have an impact on any research I conducted. However, my position on this has changed. I grew up as an Irish Catholic and attended a Christian Brothers' school. While my experiences and recollections of my schooling were for the most part positive, there are certain aspects which remain with me for the wrong reasons. For example, I remember large class sizes, where didactic teaching approaches were used. Knowledge was considered absolute without room for student participation or voice. On one level, this system worked and served me well when it came to doing exams, which consisted merely of regurgitating facts from teacher centred lessons. I

have become very interested in the area of student voice in research, particularly in relation to disability. I have come to understand that this interest emanates from my own experience as a student where, as I have outlined, children did not have a voice.

It may be argued that it is an impossible task to see outside of our positions as “no simply neutral or value-free position is possible in social science (or, indeed, elsewhere)” (Silverman, 2010, p.352). As a young person, I started to ask questions and like Takacs (2002), I began to try to stand outside of my own experiences, trying to gain a foothold from which to look at me. I became interested with how we are taught growing up about norms and acceptable ways to live our lives and that to diverge from these norms, was almost regarded as objectionable. These norms are created by society though “there are some who claim societal norms are largely independent of what people achieve together” (Corcoran and Billington, 2015, p.33). In particular, I noticed how adherence to mores in areas such as education, along with the level of education attained, influences one’s social identity and place in the world. These norms surround us and are perpetuated through family, colleagues, politicians and friends (Takacs, 2002). Though I followed these norms in many respects, I was struck that, for many disenfranchised people, this wasn’t even an option. For example, children with identified disabilities did not attend mainstream schools and children from poorer backgrounds were generally not expected to pursue a college education.

Social forces, such as television and advertising, which help to shape our world view and self-perception, often cater for people for whom norms “work”. Moreover, if these norms do work for people, they do not even need to be aware that they are subject to these norms (Takacs, 2002). However, when they don’t work and they don’t fit, things become questionable and uncertain. This may be especially true in the case of those young people in

our education systems who are not enabled to participate and whose voices are not valued in a narrowly constructed view of education, with its huge emphasis on traditional school assessments as a measure of worth and ability.

This reflective process has undoubtedly influenced my interest in student voice, social justice and the social model of disability, which is based on the premise that we as social beings construct these norms. I have also come to see that it is important to be aware of how my positionality could bias my epistemology (Takacs, 2002). Recognising this is important as a way to start to understand other opinions and listen to other voices in order to work towards a more equitable world (Takacs, 2002).

As a teacher educator, I may need to examine my position as I am the one who gives the mark. Also, because of the power I have in the lecture room, my ontological and epistemological assumptions are less likely to be challenged and if I am not careful, my students' voices may not be heard (Takacs, 2002). I may need to be cognisant of the fact that the students I teach also have a position, which is influenced by experience. As their lecturer, my assumptions may contribute to how they position themselves as current and future researchers (Takacs, 2002).

This process of self-reflection with regard to positionality is highlighted by Milner (2007) who has a particular interest in researching race and culture. He asserts that researchers need to be reflective and reflexive in order to understand "issues, perspectives, epistemologies and positions" (p.395). They need to constantly ask themselves questions such as "What is my cultural heritage?" "In what way does my cultural background influence the way I see the world?" and "What are and have been the contextual nuances and realities that help shape my cultural ways of knowing, both past and present?" (p.395). Wellington (2000) supports

this and contends that it is important for researchers to examine positions and “assumptions which are often taken for granted (p.44). Researchers need to pose questions such as “What’s my own position in relation to this research?” “What are my relevant past experiences and prior knowledge?” and “Am I carrying a bias, a prejudice, or insider information which will affect my role as researcher?” (p.44).

The next section pertains to power in educational research, which is particularly relevant to this study as young children are the participants. The insider-outsider debate is highlighted along with key theories which have resonated with me as a qualitative researcher. These theories which emphasise participation and the negotiation of meaning through dialogue, have given me an insight as to why I have chosen to embrace the interpretive paradigm and the use of focus groups.

## **4.7 POWER IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**

### **4.7.1 THE INSIDER-OUTSIDER DEBATE**

Understanding the insider-outside debate, with regard to positionality, is important. It is relevant to this study as I may be considered an insider with “expert knowledge”, yet I remain an outsider as I am not a young child with dyslexia. The young people, or “insiders”, at the centre of this study may have valuable insights which may help to improve practice in our schools.

In the past, researchers were generally classified as insiders or outsiders; one belonged (or not) to a particular group, assuming the associated advantages and disadvantages (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey et al., 2010). In more recent times, however, there has been an acknowledgement that both positions are not as polarised as one would have thought and



there is now much more fluidity between the two positions (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey et al., 2010). This may be attributed, in some part, to the emergence of and contributions from feminism, critical theory, queer theory and action research which help one to understand insider-outsider issues (Mertens, 2010). This reconfiguration of status, as it relates to positionality, provides researchers with the tools to understand the complexity of research both within and outside of one's culture (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey et al., 2010, p. 405). Moreover, although researchers are predominantly insiders or outsiders, very often one could be both. One could be part of a group but this does not denote sameness (Levy, 2013). For example, The Irish Travellers Association represents a large and diverse population with individually wide ranging experiences. They are not all the same. "Likewise, not being a member of a group does not imply total difference" (Levy, 2013). In terms of research, it is possible that the researcher's positionality may change over the course of their work, resulting in a status of both insider and outsider at different points (Levy, 2013). Qualitative researchers retain a unique position in this regard as they have personal contact with participants, which may not be the case for the quantitative researcher (Levy, 2013).

While the lines between the two positions have blurred, there are certainly some advantages to being an insider when conducting research, especially in terms of access and commonality of experience (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey et al., 2010). This is highlighted by Johnson-Bailey (1999), a black researcher who interrogated the experiences of other black women and commented that

There were several main areas of similarity that linked the participant and researcher narratives: self esteem, self doubt, guilt concerning time spent away from the family...It was a shared issue of womanhood that the respondents and I spoke of in synchrony"(p.406).

In addition to access and commonality of experience, having prior knowledge of the setting and of the participants may improve insight into the situation (Wellington, 2000). Furthermore, insider status may provide a trust and a willingness to engage which may not otherwise be the case (Levy, 2013). This trust is key to establishing good relations, offering participants the opportunity to talk openly about their lives, stories and experiences. (Ahmed et al., 2010; Wellington, 2000). However, a clear disadvantage of being an insider is the potential to bias the research process with assumptions and pre-conceived ideas, which may not be helpful (Ahmed et al., 2010; Wellington, 2000). Furthermore, a participant may decide to withhold information, pre-empt questions or direct the process, thus exerting power (Ahmed et al., 2010; Wellington, 2000). This complex issue of power is central to governmentality, which is discussed in the next section.

As well as discussing governmentality, I have included sections on critical theory, feminism and queer theory as these theories aim to challenge norms and expose structural inequalities. These theories are central to this study where I am concerned about the perspectives of young children who don't have power, as decisions regarding their placement in a reading school were made for them. They have also attended mainstream schools and discussed issues of power in these schools, which often resulted in their disenfranchisement.

#### **4.7.2 GOVERNMENTALITY and SEN**

The issue of governmentality has permeated some of this work so far; it has been discussed in Chapter Two with regard to policy development and also in the literature review regarding the impact of political forces on the construction of dyslexia. This discrete section continues to locate governmentality in the context of power relations, highlighting the importance of

power in discourse pertaining to SEN. Power “has the ability to socially exclude individuals or groups of people and may certainly be seen as a powerful mechanism within any institutional or personal context” (Morgan, 2005, p.325).

Governmentality involves the way the surveillance of populations, prioritised by governments continues to impact a variety of institutions and practices, education included (Billington, 2000; Weidner, 2009). As one of the most influential concepts developed by Foucault (Weidner, 2009), governmentality points to the fact that what is deemed important to government, is considered important in practice (Peters, 2010). Therefore, practices in education are largely determined by government standards and norms, identifying those groups “requiring intervention” (Weidner, 2009). Moreover, as disabled children become reliant on government to meet their needs, they become regarded as a flaw in the system, in need of support and surveillance (Morgan, 2005). Furthermore, with values such as freedom and individual accountability embedded in Western thought, disabled people have become particularly disadvantaged and “such freedom from social responsibilities should be discouraged” (Morgan, 2005, p.329). These values underpinning practices which benefit the masses (Billington, 2000), should continue to be questioned (Weidner, 2010).

The concept of inclusion is a consequence of governmentality as it invites participation and involvement, ultimately resulting in the neo-liberal aim of citizenship (Douglas, 2010). Individuals are governed through the control of curriculum and provision of resources (Douglas, 2010). However such resources, which are often cited as an advantage of special schooling (Lambe and Bones, 2008; Motherway, 2009), should be afforded to *all* children. This strategic form of power aims to promote the idea of the individual rather than a society through the marketization of education in the form of a target driven system, communicated

to schools by government (Douglas, 2010). The way this political thought is translated into local policies and practices is often subtle and attractive, as it yields efficiency and improved results (Douglas, 2010; Morgan, 2005). However, quantitative approaches to government led assessments ignore children's potential and result in a system which is considered appropriate for all (Armstrong and Squires, 2015; Douglas, 2010). For example, the use of narrow standardised literacy tests may appeal to the majority, while ignoring a minority. In other words, these practices, perpetuating "normative" ideas continue to benefit one group, while disenfranchising children who may be considered different (Douglas, 2010; Morgan, 2005).

This leads to a tension in education between the provision for all children and the provision for individual needs. It is "particularly problematic in the field of special education whose recipients often do not or cannot compete in a society which has been socially constructed to disable them" (Morgan, 2005, p.325). This lack of power limits the choices children and their parents can make in issues that affect them (Morgan, 2005). Moreover, as education systems have been constructed in a way where individuals, through categorisation, have been stripped of their power, it is hardly surprising that exclusionary practices occur (Morgan, 2005). For example, children with an identified disability may not be afforded the same opportunities to participate in curricular activities as other children.

Governmentality approaches are, therefore, appropriate ways to interrogate issues such as student empowerment, the concept of impairment and the inclusion of children with SEN (Douglas, 2010). They recognise that the normalising of ability stigmatises those who don't adhere to these norms, ultimately leading to their disenfranchisement (Morgan, 2005). They

challenge the fact that experts have become the magistrates of normality, and children taught to know their place (Morgan, 2005).

This exclusion is further compounded by the often denial of school placement for children, even when parents may believe the school is the right one (Morgan, 2005). In the case of reading schools, most parents do not have a choice to send their children, as places are limited and are linked to the necessity for a psychological report. Also, many working class parents may not even be aware of the existence of such schools. At a time where parental choice is considered so important (Morgan, 2005), it is ironic that, in reality, parents' choices are limited, and are determined by class and issues of wealth (Drudy and Kinsella, 2009). This results in an over representation of middle-class children attending reading schools, excluding poorer children with the same cognitive impairments. As governmentality is closely connected with an effective economy and the concept of citizenship (Peters, 2010), these wealthier children are, perhaps, advantaged to become more "successful" citizens than their less fortunate counterparts.

#### **4.7.3 CRITICAL THEORY**

It may be said that critical theory goes beyond understanding meaning that one attaches to events or theories and strives to improve aspects of social life or institutions (Arthur, Waring at al., 2012). The methodology and methods used in a study may be directly influenced by this theory and this piece of research was conducted with the view to improving the experiences and perspectives of children attending a special reading school. It involved identifying and critiquing existing structures with a view to suggesting potential changes in practices.

Critical theory has its roots in The Frankfurt School, which sharply distinguishes between scientific theories and critical theories (Geuss 2001). Scientific theories aim to manipulate, understand or change external forces. When they are “mastered”, the individual is able to achieve their objectives with success (Geuss, 2001). Critical theories, on the other hand, aim to liberate, make hidden coercion visible and empower participants to make constructive decisions (Geuss, 2001). Critical theory suggests that researchers attend to how power in all contexts influences how one goes about their lives (McIntyre, 2008). This questioning of power relations in societal structures can never be separated from the research process. In fact, it is as a result of these relations that researchers are inspired to poke and shift the foundations of sometimes accepted norms (Mertens, 2010). The children at the centre of this study attend a school which is politically and socially situated; critical theory highlights structural inequality and change, thereby having the potential to give these students a voice. Freire, an instigator of critical theory, strongly emphasised the relationship between theory and practice and urged people to engage in critical reflection in order to bring about individual and social change (Freire, 1972; McIntyre,2008). This reflection is not a call to “an armchair revolution”; rather it is a call to action through reflecting on concrete situations, leading to pro-active decisions (Freire, 1972). Geuss (2001) strongly asserts that agents in society must embrace critical theory if society is to be transformed.

What is required is a critical theory of education, which rejects the neo-business model and proposes a fairer and democratic reconstruction of education (Kellner, 2003). While The Frankfurt School has produced critical theory, it is possibly time for this broader theory of education, which incorporates the ideas of Marx and Dewey (Kellner, 2003). Dominant institutions, such as education, need to be critiqued and challenged for as long as they

continue to perpetuate attitudes which serve the masses and maintain the status quo (Geuss, 2001; Goodley, 2011; Kellner, 2003). Although many members in society view such social institutions as legitimate when they operate according to a system of norms which are widely accepted, for some, these attitudes continue to promote exclusion (Geuss, 2001). Churches and schools, for example, exist and operate according to a set of values which appease the masses, while ignoring those who do not conform.

A critical pedagogy, which aims to lessen power, has the potential to transform lives by challenging dominant structures (Goodley, 2011). In practice, children could be encouraged to question more in classrooms and a more collaborative approach to learning could be adopted. It considers the voices of the disenfranchised and regarding education, it highlights that the assessment of difficulties does not address why these difficulties are present in the first place (Goodley, 2011).

With strong power structures embedded in world education systems, it is little surprise that many voices continue to go unheard (Freire, 1972). In the existing neo-liberal model of education, individual productivity determines worth, while social and cultural histories are ignored (Goodley, 2011). Parents are viewed as consumers and in some countries such as Britain “the wealthiest move house to locate themselves in desirable catchment areas; to ensure the “best education” for their children” (Goodley, 2011, p.145). While this is not the case in Ireland, the issue of class is also very much bound up with the idea of what makes a “good school” (Drudy and Kinsella, 2009).

It may be time to question the way schools operate; there now exists an opportunity for education to be viewed as a transformative institution, with children’s experiences informing policies and practices (Goodley, 2011; Jones, 2005; Motherway, 2009). This is central to

critical pedagogy. It also involves developing learning processes which support individuals to “create a better life through social transformation and empowerment, rather than conforming to dominant views and values” (Kellner, 2003, p.55).

This advocacy worldview emphasises that research should always be linked to the political agenda with emancipation and change as objectives (Creswell, 2009). This is certainly true in the case of this research, where I have identified a sometimes disenfranchised group (students with dyslexia) and have sought to elicit their views on school with an objective of improving their experiences. As change is at the heart of critical pedagogy, this shift is brought about by action through recognising the imperative of destabilising existing power structures through dialogue (Freire, 1968). It also involves working with students as agents of learning, which includes listening to and discussing everyday events which are related to injustice and inequality (Goodley, 2011). This is central to this study.

As a researcher, I have outlined how I have aligned myself to the ideas associated with critical theory and how it relates to this study. Other similar theories such as feminism and queer theory, which I will consider next, also have particular relevance.

#### **4.7.4 FEMINISM**

According to Mertens (2010), feminism asserts that discrimination is structural and inequality based on gender is rooted in major institutions such as churches, schools, governments and businesses. This, in turn, determines who has the power or, more importantly, who does not have the power. It is in the interest of these institutions to maintain order as a way of retaining this power (Mertens, 2010). Therefore, the emancipatory aspect of research needs to be addressed in order to empower all participants (Cohen, Manion et al., (2011). While positivist research traditionally served a set of power relations,



in particular empowering the white male able-bodied community (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011), feminist research, aims to break down this system and replace it with a different and transformative agenda. This is an agenda of empowerment, emancipation and equality, where the voices of the marginalised are acknowledged (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011; Silverman, 2010). This agenda requires researchers to be courageous and steadfast in combating discrimination; it also requires taking seriously the important issue of reflexivity in order to break down the positivist paradigm, thus affording a voice to those affected (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011).

As a teacher educator, I argue that the tenets of feminism have implications for the way I teach. If I am to take seriously what feminism has to say, I should be always aiming to examine the nature of the lecturer-student relationship, striving for a participatory democracy and also privileging the individual voice more, and not only my own. Feminism aims to give a voice to the other and as England (1994) says not only to white, middle-class men. With my professional and personal interests in special needs, it has particular resonance with my own philosophy of education, contending that a voice should be afforded to all children and young people. In an article titled "Working with autistic children and young people; sense, experience and the challenge for services, policies and practices", Billington contends that knowledge is not confined to the professionals but may also be possessed by clients, or "insiders". These insider accounts may prove a valuable source of information to improve practices with children (Billington, 2006). Listening to that voice, which is central to feminism, is a challenge for all of us in the educational community. Positivism, however, is critical of this emphasis on voice and "its focus on objective reality excludes empathic understanding of the social phenomena from an individual point of view" (Hassan, 2014, p.321). While feminism appreciates individual experience and voice, others assert that "there

is a single objective reality that exists independently of individuals' perception of it" (Arthur Waring et al., 2012, p. 298). It is difficult to see how positivist research which promotes this "objective reality", and ignores participants' reality, could ever be used to capture a true account of human perspective (Silverman, 2010).

#### **4.7.5 QUEER THEORY**

Queer theory, which emerged during the 1990s, was influenced by gay social activists aiming to expose and to challenge hetero-sexism and homophobia in society. It builds on feminist theory, interrogating the social construction of ideas and identities (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011). Like feminism, it exposes norms as socially constructed and rejects categorisation of people. Rather, it "argues for the respect of their individuality and uniqueness" (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011, p.45). According to an on-line dictionary, queer means anything which is "deviating from the expected or normal" (The Free Dictionary, 2015). Therefore, it is based on a positionality in relation to the norm, the dominant and the expected. This transformative theory, which emanated from ideas articulated by disenfranchised gay groups, has moved to include people with disabilities and others who have experienced oppression (Mertens, 2010). It places emphasis on the lived experiences of disenfranchised groups and suggests that researchers should study the way oppression is structured. Like critical theory and feminism, it explores the links between social enquiry and social action (Mertens, 2010).

Queer, according to Filax (2006) is a method of inquiry in research. She says "to queer is to expose how identity categories, in particular sexuality, are produced in relation to a fabricated norm"(p.3). It is to notice, to question and to refuse to accept heterosexuality as the norm. In order for heterosexuality to function as the norm, it needs to have its abnormal other, the homosexual (Filax, 2006). Likewise, ability exists in relation to the other, disability. This

notion of “queering” in participatory research is a useful way to challenge norms. Participatory research, which is closely linked to queer theory, involves communities reflecting on their lives, aiming to engage in action which benefits the group (McIntyre, 2003). This collective effort, informed by local knowledge, informs the basis for research (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995). The oppressed and marginalised are given the opportunity to bring about change in their lives through participating in this process (McIntyre, 2003).

When informed by queer theory, participatory research offers participants the opportunities to reflect on personal and communal attitudes. Given this, and though queer theory mainly considers and explores attitudes relating to sexuality and gender, its positionality and emphasis on “relation to the norm”, make it a broad and inclusive theory with opportunities to interrogate and problematise other forms of oppression such as social class, disability and ethnicity (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011).

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the important areas of researcher ontology and epistemology in relation to positionality have been discussed at length. The interpretivist paradigm, central to this study, has also been explored. I have examined the issue of power in educational research with a focus on governmentality, critical theory, feminism and queer theory which have informed my positionality and approach to research.

In the next chapter, I will describe the methods used and outline sequentially the steps employed. I will begin the chapter with a section on qualitative research before providing a timeline for the study. Finally, other areas considered include participant selection, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis.

# Chapter 5

## Methods

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will start with a section on my experience of qualitative research methods before considering the merits and potential disadvantages of both interviews and focus groups. I will outline the timeline for the research, aiming to provide a visual overview of the steps taken. I will then proceed to include sections on some of the important elements of the research, namely; participant selection, data collection and analysis. Issues of quality in research are highlighted and the limitations of the study are also discussed. As the study involves vulnerable children, there is a strong ethical imperative and I have acknowledged this throughout the project.

### **5.2 My experience as a qualitative researcher**

The whole notion of qualitative research was first introduced to me as part of a Master's of Education course at The University of Hull. At the time, I worked as a special needs teacher in an urban primary school. Having had an interest in the area of inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream schools for some time, I decided to embark on a small scale study to identify the attitudes of those working with such students in mainstream settings. I completed courses in quantitative and qualitative research methods before choosing my preferred research tool, which was the interview. It was a comparative study, which

considered the views of teachers, principals and parents of children with special needs. The views of students were not sought and, in hindsight, such views should have been included, which I think may have given more weight to the study. At the time, I was largely unaware of the fact that the instrument I chose may have reflected my positionality. It is now clear, however, that my ontology and epistemology as an interpretivist were emerging at this time. Since becoming a teacher educator, I have conducted both small and large scale qualitative studies pertaining to disability with colleagues at the university. As a researcher, it is important that I continue to reflect on my philosophical standpoint and that I also continue to be explicit in this regard.

The experience of conducting qualitative research has resulted in a shift in what I deem as important when seeking to address certain topics of interest. The context, the setting and the participants are all vital factors in the process. The human interaction, in my view, is a complex yet fundamental aspect when aiming to “answer” specific questions. It may be argued that I ignore “the factual reality in order to get a truer or more complete picture of how things stand” (Silverman, 2010, p.119). However, this “factual reality” is subjective and cannot be measured independent of the participants and context (Mertens, 2010).

### **5.3 Interviews**

An interview is probably the most common type of instrument used in qualitative research (Boeije, 2010) and for this reason I will discuss its merits and some potential disadvantages. Bell (1999) writes that an interview is a conversation between two people with the purpose of eliciting information. As it involves interaction between two or more individuals, it has the capacity to identify the unexpected and shed light on areas which may surface as a result of interaction (Hargreaves, 1993; Kumar, 1999; Openheim, 1992; Silverman, 2010). While the

designing and conducting of the interview may be tedious, it is a flexible approach which can be administered face to face or over the telephone (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011) as well as on-line (Silverman, 2010). Furthermore, an interview can be given at a suitable speed while questionnaires are sometimes completed quickly (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011).

However, this time spent administering an interview may also be considered a disadvantage (Bell, 2005). McCracken (1988), in the context of the long interview, notes that there is a more complex relationship between researcher and respondent in qualitative research than in quantitative research in that “the first objective of the qualitative interview is to allow respondents to tell their own story in their own words” (p.34). Without this qualitative understanding, one is unable to gauge the social and historical context of the research and may not obtain the full picture (Arthur, Waring et al., 2012; McCracken, 1988). Qualitative data from the interview may also be rich in quality and of high validity (Coolihan, 1990). Unlike quantitative methods, questions are less likely to be misunderstood and the participant is free to seek clarification. The interviewer is also in a position to clarify difficult points and probe respondents to describe personal values and thoughts (Kumar, 1999). While interviews can be appropriately administered to virtually all age groups and those with high levels of illiteracy (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011), an individual interview may also be intimidating, particularly for young children (McIntyre, 2008). A clear advantage of the interview is that it can be adapted to the level and interest of participants and even shortened if needs be (Hannabuss, 1996). However, there may be a temptation for the interviewer to lead or use words or signals which may convey expectations of particular types of responses (Kumar, 1987). That said, the individual interview does offer researchers the opportunity to learn about the social life of participants by listening to their stories and experiences (Boeije, 2010). While the potential

of interviews has been presented, and indeed considered for this research, focus groups were deemed more appropriate. The rationale is outlined below.

#### **5.4 Focus groups**

I chose to use focus group interviews because of children's involvement in the research along with the sensitive nature of this particular study. While possibly the interview's closest relative, the focus group is highly suitable when dealing with sensitive topics, and children may feel that they are able to openly discuss sensitive topics in a way which they may find difficult in an individual interview (Gibbs, 2012). They may also gain confidence from the dynamic of a group setting (Gibbs, 2012). This corroborates with my professional experience working with this age group, where I noticed that children were more likely to engage and interact in a group situation. They may also be more likely to provide honest responses, rather than say what they feel is the correct answer in order to satisfy the interviewer. Furthermore, focus group interviews are highly compatible with the interpretivist paradigm as the "nature of reality is viewed as phenomenological and multiple views of reality can exist" (Vaughn, Schumm et al., 1996, p.15).

Another reason that I considered the focus group a fitting and appropriate method is that they are particularly useful when one is interested in generating qualitative data, empowering participants to speak out about a particular subject in their own words. A participant may answer certain questions in their own way but as they listen to others' responses they may be encouraged to contribute further or think deeper about the particular issue being discussed (Bryman, 2004). A further clear advantage of using focus groups is that meaning is constructed in a social setting, allowing for discussion, which may not always be the case with an individual interview (Bryman, 2004). A clear objective of this study was to allow children

to freely discuss topics which were considered important to them. Berg (2004) maintains that “focus groups are an excellent means for collecting information from young children and teens”(p.123) as they are free to speak about attitudes and behaviours. As the aim of this study was to ascertain attitudes and opinions, this was an effective instrument to gather such data (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011).

While planned and structured, focus groups offer participants the opportunity to interact and openly discuss target topics (Mertens, 2010; Vaughn, Schumm et al., 1996). This is quite different to the individual interview which may not obtain the same depth of understanding due to the lack of participant interaction. Also, they can be highly “appropriate when the researcher is interested in how individuals form a schema or perspective of a problem” (Mertens, 2010, p.241).

Focus groups have the participants at the centre of the process and the data yielded dictates the outcomes of the research. The moderator needs to have a strong focus for the group and also to take into account the setting so that participants feel relaxed and comfortable to give their opinions (Newby, 2010, in Cohen, Manion et al., 2011) The focus group offers the moderator the opportunity to observe and to note interactions between participants. This may be considered different to the traditional interview which does not give the researcher the opportunity to observe such interactions (Berg, 2004). This observation allows the moderator to get a unique insight into the emerging perspective of the children involved (Berg, 2004). It was with this interactive process in mind that I deemed the focus group a more appropriate instrument. Finally, the focus group offers an opportunity for change in policy and practice and the researcher can initiate this change “in the way they choose to present the analysis from focus group studies” (Gibbs, 2012, p.187). As this interpretive study



aimed to improve the lives of children with dyslexia in school through change in provision, the focus group may be considered a suitable method to obtain rich data.

Though focus groups have the potential to generate rich data relatively quickly, they are not without their disadvantages (Mertens, 2010). For example, they do not yield numerical data and the number of participants tends to be small. Furthermore, they yield less data than large quantitative studies (Mertens, 2010). That said, it must be noted that it is the quality not quantity of data which is important, particularly in relation to the question posed in this study, which is about perspective. Another disadvantage is the issue of reluctant speakers and those who dominate the group (Bryman, 2004). This question of power is also discussed by Berg (2004) who cites this as one of the most difficult aspects of moderation. This is a sensitive area as the researcher does not want to embarrass dominant participants, causing them to completely withdraw from the conversations. Therefore, establishing positive relationships with all members of the group may be important to manage this tension and to encourage more passive children who may feel oppressed in such a setting (Berg, 2004). In this piece of research, there wasn't any issue of a child over asserting themselves. However, there were points when some children were quite reluctant to speak, though with a little encouragement, they overcame this. Finally, the challenge of group participation for those with communication difficulties is also worth noting (Gibbs, 2012).

## 5.5 Timeline

This is a timeline for the research which was designed at the initial stage.

<b>October to December 2014</b>	<b>Opening Phase</b>
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dyslexia</li> <li>• Contemporary policies and research</li> </ul>
Primary data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection of research participants</li> <li>• Construction of schedule for focus group</li> </ul>
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First draft of literature review</li> <li>• Focus group guide</li> </ul>
<b>January – February 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interview Phase</b></li> </ul>
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative methodologies</li> </ul>
Primary Data Collection and analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coding and initial analysis of focus groups</li> </ul>
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second draft of literature review</li> <li>• Transcription of interviews from focus group</li> </ul>
<b>March - May 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Further Analysis</b></li> </ul>
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative methodologies</li> </ul>
Primary data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further analysis of focus group</li> </ul>
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft of methodology and methods chapters</li> </ul>
<b>June - August 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Review Phase</b></li> </ul>
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative methodologies, Data Analysis</li> </ul>
Primary Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of Data Categories</li> </ul>
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft 2 –Methodology and methods chapters</li> <li>• Conference paper reviewing initial findings (Paper presented at The International Literacy Conference, Klagenfurt, Austria)</li> </ul>
<b>September - October 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Refining Phase</b></li> </ul>
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New books/publications</li> <li>• Additional reading in areas suggested by data</li> </ul>
Primary Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refining of data findings</li> </ul>
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation of data</li> </ul>
<b>November - December 2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Review Phase</b></li> </ul>
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further theoretical work as suggested by data</li> </ul>
Primary Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further review and refining of data</li> </ul>
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion of data</li> </ul>
<b>January – February 2016</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Review Phase</b></li> </ul>
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further theoretical work</li> <li>• New publications</li> </ul>
Primary Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further review and refining of data</li> </ul>
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation, analysis and discussion of data</li> </ul>
<b>March - June 2016</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Completion phase</b></li> </ul>
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further theoretical work/ New publications</li> </ul>
Primary Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review</li> </ul>
<b>February – October 2017</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further writing and overall review</li> </ul>

## 5.6 Participant Selection

As stated earlier, there are four reading schools in Ireland; three in Dublin and one in Cork. I chose to conduct the study in one of these schools. All of the students in the special school had dyslexia and were, therefore, eligible to participate in the study. As highlighted in the literature review, special schooling and the assessment of dyslexia are closely connected to class and socio-economic background. As a child requires an assessment from an educational psychologist (which are often privately administered and quite costly), many children from poorer backgrounds are not in a position to attend a school such as this. While I did not collect biographical data in this regard, it may be inferred that the socio-economic profile of these children is not representative of the wider school going population.

The first step involved sending a letter to the Board of Management, outlining the aims and details of the study (See Appendix A). In this letter, it was clearly stated that a system of random selection of students would be employed. I explained that the students would be assigned a number and I would identify six students for the research (each number corresponding to a student). Fortunately, the Board responded favourably here, so parents needed to be informed of the study and told that their child was eligible to participate, if they so wished. The next step was recruitment.

Following agreement from the Board of Management and permission from parents, the system of random selection was used to identify participants. At this stage, it was paramount that all concerned knew the purpose and details of the study and that children were aware that they could withdraw at any point, without consequence.

## **5.7 Data Collection**

I conducted focus groups which consisted of six children with dyslexia. The group met on two separate occasions to discuss questions and topics brought to the group. As an interpretivist, I decided to use Braun and Clarke's model of thematic analysis (see below) in order to demonstrate rigour. This involved carefully planning each stage of the process, from the initial point of question design right through to detailed analysis. This is sequentially presented in the next section.

The questions were mainly semi-structured, giving the children a starting point, while allowing for open and honest discussion and elaboration. I adopted a flexible, student centred approach where the voices were listened to, perspectives acknowledged and views affirmed. The language of the questions used during these sessions was designed in a child friendly manner. For example, the words "inclusion" and "methodologies" were not used, though perspectives and attitudes relating to these topics were sought using words and phrases which were easily understood. The full list of questions is included in the Appendices (See Appendix D). Though I had prepared set questions, I was lead by the students and therefore, did not ask all of the questions originally prepared.

## **5.8 Data Analysis**

As mentioned, a thematic approach was employed where a system of coding was used throughout the process in order to identify themes emanating from the data. Thematic analysis, though not a method in its own right, is flexible and can be applied across a number

of epistemological and theoretical approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is very widely used though is not branded as a method of analysis in the same way grounded theory or narrative analysis may be. This may have to do with the fact that much analysis irrespective of the brand is essentially thematic (Braun and Clarke, 2006). According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is a way to encode qualitative data and can be used across a range of disciplines. Depending on the research question and the field of enquiry, codes can come in all shapes and sizes (Boyatzis, 1998; Silverman, 2010).

I kept a research journal which I used to note observations and thoughts during and after the sessions. I have kept this throughout the process since beginning the data collection right up to the point of submission.

The following table outlines the steps involved.

Analytical Process	Practical Application
1. Organising data	Transcribing and become familiar
2. Generation of initial codes	Systematic open coding
3. Identifying themes	Categorisation of codes
4. Mapping and Reviewing themes	Designing a thematic map
5. Defining and finalising themes	On-going analysis to refine themes to reduce data.
6. Final report	Relating back to the analysis of the literature and the research questions

Data Analysis (adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87)

**Phase 1** – Following the completion of the focus groups, I transcribed all of the recorded data and printed hard copies. In order to become familiar with the material, I read the data several times as well as listening to the audio.

**Phase 2** – I read each line of data, though I did not code each line. With the literature and research questions in mind, I wrote in the margins when certain words were mentioned and also when I thought something relevant was being implied. I used words and phrases such as “feels included here”, “inviting”, and “very comfortable here” (**Appendix E**).

**Phase 3** – At this point, I re-read all of the material and the codes which I had assigned. I identified common points in order to generate categories consisting of connecting codes (**Appendix F**).

**Phase 4** – Having sorted the codes into categories, I then sought to identify themes, each consisting of a number of categories. There was much overlapping between categories and some of these could have been relevant to more than one theme. However, I inserted the categories into the themes I deemed most relevant (**Appendix G**).

**Phase 5** – I identified five core themes pertaining to the research questions and literature. In order to refine the themes, I re-read the categories to ensure that I had assigned them to the correct theme. I also decided to omit some of the material which I felt did not enhance the quality of the theme.

**Phase 6** – While analysing and finalising the themes, I reverted to the literature and research questions. I also considered my interpretive position and how this impacted on the process.

## 5.9 Ethical Considerations

As the participants in this study were children with dyslexia, they were encouraged to discuss issues which directly and personally affected them. It was an imperative of this research, therefore, that due cognisance of this sensitivity was taken. No two students were the same and each had a varying level of willingness to engage with the issues/questions in hand. I demonstrated a sensitivity here and did not apply any pressure on any participant to contribute more than they were willing to at a particular time. In order to minimise any danger or harm to participants, a clear, unambiguous written statement with the aims of the research, was sent to the young people's parents, who were encouraged to discuss this with their children (See Appendix B). I began the focus groups by clearly outlining the purpose of the study to the children and giving them the option to withdraw at any point, without any consequences. This was done orally to obtain assent so that the children knew exactly what they were expected to do and how this research would affect them. When the children indicated that they were comfortable with the process, a written consent form was provided for them to sign (See Appendix C). Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. I assured the children that all information would remain confidential and would not be released to a third party. Data has been stored electronically on an encrypted computer and hardcopies have been stored in a locked filing cabinet for the duration of the study and for the recommended period following the study. Anonymity of the participants and of the institution was made clear from the outset.

## **5.10 Quality**

### **5.10.1 Quality**

Quality in research may be deemed an imperative component to ensure that the study is rigorous and systematic (Silverman, 2010). While the concepts of reliability and validity are discussed in this section, it must be noted that qualitative research moves beyond the notion of validity as it pertains to quantitative research and adopts different standards which are relevant to the aims of particular studies (Yardley, 2000).

Boeije (2010) contends that the judgement of the “quality of research implies an assessment of the accuracy of the insights gained as a result of the research” (p.168). It includes reference to how the research question was formulated and how this was relevant to the field, what instruments were used, how the data was analysed and how the researcher managed the results (Boeije, 2010). Each of these elements have been comprehensively addressed in this project.

There is a need for transparency at all stages of the process, which includes the researcher declaring their positionality and potential bias. Furthermore, “qualitative research should offer no protection from rigorous, critical standards that should be applied to any enterprise concerned to sort fact from fancy” (Silverman, 2010, p.58). Although quality is important in both quantitative and qualitative research, it should be re-iterated that the criteria for assessing qualitative research is somewhat different (Yardley, 2000). While quantitative research aims “to focus on factors or relationships which are observed in large numbers of people, many qualitative methodologies are explicitly concerned with the particular situations and experiences of the individuals



participating in the study” (Yardley, 2000, p.215). This was certainly true in the case of this study.

### **5.10.2 Reliability**

The concept of reliability highlights the consistency of the measures employed; when the same measures are applied by another researcher, one should arrive at similar outcomes (Boeije, 2010; Bryman, 2004). This tends to be fundamental to positivist research and “qualitative researchers are often criticised by quantitative researchers for failing to employ a representative sample, to develop reliable measures, or to yield objective findings or replicable outcomes” (Yardley, 2000, p.218). However, a large sample size may be difficult to analyse in depth, thus remaining non conducive to qualitative methodologies (Yardley, 2000). Consistent coding is important in qualitative research, with an explicit statement from the researcher on how the data was coded and how findings were interpreted (Bryman, 2004, p.195). However, “though it is feasible to train two people to code a text the same way, this does not exclude the element of subjectivity in the interpretation of the data – it simply becomes an interpretation agreed by two people” (Yardley, 2000, p.218).

### **5.10.3 Internal validity**

The issues of “truth value”, “consistency” and “credibility” of research are often highlighted as a way of evaluating internal validity (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006). This aims to ensure that the reader “can be confident that researchers describe and/or explain what they had set out to describe and explain” (Boeije, 2010, p.170). It includes

fundamental questions such as is the research sound and was it done properly? Also, is there a clear statement on researcher positionality and how this could possibly affect the outcome? This is important as “the inquirer uses a viewpoint or lens to establish validity in a study”(Creswell and Miller, 2000, p.125). Throughout this study I aimed to provide an explicit account of my positionality and its potential for bias. Creswell (2007) notes that the trustworthiness of the research needs to be established in order to increase internal validity. This may be achieved by providing a transparent methodology, outlining each step of the process in detail (Silverman, 2010). While this is important in both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the validity of qualitative research is also dependent on a sensitivity to the context along with rigour, which “might be demonstrated by the effective use of prolonged contemplative and empathic exploration of the topic together with sophisticated theorising, in order to transcend superficial, commonsense understanding” (Yardley, 2000, p.222).

#### **5.10.4 External validity**

A common criticism of small qualitative studies is that they have low external validity and cannot be generalised to other groups (Bryman, 2004). However, “validity is about being specific about what you set out to assess” (Boeije, 2010, p169). Although much quantitative research aims to generalise to other populations, qualitative researchers maintain that it is not the purpose of studies to generalise, acknowledging that studies may have restricted generalisability (Bryman, 2004). That is not to say that generalisations cannot be drawn from the research. Though researchers working within the positivist paradigm may be more likely to claim generalisability for their theories, a small, qualitative study may also have generalisability. For example, Stake (1978) in O’

Donoghue (2007) argues that “interpretive studies undertaken with small populations may be in harmony with the reader’s experience and thus a natural basis for generalisation”(p.65). This is also supported by Yardley (2000), who states that

the function of any story, including the story of a research project is not to describe but to construct a version of reality. Consequently, the quality of the narrative is an integral part of its productive value; a convincing account exerts its effect by creating a reality which readers recognise as meaningful to them (p.222).

Creswell (2007) also notes that rich descriptions allow the reader to make decisions about its generalisability, which is different to quantitative research (Bryman, 2004). As this study was about depth, not breadth, the richness of the account may provide the reader with an opportunity to make judgements about its generalisability or external validity. Generalisability is also closely linked to the idea of impact, which is relevant to all research (Yardley, 2000). However, qualitative research is unique in this regard as it is often concerned the socio-cultural impact recognising that research is “inherently political, in the sense that all our speech and actions arise from a particular social context, serve some social purpose and have some social effects”(Yardley, 2000, p.223). To this end, this project aims to provide practitioners with ideas and reflections in order to improve practice.

## **5.11 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have included a rationale for conducting focus group sessions to answer the relevant research question. I proceeded to outline the concrete steps involved, bearing in mind the imperative of quality in research. It was a small-scale study which had limitations and I have aimed to discuss such limitations. This focused project involved working with young

children and this presented me with a real responsibility to inform children and adults of what it entailed before moving on to selecting students in a sensitive manner.

I have carefully described all of the steps involved from the identification of participants right through to the stage of analysis. Ethical considerations were considered especially important. The timeline provided me with a visual plan from the outset, which helped me to structure the project at various stages along the way.

In the next chapter, I will turn attention to the presentation and analysis of the data.

# Chapter 6

## Presentation of Data and Analysis

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the data from the research and will analyse it accordingly. As a interpretivist, I am aware that this study and, in particular the following data, were context bound and may have been different if variables such as time, the size of the group, and especially the children themselves, were different. Having coded the information from the transcripts as described in the previous chapter, I was presented with several themes which the coding process yielded. However, I have managed to collapse these into **five** discrete areas.

The **five** themes are as follows

- Difference
- Inclusive Pedagogy
- A Sense of Place
- Socio-Emotional Issues
- The Role of School Staff

## 6.2 Difference

A strong theme which emerged during the research was that of difference – both in terms of the way children described their understanding of dyslexia and also the manner in which they felt different to other children in the mainstream system. Though there are many layers or interpretations of difference, I wanted to capture the way the children demonstrated an understanding of learner difference along with the different perspectives they had of the previous settings. It was also evident that the students in the group were *all* different to each other. However, the difference which I gathered here was the manner in which students felt different to others in previous settings as well as how they felt differently about this school.

This sense of difference may have had to do with the way that dyslexia is socially constructed and understood in a literacy dominated society. The challenges which are encountered by students as a result of having dyslexia are highlighted throughout; the “difference” spoken about is merely as a result of the way society and, in particular, schools view difference.

At the beginning of our conversations, some children spoke about the way in which they understood dyslexia and how they identified words as often something different. One student remarked that “I look at a word sometimes and it looks like a word I know..but I can’t read too fast and I think it’s another word and I say it wrong. But when I go back it’s the word I know”. Another student, adding to this, said that “sometimes I see different words but that’s ok”. I was impressed by the way some students articulated their awareness and understanding of dyslexia and were able to put this into words in a meaningful way. They appeared to be very aware of their reading impairments, which seemed to cause frustration. All of the children in the group mentioned areas which they found difficult. Some of the things they said in this regard included “I read the question and then I make an answer in my

head. Then I put it down (on paper) but because I am probably thinking too much I forget to put down small words like *the* or *to*". This omission of short words may be common for young people with dyslexia though the fact that it causes so much anxiety should be an area of concern for practitioners.

Another child stated "Yes, that also happens to me and my teacher says don't panic, don't rush, re-check your work, take your time". This sensitivity on the teacher's part to the differences experienced by the students was mentioned at some point by all of the participants in the group. I will return to this under another discrete theme regarding school staff but the supportive environment created by the teachers in this particular setting was noteworthy and permeated the entire discussions. In particular, the different way in which teachers and students interacted in this school was mentioned on several occasions.

The use of the word "different" in this context was interesting because, though there was no reference to particular teachers in the previous schools, it was evident that a comparison was being drawn. Also, if the experience here was different and was certainly very positive, did this suggest a negative and possibly unhappy experience in the mainstream settings? This may have implications for teachers in mainstream settings as this student-teacher interaction was very much appreciated.

While continuing to discuss the different ways in which the children understood dyslexia, another student said that "I don't misspell words.. I just don't put them in....Also I don't understand different things but I do understand other things... that's part of my dyslexia". Another child stated "I agree. Also, when I am reading a story as well, it's the exact same, I'm reading the same thing, but sometimes different words, like instead of she it might say he or

something". All of the students spoke about their understanding of what they read and how this was the same or different.

As students spoke and articulated their perspectives, the others without fail, affirmed and encouraged throughout. Expressions such as "I agree" "That's the same as me" "I know" and "Yeah" were mentioned. They spoke about the processing and time management differences they experienced along with how they all tended to forget easily. Understanding impairments, which are often considered disabilities, may require attention in schools, if children are to be successfully included.

When prompted to talk about what the children really liked about this school, they drew comparisons between the organisational structure of the day in this school and the other schools. As previously discussed in chapter three, students with dyslexia in mainstream schools receive general group support and, though "in class support" is becoming more commonplace, withdrawal of children from their class for short periods of the day, is still the most common form of provision. In special reading schools, withdrawal does not feature.

Some children spoke about their negative experiences of being withdrawn and even though this may have been done with the best interests of children in mind, it appeared to have compounded this sense of difference. One student stated "I don't know. It used to make me feel different and none of my friends were there" Another cited "Yeah, I used to go out when *they* were doing Irish. I would come out and have to do something else....I always used to go out and used to hate going out". This sense of difference and isolation from the main group was felt by some of the children and another said "the thing was every single time they sent me to a class I was just alone because there was no one I could talk to because I was just by



myself in a completely different room. And I'm like what am I supposed to do...feeling I'm so bored" Adding to this, another noted

I'm really shy. Yes I used to never be able to talk to anybody because I used to be always like scared and say that they are not going to talk to me, why would they?...Since I came here I can't stop talking to people. I feel that it's ok to talk . I'm not nervous. They (other students) are not going to say anything about me, that I'm stupid or anything like that.

This sense of group identity was very positive and appeared as a core advantage of this type of school. Knowing that the differences that children experience are only differences, not disabilities, was something of which there was a heightened awareness in this setting. Of course, this was in relation to other settings which cater for the masses and who may not experience the challenges associated with dyslexia. It appeared that, in the views of these children, the mainstream system was not supporting and addressing the different needs of all learners. Moreover, I was struck by the child's (above) use of words such as "nervous" and "stupid" as she was not concerned about these issues in her present school. I noted as she spoke and used these words, others in the group nodded as if, they too, shared, her experience. It is possibly worth asking *did attending her previous school make her feel nervous and was she regularly called stupid?* Also, these negative sentiments may have been perpetuated by a system which ignores learner differences, in an attempt to raise government led standards for the majority, who do not encounter similar challenges.

The children were satisfied that they were included in all aspects of school life and expressed general satisfaction in this regard. Comments such as “I take part in everything all of the time. It’s great. I’m not different” testified to the strong sense of who “we are” in this school. In fact, there was a strong sense of group ownership of the school during the two sessions. It was as though these students were proud to tell me about “their school” and how it was, indeed, different. Positive language was used, with children using phrases such as “here you can” and “in this school, I am able”. Also, children’s body language was positive and engaging. The sense of belonging to the group and to the school offers teachers in mainstream contexts some points for reflection.

This theme of difference was definitely worth capturing. As well as students giving utterance to their experiences of other schools, they identified some positive differences that they associated with dyslexia. It was as though, despite (or even as a result of) challenges, the pupils wanted to focus on their ability. One student said “it’s like my reading isn’t good but I can do a lot of other things”. Another said “Some people that have dyslexia is better than people who don’t have it. Say someone didn’t read...but they were really smart.” Some students were quick to point out famous people with dyslexia such as Einstein and some of their positive achievements. One child who had been quite reticent to speak initially was enthused by this topic and added “there was this thing on Facebook and my mum showed me it and it was like.. a fish can’t climb a tree but it can do lots of other things like swim really well”.

Finally, while the children expressed views pertaining to feeling different in this setting, it was clear to me that they were not different to other children in mainstream contexts. However, they experienced obstacles in previous schools which may have resulted in this negative self-

perception. This should not be ignored by mainstream practitioners and suggestions for school improvement will be presented in the next chapter.

The next theme is *Inclusive Pedagogy*.

### **6.3 Inclusive Pedagogy**

When prompted to talk about learning in the special setting, most of the children were generous in response and willing to engage with the topic. In a way, the level of enthusiasm was surprising though understandable, when one participant stated that he had not been asked for his opinion before.

The children referred to the imperative of teachers understanding dyslexia in order to include *all* children, with one student remarking that “the teachers here do it differently”. The word differently was used positively in this context. This was interesting as the students very much highlighted the inclusive nature of teaching here. For example, one child remarked “The teachers here explain everything all of the time”. A slower pace of teacher delivery was deemed appropriate by some children and all participants agreed that this made learning more accessible.

One child commented “If I were to give advice to a teacher, it would be to do it slowly and take your time”. Another child added “don’t rush through it...stop and explain the word” while another said “Yes and if you don’t rush them, you will probably get it done quicker”. Referring to the subjects taken in school, the children spoke about the slower pace involved, with one student stating “we do the same subjects but it’s slower”. Everybody in the group spoke about the importance of teachers understanding the challenges associated with dyslexia. In this context, one child recalled an experience of a teacher in her previous school.

She noted “I remember this teacher used to come to my house at 4 o’ clock...it was so annoying...I didn’t think that it was helpful at all, it was just like a waste of time I felt” In this situation, the parents of the child were paying for extra private tuition, though it appeared that, without an understanding of dyslexia and the specific issues, this type of intervention is not beneficial. It also raises the issues of class and wealth as the child’s parents, unlike others, were in a position to fund these lessons.

Some children highlighted the fact that an effective teacher, in their view, was one who modelled new skills before offering students the opportunity to practise these skills. One child said “you need to show them how to do it...that’s the good thing about *this* school, they show you how to do it”. This suggested that the children have had experiences of schools where teachers did not take the time to show children what they needed to do. Most of the students testified to the effectiveness of strategies such as chunking, making inferences and, in particular, scaffolding, adding that “our teacher helps us to piece things together, that really helps”.

There appeared to be an emphasis on group work and pair work in all curricular areas, which the children found beneficial. One commented “when we are reading we sometimes read it together...that really helps”, while another added what he considered to be an advantage of choral reading “more brains, more people, definitely more brains”. Another child stated “I feel very comfortable here reading aloud, more than at home which is weird”. This testified to the climate of trust and support which had been created and fostered in this school. Moreover, the positive attitudes towards choral reading in this settings offers *all* teachers an opportunity to explore such benefits.

The use of group work in this setting was described by some children as being worthwhile.

When asked to give an example of this, a student noted

Well it's like you know the way usually in your school, you are not always with the same people. So in your old school, you'd be like, *really really* bad at Maths and the others could be really good at maths and you'd still be doing the same thing. Whereas here, we go into different maths groups.

Interestingly, the use of ability grouping for certain subjects was considered beneficial. It should be noted, however, that this form of ability grouping may be different to ability grouping in mainstream schools with large classes and with children who have wide ranging abilities. All of *these* children have already been "ability-grouped" as they each have a diagnosis of dyslexia.

Referring to working with other children, one child said "I really like working in pairs" while another commented "in a group you can ask other people". The issue of learning Irish was raised by some children and everybody was quite passionate here. In mainstream primary schools, Irish is a compulsory subject and taught for up to four hours per week. A student with dyslexia may be granted a dispensation, though this may compound the sense of difference and alienation that these children spoke of. In the special school, Irish is offered as a subject though it is clear that the uptake was very low. Though none of the students in the group were studying Irish, everybody had something to say about it, with one student stating "If you want to do Irish, you can but if you don't you don't have to. You have a choice" This issue of choice was clearly important and may have added to the overall contentment of the group regarding the subjects taken. In terms of Irish, another child added "I could never learn words like asking to go to the toilet". Another child stated "I know basic Irish....just very basic Irish that's all I know". The impression I got from the children was one of distaste towards the

Irish language and nobody had anything positive to add. This was quite understandable when the mainstream school does not offer choice to students and this was clearly an area of difficulty for all of the students in this particular group.

The word *boring* was used quite often and children remarked “if you want to keep kids interested, don’t make it boring” and “don’t be like oh God I have to go another day of this”. The use of this word was interesting as the students could have used the opposite and said something like “if you want to keep kids interested, keep it interesting”. As some students did use the word boring quite often, it suggested that they have experienced this sense of being bored in another context. Having prompted the children to elaborate on what they meant by boring one boy said “not interesting, not fun”. When asked how teachers could make things more interesting, the same child went on to say “make it exciting”. This provides a point for practitioner reflection in terms of appealing to children’s interests and strengths.

Some children were emphatic about the length of passages used for reading comprehension. They asserted that short passages were the most effective, adding that “usually when reading, I am like how much longer do we have to go?..... the stories we read here are only one page long”. It was evident that there was an understanding of the need to keep reading material to a minimum in this school. This undoubtedly contributed to these students’ satisfaction regarding the interventions and strategies used.

Most children were satisfied that the teachers in this setting employed reasonable and relevant strategies to support learning. When prompted to elaborate on this, one very enthusiastic boy articulated that “there are certain teachers who work with each student differently.....it’s not like they do everything exactly the same with each kid”. The importance of addressing individual differences appeared to be in evidence in this school and offers

teachers some points for reflection. It highlights the imperative of a child-centred approach to learning, possibly beginning by acknowledging children's strengths and abilities.

When the conversation turned to how children learn best, there was an almost tangible feeling of surprise at being asked the question. Unfortunately, some children were quite reluctant to speak until one participant added

For me it depends on what we are doing because it's not like you do the exact same thing for every single subject. For Science I like to see and listen because if you can see you sort of know what is going on and what it's going to look like...but listening you are getting more information. For P.E. you have to do stuff, that's how you learn.

This was the spark needed at this point of the discussion as all the students became engaged once again. I was surprised to hear this student articulate his understanding of learning preferences so succinctly. His comments were followed by others in the group who also displayed an awareness of the various modes of learning. Another student said "I definitely learn by looking or showing...when he (teacher) shows you how to do it and put it together you understand". All of the children commented on learning visually with remarks such as "I learn from pictures" and "I have to see in my mind". Along with learning visually, some children discussed how they learn differently depending on the subject. This highlights the imperative of a multi-modal approach to teaching, requiring attention to learning preferences, determined by the task. This was also supported by the group's consensus that they were more likely to engage in activities which comprised visual, auditory and kinaesthetic elements. Science was an example given by some pupils where all three components were present. Some comments included "I really like Science" and "with science you are making stuff like blue smoke ....it is literally about getting things and putting them together". The whole group displayed quite an inquisitive disposition in relation to how things operate in the world and how this could be transferred to the classroom. Remarks included

“I love finding out new stuff about certain things...I really like that” and “I need to understand why”. Referring again to Science, another girl added “ with science a lot of famous people weren’t thinking, they were just doing” while another remarked “ A lot of the famous artists and scientists weren’t always looking at a book, they were just doing whatever they wanted”. While one child mentioned “hating history”, another responded “it’s ok if you bring in an object, hold it and watch it”. This reaffirms the imperative of a multi-sensorial approach to learning along with the importance of designing activities which are both relevant and appealing. Perhaps, this could be considered the case for *all* children in *all* schools? Other comments regarding how the children learned best included “So it’s pictures and sort of talking and walking right through it” and “learning is like playing cards...all of the different shapes, pictures, numbers coming together”. Importantly, the “numbers coming together” may indicate the importance of making connections, which may have consequences for mainstream practice. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### **6.4 A Sense of Place**

A clear sense of place in terms of the special setting permeated the entire conversations. Some children identified the physical school as an inclusive structure and indeed were familiar with every room, corridor and space. They spoke about the way that certain rooms were used for specific activities and it was also notable the fond way in which they described this as “our” school. As the rooms were smaller than a mainstream school, this was perceived as an advantage of this setting. The size of the school was mentioned by one boy who noted “and it’s the size of this entire school. It’s very much smaller than a *normal* school, like a *normal* school would have over a thousand students or something like that”. The use of the word normal was noteworthy and I will return to this.



Referring to his experience in a mainstream school, one boy said “they get frustrated at you and they get tired because there are thirty something people”. This suggested a negative perception of large class sizes where the children’s needs were not being met. Previous settings were not regarded as places of inclusion and warmth.

Another participant said

When I came to this school, the first day I came in here, I saw all these people....I didn’t know them but eventually I knew them. And I don’t know what it was.. something about the room or something...and I just felt comfortable and it felt inviting...it just felt comfortable like someone was asking me to come in and talk to people

The other students, as well as the building itself, may have contributed to this feeling of well-being as he said that the first thing he noticed were the people who he eventually got to know. Words such as “comfortable” and “inviting” indicated a happy and inclusive environment. On the topic of the physical school, some children were quick to alert me to the presence of an Occupational Therapy (OT) room which was fully equipped and staffed. The students were quite passionate discussing what they did here and why they went there. It was interesting to observe the way in which they shared their experiences of this facility as they commented “if you want to be on your own, you go to OT”, “I like going on my own to get a massage...it’s nice and calming”, “they put on relaxing music and everything”. This resource, which is generally not included in mainstream settings for students with dyslexia, provided the children with a space to self-regulate and self-manage. The associated benefits of the OT room were clear to me in the way the children were so enthused and engaged while speaking about this. It was as though they really wanted to let an “outsider” become aware of how good this facility actually was. They used words such as “calming”, “peaceful” and “relaxed” when speaking about this. One boy said “If I go in there I go to relax...you can go to

sleep or read a book or something” This element of choice in the special setting (which does not generally feature in the mainstream school) was very much appreciated by most of these students. This sensory aspect of dyslexia, highlighted by these young people, is a unique contribution from this research. The previous five studies outlined in chapter one did not yield any information pertaining to sensory issues. In terms of practitioner reflection, this could be used for class and school improvement by exploring ways to incorporate strategies and resources which support the sensory needs of *all* children.

When speaking about the school, there were some references to previous settings, particularly the way students were withdrawn for extra tuition. One girl noted

in my school for Maths..I was really good at Maths.. and I was with the *normal* class but then afterwards I used to go out to somebody and it would with older girls and I wouldn't be friends with them or nothing. So I'd be the only younger one there and I had nobody to talk to or nothing.

The fact that students raised this point on several occasions indicated the level of dissatisfaction with the withdrawal process in mainstream schools. The use of the word *normal* here was worth addressing and this word was used in other contexts throughout the discussion. As the perception of the other class was considered normal, did these students perceive themselves as abnormal? Also, it needed to be acknowledged that the young people did not create this idea of normality – it is perpetuated through societal structures and is all around them in language used by family and friends. Therefore, there is an obligation on all in society, particularly those in power such as educators, to adopt a more inclusive language. Moreover, as these children attended a segregated school, this may have influenced their own views of normality.

All of the children in the group spoke about the way food was provided in the school, emphasising the communal and inclusive aspect of eating together. In the majority of Irish

mainstream schools, children do not receive breakfast or lunch. They used words and phrases such as “we can eat”, “we are able to have” and “we like.” This idea could be overlooked and regarded as banale but, as it was such a positive experience for the students to come together to eat and “chat”, it is noteworthy. This activity of eating together was something the students enjoyed and looked forward to. It was evident that in this relaxed and communal experience, they shared stories along with hopes and fears. There was also a sense that this different experience of eating together should be shared and experienced by all children in all settings.

Another aspect of the school which really appealed to these children was the playground and the resources which were used by everyone on a regular basis. They were able to talk about all of the equipment, how they used it and they joked about their experiences in this regard. Also, when they spoke about the “yard” they made regular references to the previous schools with one boy commenting “I feel way more comfortable in this school”. One of the girls concurring with this, stated “I used to never be comfortable in my old school” This constant comparison between the two school settings was indicative of their negative experiences. The idea of being “comfortable” was important to the children and from our discussions I derived that, by comfortable, they were also suggesting that they were happier and less intimidated. In some ways, the emphasis they placed on being “more comfortable here” was a signal that discussions need to be had with regards to why they were so *uncomfortable* previously.

### **6.5 Socio-emotional issues**

This was by far the most prominent theme yielded from the two focus group sessions. It permeated all of the topics and some students were quite emphatic about issues such as confidence, self-concept and self-esteem. Each member of the group spoke about these

issues and generally referred to the previous settings when doing so. This appeared to happen naturally without prompting and it seemed that the children were happy to be given the opportunity to interact with each other to discuss these issues; telling stories, drawing comparisons and looking to the future. One student remarked

I don't think I'm a good reader but its just that I have more confidence that I can read. In my old school I probably wouldn't be able to read a book as well as I do now. But I feel more confident...I know I'm not a good reader or speller but I do have more confidence. But I'm a bit slower than everyone else.

This sense of confidence was shared by most of the children and the fact that it was mentioned three times alone here suggested that confidence was important to these pupils. As some children asserted that they had more confidence now, it suggested that a lack of confidence featured at some point in the past. Another student added "I would say that confidence is important..you need it later in life" Here, confidence was not only deemed necessary for young people but a requirement for all "later in life". As these students articulated their experiences very clearly, this statement also demonstrated how they viewed confidence in society being linked to success, whether personally or professionally.

One of the other children, while nodding affirmingly when this comment was made, noted "I never had confidence before coming to this school". Along with an acknowledgement of how this school addressed the socio emotional needs of children, it also indicated negative experiences in previous settings. The use of the word *before* was interesting and denoted that the way in which challenges were addressed was not very pleasant.

One of the other children spoke about confidence in relation to "putting up my hand" and requiring assistance. She was less inclined to do this in her previous school and mentioned the large class size of thirty being a factor in her reluctance to request help. If she were to ask

the teacher a question, she mentioned that she would approach the teacher and before asking the question “would walk away just acting like the conversation never happened”. I wondered why she would “walk away” before asking the question which may have been important to her. There was a possibility that her previous experiences had taught her that her question may not be addressed appropriately. She may also have felt that by asking a question, she was in some way exposing herself and her self-perceived inadequacies. Others in the group spoke about asking for help and there was a consensus that they were far more likely to do so in this school. This raises the issues of teacher education and school improvement; if the teachers in mainstream schools were to appreciate the associated learner differences, then the children’s experiences would possibly have been more positive. If these differences were viewed as a “normal” aspect of human experience, practitioners may have the opportunity to form more tolerant attitudes, respecting children’s unique contributions.

Along with confidence, the issue of self-concept was important. Every child referred to being “able to” or “not being able to” several times and this again was, for the most part, in relation to mainstream schools. The students appeared to demonstrate an awareness of what they could or could not do, indicating high levels of intra-personal intelligence. Interestingly, they asserted that difficult tasks may be completed if the conditions were changed. For example, in relation to homework, a student remarked “I don’t feel like I can do it if I’m on my own” suggesting that with support of others she did feel competent. Generally, most children spoke about self-concept with regards to reading. While they accepted that literacy does present challenges, they were more likely to overcome these challenges in this school.

One girl mentioned “If there are long words, I can’t spell them. If there are really long words, I can’t read, I can’t spell them out”. Another added “My writing is perfectly fine...my reading and spelling I just couldn’t do that before” while another highlighted self-concept in relation to Maths

Before I came here I was terrible at Maths...I couldn’t do it..I didn’t know how to do it and I used to get really frustrated and I used to blame myself that I couldn’t do it. But when I came here I found out how to do the sign really quickly , they showed me how to do it.

There was a sense throughout that some students blamed themselves for failing in the past. In contrast to previous schools, the children here were listened to and their differences understood. As they recalled past experiences, I was struck by the sense of group identity and the manner in which they affirmed each other. Like at other points of the conversation, all of the children nodded and contributed supportively with words and phrases such as “yes” and “me too” and “I know” used regularly. One of the girls mentioned at the beginning of the second session that she was shy when she arrived at the school. Others in the group responded with statements such as “you shy?”, “ I couldn’t see you being shy” and “ not now”. She finally conceded with “ok not now” in a self-assured tone. I was left in no doubt that this was in some way influenced by her experiences in the school. Another interesting aspect was the way in which some children were able to identify areas in which they excelled. They used phrases such as “Yes I’m good at that” and “Yes I am a good singer”. However, at no point did I detect any arrogance – just a genuine and sincere sense of “yes I can do that”. This was positive indeed as all of these children had in some way experienced failure in the past, yet possessed a far higher self-concept in this school. When I asked the children to

identify something they were good at, one boy said “working with my brain.. I’m very good at that” Another added

I can piece stuff together sort of like...I can walk in somewhere, look around and I can just just tell someone has been here, someone touched that and someone grabbed that, brought that out there and then moved stuff around. I’m very good at that. It’s just something in my mind that I can do

This, I thought, was worth exploring. While all of the children in the group testified to having challenges with remembering information (including this child), he exhibited impeccable attention to detail, remembering where objects were and how they had moved. This child possessed a noticeable ability to remember, when information was presented visually. Therefore, practitioners may be positioned to identify children’s areas of strength in order to increase self-concept and overall wellbeing. This includes developing pedagogies which recognise learner preferences as well as adapting resources to cater for all children in a variety of settings.

When asked what advice the children would give to new students in the school, they all agreed that first and foremost they (new children) would like the school and that their experiences would be overwhelmingly positive. One child stated “I’d say maybe first you kinda feel all different because it’s a big change, a really big change. There are smaller classes and not many people...there are only ten or eleven in your class”. This reference to change and difference was again significant and what the student proceeded to say was of particular interest. He continued “And you are not *afraid* or anything to put up your hand and just ask for help. Yes that’s easier as well when you go to this school”. The repeated reference to a lack of fear was a strong indication of the inclusive and supportive atmosphere cultivated in

this setting. The sense of group identity was evident here again with students affirming each other and acknowledging every contribution. The children's satisfaction was marked with almost an excitement surrounding the fact that all of them shared the same experiences. This group identity was captured by one child, asserting

Yes you don't have to be *nervous* in this school because everyone is exactly like you. It's not like you are going to be made a joke of or anything like that, because they have the exact same thing as you, maybe even worse or different than you. So yes you really should not be nervous if you are going to a school like this.

The issue of stress was a topic which some of the children were keen to talk about. This arose in the context of how they felt about learning and was certainly not a word I was going to use. However, when the children did start to speak about this, it was evident to me that it was significant and that these students had something to say about it. It appeared that most children had experienced stress in school and they referred to becoming stressed when they did not have time to complete work or when unrealistic time constraints were imposed on them. "I don't think you should rush them as that will make them stressed" was an interesting contribution. They also spoke about the counterproductive effects of stress, stating "if you stress over it you might get it wrong anyway". There was an appreciation of strategies to self-regulate and self-manage in this setting and notably, the staff displayed a sensitivity here. The students could take short movement breaks when required and were free to go to the yard or to the OT room. The way stress influenced how the children engaged (or not) throughout the day and consequently how they felt about themselves as learners or, more importantly, as people, was significant. This provides a challenge to mainstream practitioners to recognise the effects of stress on children's lives. There may be an opportunity to learn from these students who testified to the value of sensory exercises to combat such negative emotions.



A surprising contention in relation to confidence and self-concept was that in the area of transitioning from primary to secondary school. The children were noticeably apprehensive about this. I had not anticipated any issues surrounding secondary school, though it was evident that this was a point of concern for some of the children. They spoke about feeling “nervous” because they would have to return to a large school with large classes. I derived that they were also unsure of their future schools’ appreciation of the challenges they had faced. Their feelings of anxiety in this regard were quite understandable when they had spoken so frankly about their negative experiences of mainstream schools to date.

Regarding the transition from primary school, one child said “If I mess up I mess up ..I can work on that..but I can’t avoid messing up..that’s what makes humans human...” In one way this was quite a mature outlook in terms of making mistakes being part of life. However, to talk about possibly “messing up” in the future was indicative of an underlying apprehension, possibly determined by experience. On the same topic another contributed by saying that she was “afraid to go into secondary school”.

The topic of bullying was raised on several occasions. Being “made a joke of” or insulted pervaded many aspects of our discussions. Though the actual source was never stated, it may be procured that this emanated from experiences at other institutions. There were several descriptions of accounts of bullying with one boy saying “yes in my old school there was a kid who always knocked me over..literally kicked me when I was down in my stomach” with another reporting “yes in my old school, there was one who always picked on me, called me names, hit me, threw me against stuff”. Though most of the children had this shared experience of being bullied physically or being called names, they had a resilience in spite of it.

It was remarkable the way all of the children were able to empathise with anybody that they felt was different and treated as an outcast for some reason. One of the girls, while speaking about her own experience of bullying, displayed a strong empathic disposition towards anyone with similar experiences. She noted “I feel like, I know what they feel, why should you be doing that to them” and another child added “ Yes and the thing with me it’s sort of our natural response to help other people it’s what you learn when you are growing up. Sort of like you always see people helping other people and that rubs off on you”. It was interesting that all of the children had some experience of being bullied in some form and it was all related to the former schools. The bruising of confidence and self-esteem as a result of these attacks was evident.

One of the children said “I *hate* seeing people sitting on their own” while another added “ Yes I *hate* when other people get bullied and I just want to step in and help”. The use of the word *hate* highlighted the level of disdain and disregard these children had for those responsible for causing fear. The willingness and desire of these students to assist and support those who had been bullied also indicated high levels of both emotional and social intelligence.

While this study focuses on the perspectives of children in a special setting, it appears that their views on mainstream education is fundamental. Although they displayed an overwhelming satisfaction with the reading school, the data indicates correspondingly low levels of satisfaction with mainstream settings. I derived from these discussions that the children may have been targeted as their differences were possibly misunderstood. Was there a climate of indifference in addressing individual differences or even recognising that

these differences existed? I remain sceptical as to whether the mainstream schools had ever risen to the challenge of supporting *all* students.

It is paramount that mainstream education is fully aligned with inclusive principles; if learner diversity is important, schools may need to consider ways to appreciate diversity in order to improve children's well-being. It appears, from this study, that the children's well-being was context bound. It may, therefore, be time to explore the positive aspects of special settings as a way of supporting the socio-emotional needs of all children.

## **6.6 The Role of School Staff**

It was in evidence from the discussions that all of these children were very appreciative of the staff's understanding of the challenges they faced. At all times, they demonstrated a very positive view of the relationships they had with the staff. An interesting feature here was the repeated use of the word "staff" as opposed to teacher. This indicated that a more holistic, whole school approach was in operation when compared to the mainstream setting. It suggested that the work of the special needs assistants was valued here and furthermore, the students viewed all staff in a supportive and encouraging way. Some children spoke of their perceptions of a *different* type of teacher in this school, commenting that "I think the teachers here have to go to a different type of place and get a different type of education". They displayed a strong level of satisfaction with the support that they were receiving at this school and one child compared her "unhappy" experience in the mainstream setting as almost traumatic and damaging. She recalled the pressure which was applied to conform and rote learn. She stated

When I had to do Irish I had to sit at the back of the class..I was crying and everything, I couldn't learn it off...And I could not learn the tin whistle and I cried my head off..we had so many songs. In the end they gave me one song and said if you can't play don't play and just pretend you are playing. That's what they did with me.

The rest of the children nodded and affirmed what was said as if they all shared and identified with this experience. This level of distress and unhappiness is something which cannot be ignored and should be addressed without delay. It appeared that there seemed to be an over concern with "how the school looked" and how this may have reflected on the institution without due regard for the child. It also demonstrated a lack of care and lack of awareness of the child's challenges, where maintaining the status quo was paramount. The last line "that's what they did with me" highlighted the child's belief that she was being treated almost sub-humane and unfairly. She certainly didn't convey that there was any element of care and respect involved.

It must be acknowledged that the class size in this school with a ratio of 9:1 may have made it more manageable for school staff to meet students' needs on a daily basis. That said, small classes, though advantageous, are not a guarantee of effective support being provided. The pastoral atmosphere created by the staff here was apparent with all of the children contributing to how they felt. One boy remarked "There is the teacher and then there is the SNA and if you need help one of them will come to you". The word *help* was synonymous with support and was used much throughout by most of the children. There was a constant comparison made between experiences in former schools. One of the girls noted that "They treated me like I was five....this is "a" this is "b" but like I'm not five. I may not know how to read but I still understand at a normal rate.....they are *undermining* you". I was struck by the level of awareness and indeed the ability to articulate such feelings and experiences at a

young age. The word *undermining* was powerful. It was as though she wanted to convey the sense that teachers in her past school did not have the required respect or regard for her differences. Comparing this with her current experience she stated “They know what you are *feeling*”. I noted that she did not merely talk about the staff considering cognitive abilities and challenges; they also placed an emphasis on emotional factors. There was a strong sense that a holistic approach was in place. Adding to this, one child added

I like this school because in my old school I got really stressed..I wouldn't get stressed or anything (here) because there is not much pressure on me to do everything and the teacher, if you need help they will help you...in my old school I remember I had to ask for help..I was waiting for half an hour for help.

All of the children were in agreement with this contention, particularly with the reference to *stress* and *pressure*. It was as though stress and pressure were not issues in their current setting but the repeated references to these issues throughout was certainly noteworthy. It may be indicative of the negative perspectives the entire group had with the level of support and encouragement they received before attending this school. One child returned to the idea of being afraid to ask for help in the previous setting due to fear of failure. She also acknowledged that if one does not request clarification, they will not learn and their educational experiences could be damaged.

During our conversations, I asked the children if they were to give me some advice on how to be a good teacher, what would they say? The responses were varied with patience being an important characteristic. Some comments included “you have to be patient with your students” and “being patient”. One child also contributed “Be patient because again they came here to learn not to be criticised” while another suggested that if children don't get as much “done” as the teacher would like “don't really give out to them as it is not their fault... they are not fast enough”. This idea of not being “fast enough” suggested a lack of

understanding on teachers' part of the challenges of phonological processing and rapid naming. This has significant implications for school improvement for inclusion as well as teacher education for inclusion. These will be discussed in the next chapter.

All of the children agreed that the staff here were indeed patient and this was an attribute the children valued. This appeared to add to their sense of well-being. The importance of clear instructions and realistic expectations was emphasised, with one child asserting that "you need to tell them what you want them to do". This confirmed the necessity of explicit pedagogy which is regarded as a core strategy in inclusive teaching.

Interestingly, another student added "not being strict all the time" was important, which suggested that the child had experience of a teacher who had been "strict all the time". Also, the word "strict" was used almost in a fearful manner, not in the sense of being consistent and fair. Building on this point of giving advice, some children were keen to let me know what they thought; it was obvious to me that their suggestions were firmly rooted in experience. Talking about a particular teacher, one girl said "she is funny...she's not strict..no she is strict but she's funny". Appreciating the boundaries established by this teacher, the student was also enthused by the teacher's ability to be light-hearted and this was something she wanted to convey. Speaking about another teacher, one of the boys emphasised the "energy" that the teacher possessed and how this appealed to the students, saying "he has a lot of energy in what he is doing.....in that room we have a picture of all our class and we have all our names at the bottom and *him* lying across and everyone is around". This was one of those moments which portrayed a clear impression of children feeling included and valued. There was a strong sense of "care for the pupil" throughout. Summing up much of what had been said already, one child remarked that "the staff are very kind. They are very kind to us even when

they really don't have a reason but they are still kind to us because they know us". The emphasis on being kind pervaded the conversations. I derived that this strong focus on care was, perhaps, reactionary towards the perceived lack of care in former schools.

In addition to the characteristics discussed above, some children spoke of the importance and benefits of a teacher listening to what the students had to say. It was asserted that in order to maintain students' interest, it was vital that a teacher also showed an interest in how the children felt about learning in various contexts. One student said "teach them whatever they want to know and make them more interested". I understood that listening to the views of students on all aspects of their experiences, including how they learn, was important to them.

It may appear quite simple on one level but listening to what students say presents educators with challenges, as it may require one to re-evaluate how things are currently done. However, the perceived benefits of teachers listening and communicating effectively were clearly felt by these students. When I asked the children to elaborate on ways for a teacher to understand students more, one boy said "ask them..go up to them and ask them what would make this class more interesting". Most of the children thought that this was a good idea.

Another child, noting that children appreciated being asked what they liked, stated that if he wanted to know what to buy Mr X for Christmas, he would ask him and he was sure that the teacher would appreciate this. Another child mentioned that if teachers don't know how to keep children interested then "you just go up to them and ask". There was strong agreement that when children are included in their own learning and target setting, student participation may increase. As the concept of participation is fundamental to inclusive education, this may provide practitioners with ideas for school improvement.

Aware of different personalities and dynamics in each classroom, one student displayed a sensitivity towards children who may not feel comfortable speaking in front of the class. He noted that this issue of confidence could be addressed as

it's good to go up to each of them and ask because maybe one kid is really shy and doesn't want to shout out. And when you go to him he can answer quietly and then you get more information from more of your class.

Finally on this point, it was interesting to note the way that some students were aware of issues of power and democracy in the classroom. There was an acute understanding that if something is “votable” and the views of students are taken seriously, children are empowered, thereby increasing participation. When asked if they felt that their views were listened to in this school, all of the children agreed that this was the case.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have considered the main themes which emerged as a result of my analysis. The five themes of Difference, Inclusive Pedagogy, A Sense of Place, Socio-Emotional Issues and The Role of School Staff were discussed and analysed in light of the views of the children who were at the heart of this research. The results were positive in terms of pupil satisfaction with the present setting. However, as much of what these children expressed was in relation to their former schools, the data indicated that the children experienced a particularly low level of engagement and support in previous environments.

As evidenced in the chapter, there are issues here for mainstream schools in terms of improvements in practice, and these will be discussed in the next chapter.



# Chapter Seven

## Discussions

### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the students' perspectives of the new knowledge which has been constructed as a result of our interactions. I will connect the discussion topics to the literature previously presented in Chapter three, as well as sharing insights throughout in a relevant manner. I have divided this section according to the previously identified themes.

### 7.2 Theme 1 – Difference

As the students described dyslexia, some spoke of the way that they recalled, processed and memorised important information. These challenges are documented by Reid (2009) who discusses the areas of learner differences for students with dyslexia. As they talked, they emphasised the way that they learned differently (and felt different to the way they did in previous settings) and I wonder has this sense of difference really been understood by policy makers and practitioners? It was evident that these children were not different to others though these sentiments were quite understandable in a literacy dominated society, where impairments often result in disabling children (O' Gorman and Drudy, 2010; Reid and Valle, 2004). They discussed challenges they faced such as processing time and memory. These challenges are documented by Reid (2009) and this presents challenges to teachers and to

teacher educators to meet the needs of *all* students (Armstrong and Squires, 2015; McDonald, 2009). Although there are some commentators such as Barton (2003) who maintain that children with SEN do not need any specialist support, the challenges demonstrated by these students may indicate that such support is sometimes necessary.

As described in the previous chapter, the withdrawal process in mainstream schools was perceived very negatively by most students and it added to their sense of feeling apart and being different to their peers. This concurs with Demchuk in Nugent (2008) who stated that the negative consequences for students who were withdrawn for extra tuition included students feeling “victimised” and “excluded”. While most of the needs of students with dyslexia can be addressed in the dyslexia-friendly classroom (Florian and Rouse, 2009; Rix, Hall et al, 2009), sometimes a student may benefit from intensive tuition in a group or individually (Brady, 2011; Hulmes, 2011; Pavey, 2012; Scamacca et al., 2007; Singleton, 2009). The sense of difference that these children spoke about as a result of being withdrawn requires attention. The present system of withdrawal needs to be reviewed and both specialist and mainstream teachers need to collaborate to identify ways to support children in-class whenever possible. This does not entirely negate the need for withdrawal, though this should only be done when entirely necessary and for short periods. Furthermore, as these students displayed major dissatisfaction with the current withdrawal process, it may be time to include children’s voices to identify areas for development. This is supported by Allan (2003) who cites the advantages of such participation.

Dyslexia is generally classified as a learning difficulty and not as a learning difference. In doing so, children with this “difficulty” continue to be perceived as “different” to their peers (Hughes, 2010). Learning difference, however, highlights the imperative of understanding

impairment, differentiating instruction and embracing the notion that all students are equal, though learn in various and unique ways (Kirschner, 2016; Krank, 2001; Newton, 2015; Reid and Valle, 2004). This has implications for whole school improvement by engaging in continuing professional development, where a collaborative approach is adopted (Norwich 2008). School reflection on inclusion is paramount, where teachers could identify resources and strategies to support *all* children (Brown, 2006; Cheminai, 2001; EADSNE, 2015). Also, as the concept of class is closely linked to dyslexia (Comer and Hill, 2010; Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015), practitioners need to be cognisant of the ways costly formal assessments provide access to resources for a particular group, while ignoring other poor readers. In a way, the children at this school may be considered advantaged as it is probable that they are middle-class with parents willing and able to fund travelling expenses and other resources. Therefore, issues of class as they relate to dyslexia need to be understood (Elliott and Gibbs, 2008; MacDonald, 2009) by all practitioners when addressing learner differences.

As schools operate according to a system of norms which facilitate the majority who do not have literacy issues (Goodley, 2011), there needs to be a commitment to identifying and addressing the needs of *all* children. Frith (2002) argues that the influence of culture is central to dyslexia. Therefore, teachers may need to understand the impact of culture so that they may treat students in a way which celebrates learner differences. This issue of learner diversity is central to inclusion (EADSNE, 2015). Therefore, this may be the time for a wider debate which could include the voices of students themselves. Practitioners may also have the opportunity to reflect on ways to include children's voices in issues which affect them (Billington, 2006; Jones, 2005; Lundy, 2007; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009; Motherway, 2009; Prunty, 2002; Slee, 2009).

Most of the students in this group displayed a strong awareness of their learning differences and were indeed able to vocalise these in an extremely succinct way. They appeared to be content with the “label” as this helped them understand their challenges (Riddick 2010) and in fact this label enabled them to access support in the form of the reading school. This concurs with the literature which states that the label may be advantageous for some who risk being considered inferior (Cameron and Billington, 2015). However, the fact that a label is required to obtain resources is problematic. This issue will hopefully be comprehensively addressed by the New Model of Provision, which negates the need for a label to access support.

As the children expressed the view that they were not always treated fairly in mainstream schools, there may be an opportunity for practitioners to consider the “hidden curriculum” reflecting on their values and attitudes pertaining to what they consider important. The low expectations communicated to these children is emphasised in the literature (Armstrong and Squires, 2015; Elliott and Grigorenko, 2015; Madriaga, 2007; Ramus, 2014) and it is something which requires attention. Furthermore, the medical construct of disability compounds this sense of difference as the negative attitudes of practitioners may determine what is considered normative in schools (Low, 2001; McDonald, 2009; O’ Gorman and Drudy, 2010; Riddick, 2010). The children’s use of the word “normal” was indicative of this. It is then, perhaps, time to reflect on individual and collective value systems in order to understand the concepts of categorisation and difference.

Some students referred to the teachers in the school in fond terms, particularly the way they understood the different manner in which the students learned. This sensitivity was noted, which raises the issue of teaching approaches in previous schools. It should be acknowledged

that, in this school, the class size did not exceed ten which does facilitate more individual and group instruction and this was certainly appreciated by the students. Though not guaranteeing more effective learning, smaller class sizes do have the potential to support student experience (Lambe and Bones, 2008; Westwood, 2013). Though this is possibly a wider issue for policy makers, it is also relevant to practitioners who have the opportunity to use small group instruction effectively as a way of addressing this. As a former primary school teacher, I certainly understand the challenges of large class sizes and the difficulty this poses. However, if training were systematically provided to all teachers, this may support them in their roles and ultimately benefit the students concerned.

If student voice is a core issue (Billington, 2006; Jones, 2005; Long, McPhilips et al., 2012; Lundy, 2007; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009; Motherway, 2009; Slee, 2009), I may need to identify ways to convey to my students the importance of listening to children. A possible starting point could involve encouraging them to reflect on questions such as “How do we listen to children?” and “How do we speak with children?” (Billington, 2006).

Teacher education for inclusion is fundamental to pre-service education (Florian and Rouse, 2009) and this needs to include a focus on the importance of whole school development (Barton, 2003). It also requires students to acknowledge pupil diversity and the imperative of lifelong learning, as documented by EADNSE (2015). This is important in order to promote increased pupil participation in mainstream contexts (DES, 2004). If inclusion is a rights discourse and “appeals to our sense of individual worth” (Meegan and McPhail, 2006), then pre-service teachers may require an understanding of the social model of disability as discussed in the literature (O’Gorman and Drudy, 2010; Rix, Hall et al, 2009). As the children in this study used words such as “normal” and “stupid”, it may be time to reflect on the

language used in classrooms. As language is political and has the power to liberate (Freire, 1972), there now exists an opportunity to reflect on learner difference and how language conveys ideas about such differences (Florian and Rouse, 2009). This may be a useful exercise for pre-service teachers. Finally, as some students in this group mentioned “not being nervous here” and “I’m not different here”, I am sure that they would have something worthwhile to contribute as to how these sentiments may be addressed in mainstream settings.

### **7.3 Theme 2 –Inclusive Pedagogy**

As most students displayed an overwhelming satisfaction with the teaching and learning experience in this setting, it may be important to note their corresponding levels of dissatisfaction with former settings. One aspect which emerged was the way that all students felt valued in this school, with their different needs and challenges appropriately addressed. They were acutely aware of these differences, particularly in terms of learning preferences and the importance of teachers adopting a multi-sensorial approach. This is iterated in the literature, which emphasises that children do learn in different ways depending on the task and individual learning preferences (Davis and Florian, 2004; Kirschner, 2016; Krank, 2001; Newton, 2015; Olsen, 2006; Riener and Willingham, 2010; Rix, Hall et al., 2009; Rose, 2009; Westwood, 2013). As the multi-sensory aspect of learning was discussed during the sessions, some students spoke about the imperative of seeing something in order for it to make sense. This has implications for teachers and school improvement in terms of employing approaches which are likely to cater for a variety of learning preferences, thereby including *all* children.

This does make me reflect on my former practice as a primary teacher and whether or not I employed a multi-sensorial approach to teaching in order to include as many students as possible. I was always cognisant of the fact that students do indeed learn in various ways and therefore, I strove to provide appropriate and relevant resources along with employing inclusive pedagogies. In my current role as a teacher educator, I deliver lectures to both primary and post primary teachers, focusing on ways to maximise learning. In some sessions, the teachers comment on the difficulty of embracing a multi-sensory approach, with large classes and challenging behaviours. I acknowledge the possible difficulties in this regard but, nevertheless, also appreciate the benefits for all children.

Most students in the focus group displayed a passion for learning when their teachers understood how they learned. After all, the use of words such as “exciting” and “interesting” were noteworthy. I suggest that in order to support students to identify the way they learn in different contexts, a good starting point would be to ask them, as suggested by these young people. As the students in this group were quite adamant about being asked how they learn, this cannot be ignored. In fact, as mentioned in chapter three, students may not even be aware of how they did something unless you ask them (Reid 2003). In order to develop inclusive practices, it is essential that practitioners are adequately prepared (Mitchell, 2009; Rose, 2009), and this focus on student voice could support such preparation.

The students noted effective strategies used by the teachers in this setting; they attached importance to pacing lessons appropriately, using group-work and including visual components. This is very much in line with the literature, which points to the fact that children with disabilities do not need completely different approaches to other children (Ainscow and Miles, 2008; Davis and Florian, 2004; McPhillips and Shevlin, 2009; Norwich and Lewis, 2001).

They were satisfied that the teachers here paid attention to the pace and momentum of lessons, as well as using strategies such as chunking and scaffolding, with differentiated instruction employed regularly. They spoke about choral reading and other co-operative learning activities. The awareness on the students' part of the importance of teachers tailoring instruction to individual needs was noteworthy and this contention is very much supported by Chiesa and Robertson (2000). The emphasis on group work and social interaction noted by the students is also highlighted in much of the literature (Nind and Wearmouth, 2006 Norwich and Lewis, 2001; Smith and Barr, 2008). Although paired reading is a methodology often employed with children with dyslexia (Topping, 1987), the use of choral reading does not feature as much in the literature. However, the imperative of children working collaboratively is noted by several authors (Ainscow and Miles, 2008; Davis and Florian, 2004; ; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009; Norwich and Lewis, 2001; Smith and Barr, 2008).

In has been my experience that, while choral reading is employed as a teaching strategy with younger children, it is usually abandoned by the time students reach eleven or twelve, which was the age of the children in this particular group. Therefore, it could be beneficial for teachers to understand the advantages of using choral reading at the senior end of primary school and the lower end of secondary school. I have taught this age group in primary school and, admittedly, did not use choral reading. As some of the children testified to its benefits, there may be an opportunity for practitioners to explore such benefits. The length of reading passages may also need to be considered. If teachers are to be aware of the benefits of choral reading for *all*, they may require training at a whole school level. A collaborative and systematic approach to such training may potentially raise standards for *all* children (Florian and Rouse, 2009; Rix, Hall et al.,2009; Westwood, 2013). As I reflect on reasons why some



students in this group enjoyed and benefitted from choral reading, I think of the way the students' lack of confidence was not exposed while reading together, as well as having the support of others in a group to scaffold learning.

As a means of developing inclusive strategies, including choral reading, a "connective pedagogy" (Smith and Barr, 2008) could be adopted. This may involve using literacy resources which resonate with children's experiences in and out of school. It may have particular benefits for children with dyslexia who, as evidenced in this group, have challenges memorising and recalling information. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these children highlighted the importance of forming connections. By making resources meaningful and "connective", children may be more likely to attend to tasks and to retain new knowledge. As a whole-school approach to inclusion is considered important (Rix, Hall et al., 2009; Westwood, 2013), it may be worthwhile to identify ways to develop this connective pedagogy across the setting so that practitioners may share ideas of best practice. This exposure to quality teaching is necessary for inclusion (Ainscow and Miles, 2008) and could be done by facilitating a common space for reflection. A practical approach to this could include using "lesson study" as a way of observing and critiquing practice (Ainscow and Miles, 2008). This may also be beneficial at the initial teacher education stage.

The children spoke passionately about the way they learned and the way the teachers used effective strategies to address their needs. It must be noted that, while there are some very effective evidence-based interventions for dyslexia (Nugent, 2011; Scamacca et al., 2007; Singleton, 2009), these were not mentioned by the children in this group; rather they discussed the ways they learned in this school, corroborating with much of the literature on inclusive teaching which states that effective SEN teaching is effective teaching for *all* (Davis

and Florian, 2004; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009; Smith and Barr, 2008). As group work was considered advantageous by the children, the use of the “jigsaw co-operative learning model” may be used in mainstream schools. In previous practice, I have observed this to be beneficial for *all* children and its focus on making connections may prove particularly worthwhile.

In order to promote inclusion and success in mainstream schools, effective planning is paramount (Hodkinson and Vickerman, 2009). Students and teachers may collaboratively set realistic targets for students based on identified areas of need. Such planning could include student input as much as possible, which would help to promote an inclusive culture (NCSE, 2006; Prunty, 2002; Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007). However, in my experience, including children in the planning process is not widespread and this may have to do with the current statutory status of the IEP in Ireland and the inconsistencies involved in practice. Therefore, this aspect of the EPSEN Act 2004 needs to be implemented without delay, which would give clarity to students and teachers (McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009). Some students in this group spoke about the strategies which they found to be beneficial and these strategies would undoubtedly benefit *all* children. However, teachers may need to be aware of how to plan and to be able to identify appropriate resources, while taking into account learning preferences. This gives rise to the question of training in the area of individual and group planning which is currently inconsistent in the Irish context (McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009). Before setting targets for children, it is important that training begins with an examination of possible strategies, with a strong emphasis on student contribution. Placing children with dyslexia at the heart of the planning process may not only improve outcomes for students

with dyslexia but for *all* children. This need for effective planning for *all* is highlighted in the literature (Ainscow, 1994; Barton, 2003; Brown, 2006; Florian and Rouse, 2009).

While some ideas for reflection have been presented in this section, it is not enough to merely focus on pedagogical tools devised by “experts”. There needs to be a challenge to the status quo regarding the contribution that children themselves can make to inform educators when planning strategies. The children in this school demonstrated a strong case for collaborative approaches as well as a compelling argument for multi-sensorial methodologies.

#### **7.4 Theme 3- A Sense of Place**

This strong sense of place was in evidence during our interactions and I derived that the students felt that they owned or, at the very least, belonged here. The endearing fashion in which they spoke about the school was impressive. While this corroborates with previous studies on children’s experiences of special schools (Cassery, 2012; Lambe and Bones, 2008; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009; Motherway, 2009; Nugent, 2008), it should be viewed as a challenge to mainstream schools to improve all children’s experiences.

It was obvious to me that this was *their* school and that they were proud to tell me about it. As much of their experiences in former settings were not positive, it may have accentuated their feelings of well-being and inclusion in this setting. Mary Warnock (Warnock and Norwich, 2010) has pointed to the fact that sometimes the mainstream school is not where students feels they belong or included. This is an important issue and raises questions for *all* practitioners. It may be time to consider why didn’t these students feel like they belonged? Some students spoke passionately about their full participation in daily activities in the

school. This idea of participation is key to successful inclusive education (Ainscow and Miles, 2008; Dragonas, Gergen et al., 2015; Freire, 1972; O' Gorman, Drudy et al., 2009; Shevlin and Rose, 2008; Smith, 2014).

In this setting, the students referred to the smaller classes in a positive way and spoke of how this facilitated learning and success. This is supported by others who cite class size as an important factor in determining pupil satisfaction (Lambe and Bones, 2008; Westwood, 2013). The issue of large class sizes in mainstream schools is something which requires attention if inclusion for all is an objective. There is also the issue of practical support for teachers to develop inclusive practices. Therefore, there is an onus on government to ensure the "provision of support for teachers by all stakeholders; politicians and leaders" (EADSNE, 2015, p.7). This support could possibly include the recognition that experienced practitioners have more of an input in terms of collaboration with pre-service teachers and with third level institutions (EADSNE, 2015).

Furthermore, existing school practices, which often value narrow types of intelligence particularly regarding assessment, need to be examined (Armstrong and Squires, 2015; Long and McPolin, 2009; Reid, 2009). Schools may need to reflect on the importance of such practices, and in particular how these practices often serve to exclude. For example, the children in this study testified to the necessity of appreciating learner preferences, which is supported in the literature (Kirschner, 2016; Krank, 2001; Newton, 2015; Olsen, 2006; Reiner and Willingham, 2010). A narrow approach to literacy often ignores these preferences. Moreover, there may also need to be due consideration for linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom when addressing learner differences (Armstrong and Squires, 2015). This raises the issue of teacher preparation for all (Florian and Rouse, 2009; Rose, 2009). As the children

spoke so passionately about belonging in this school, they used words such “inviting” and “comfortable”. It may also be an opportunity for whole school communities to engage in continuing professional development for all (EADSNE, 2015; Rose, 2009). While The Special Education Service provides optional courses for teachers, this could be broadened to include all stakeholders; special needs assistants and, possibly, parents. This whole school approach is recommended and should begin with initial teacher education (Barton, 2003; Rix, Hall et al., 2009; Westwood, 2013). However, any such programmes also need to recognise children as stakeholders and identify ways to include the young people’s input.

As the children testified to the value of an occupational therapy room, they highlighted the advantages of being able to self regulate by engaging with the resources. This aspect of the study constitutes an original contribution to knowledge, and was not mentioned in any previous Irish research (Casserly and Gildea, 2015; Casserly 2012; McPhilips and Shevlin 2009; Nugent 2008; Nugent, 2007). This is hardly surprising when schools are mainly concerned with the phonological deficit theory, which pertains to literacy (Poole, 2010). However, other theories such as the magnocellular theory, which does highlight sensory aspects, are largely ignored in educational contexts (Armstrong and Squires, 2015). While many mainstream Irish schools do have sensory rooms, they tend to be used to support students with ASD, who may have more obvious and immediate sensory needs. However, as students here have highlighted, this sensory component benefits *all*, including those with dyslexia. These children identified such a space as “relaxing” and “calming”. There may be an opportunity to develop a multi-disciplinary approach to school improvement for all, involving an input from professionals such as occupational therapists. While this is supported in policy (EPSEN, 2004), it is not common in practice. Furthermore, while occupational therapists do have

particular expertise in areas relating to sensory issues, teachers may also need to consider “sensory issues” as part of their role as educators. It could be beneficial to all children if a sensory facility were available to them and this could be provided on a smaller scale in mainstream classrooms by having a “sensory corner”. Schools may not currently have resources to provide sensory rooms all of the time but such a space may be more manageable, providing it is equipped with relevant and age appropriate resources.

The sense of place that these children spoke about included resources and activities. Throughout our conversations there was a sense of “here we can”. It is arguable that the positive sentiments of these children regarding the place of the school in their lives was indicative of their experiences here to date. I was left in no doubt that this was where these students felt most included. The class sizes, the layout, resources, OT room and the ritual of eating together all contributed to these children’s sense of well-being and belonging to a school community. These positive elements shared by the students could act as a catalyst for initial teacher preparation along with inclusive school development.

#### **7.5 Theme 4 - Socio-Emotional Issues**

As stated in the previous chapter, this theme strongly emerged and provided insights regarding the children’s confidence, self-esteem and well-being. It supports the findings from previous studies, which also highlight the socio-emotional benefits of special settings (Casserly and Gildea, 2015; Casserly, 2012; Motherway, 2009; McPhillips and Shevlin, 2009; Nugent, 2008; Nugent; 2007). The fact that the children did not feel “stressed” or “nervous” offers a point of reflection for practitioners, particularly in terms of classroom resources and organisation (Ainscow, 1994; Barton, 2003; Brown, 2006; Florian and Rouse, 2009).

There was a sense from most of the children that they felt better about themselves and also that they felt more capable of undertaking particular school tasks. They discussed reading in this regard and the way that they were more confident in succeeding in this school. This is in line with McPhilips' and Shevlin's findings, which highlight that students in reading schools have a better self-image and perform better academically (Mcphilips and Shevlin, 2009). However, this may be addressed by empowering *all* teachers for inclusive education by increasing "teacher confidence" in order for them to value learner diversity (EADSNE, 2015, p.10). While teachers have the potential to include, they also have the potential to exclude. Therefore they need to reflect on ways to ensure that "all learners participate and achieve" (EADSNE, 2015, p.10). This process of reflection, beginning at the stage of initial teacher education, has the power to transform practice (Smith and Barr, 2008) and to include all children.

Lawrence (2006) in Riddick (2010) contends that teacher-student relationships are important and self-esteem may be increased or reduced as a consequence of these relationships. This is also supported by Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) who state that "pupils consistently emphasise teacher-pupil relationships as being of central importance for the quality of their lives in classrooms"(p.54). The quality of relationships in this setting appeared to be high. Student-teacher relationships may be improved by letting "learners increasingly take responsibility for their own learning"(EADSNE, 2015, p.11). This was certainly the case in this school. Furthermore, by encouraging children to reflect on their learning processes, corresponding levels of student participation may also increase (Freire, 1972).

Glazzard and Dale (2012) highlight the fact that dyslexia has a negative impact on self-esteem and this appeared to be the case for these students. However, poor self-esteem and self-

concept were referred to by these students in the context of the former schools, and not in this school. It may be derived, therefore, that the negative self-image was context bound and not as a result of dyslexia. However, it appeared that the attitude towards impairment in previous settings had an impact on how the children viewed themselves. As inclusive education is for *all* teachers, *all* learners and *all* teacher educators (EADSNE, 2015), it is imperative that practitioners are encouraged to be open and innovative. In doing so, the number of children considered to have “special needs” due to impairment may be reduced as what is deemed beneficial for some may, in fact, benefit all (EADSNE, 2015; Florian and Rouse, 2009).

It was interesting the way that some students had internalised a lack of success and almost blamed themselves for their perceived inadequacies. However, this poor self-concept may be attributed to the fact that they have had experience of being unable to access the curriculum due to learning differences. The narrow curriculum in mainstream schools, which has been developed for the masses, often serves to exclude non normative children (Goodley, 2011). Practitioners may benefit from reflecting on the importance of teaching the curriculum in a way which benefits all young people (Ainscow, 1994; Barton, 2003; Brown, 2006; EADSNE, 2015; Florian and Rouse, 2009; Rose, 2009). This may require visiting the principles of Universal Design for Learning, involving effective planning and differentiated instruction to include *all* learners (Westwood, 2013). While this does not invalidate the need for specialist support in some circumstances, UDL may have the potential to increase children’s well-being by increasing curriculum access and active participation.

The negative experiences of these children in mainstream education is also supported by Riddick (1996) in Nugent (2008), stating that children in such settings described themselves



as depressed, angry and embarrassed. This embarrassment was felt by the students in the group, particularly when it involved requiring assistance or “putting my hand up”. It appeared to increase stress and anxiety, mainly due to a lack of time provided to answer a question. As processing difference is a characteristic of dyslexia (Reid, 2003), it suggests that there was a lack of understanding of “increased wait time” in mainstream schools. This offers opportunities for teacher educators to highlight the advantages of providing extra time for all children, including those with dyslexia.

All of the children in this school appeared more content with the special setting compared with the mainstream schools. They were no longer “afraid” of “messaging up”. This is in line with other studies, which described higher levels of self-esteem and confidence in reading schools (Casserly, 2008; Nugent, 2008). They were more predisposed to learning, which is also mentioned in other studies (Casserly and Gildea, 2015; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009). However, as many of the students in the group had experience of being bullied in former settings, there may be an opportunity for practitioners to reflect on this. Perhaps the values of the hidden curriculum (Dragonas, Gergen et al., 2015) communicated a message of deficiency, leaving children feeling exposed because of their impairments? As long as a system which views learner difference as a disability is retained, then inequality continues to be perpetuated. It is hardly surprising then when young people who are considered different articulate low self-esteem, low confidence levels and low self-concept.

## **7.6 Theme 5 – The Role of School Staff**

The topic of difference permeated the entire discussions and some children contended that the staff in this setting were, indeed, different. I interpreted that *different* here referred to

the manner in which they treated students and the methodologies they employed. However, it was also the overall attitude towards learner difference which was, in fact, *different* in this school. The approach of the staff towards the students was positive, which brings me back to Billington's questions "How do we speak with children?" and "How do we listen to children?" These positive relationships (also mentioned in a previous theme) impact teachers' expectations for all children (Cheminais, 2001; EADSNE, 2015; Meegan and MacPhail, 2006; Ross-Hill, 2009). It appears that when children are listened to and involved in their own learning, then participation increases along with more positive attitudes towards school. The children spoke about the different type of teachers in this school, contending that these teachers had undergone a different type of training to other teachers. However, this was not the case as it is not a requirement for Irish teachers working in special schools to have a specialist qualification (Ball, Hughes and McCormack, 2006). This does raise an interesting point, however. As the teachers' attitudes in this school were deemed more positive, it may be an area to consider in programmes pertaining to general school improvement and inclusion for *all*. As "empowering teachers" is a core issue in inclusive education (EADSNE, 2015), surely this empowerment includes reflecting on attitudes towards difference and impairment. These attitudes fundamentally shape relationships children have with their teachers (Ruddick and McIntyre, 2007).

The young people in this school believed that the teachers understood their challenges, which may not have been the case in previous settings. This is in line with other studies, citing that mainstream teachers did not understand associated differences (Casserly and Gildea, 2015; Casserly, 2012; Nugent, 2008). Teacher understanding is central to inclusive education and instils a sense that all children are "valued in the group" (Westwood, 2013, p.6). It may,

therefore, be time for teachers and teacher educators to give more consideration to the views of young people in order to truly *understand* their perspectives on education.

Positive teacher attributes were mentioned by the children, particularly teachers' patience. They discussed the kindness of "staff" (including special needs assistants) and how fairly they were treated. There appeared to be a collaborative approach in the school which benefitted all children. This reiterates the importance of a whole school approach to inclusion (Rix, Hall et al., 2009; Rose, 2009; Westwood, 2013). The children used words such as "stress" and "pressure" and it was evident that it was in the context of previous experiences. The fact that they did not feel "stressed" or "nervous" in this school was indicative of the pastoral emphasis and the positive culture created by the staff. In order to reduce these negative sentiments, practitioners may need to develop skills which help them to cater for the needs of *all* children (EADSNE, 2015; Nind and Wearmouth, 2006; Westwood, 2013). This may include listening skills. In terms of course design, it may not be sufficient to focus merely on pedagogical approaches; there also needs to be awareness of the affective components of learning. It could be an opportunity for the school community to create "nurturing learning environments that value participation as well as providing learning opportunities that incorporate voice, choice and independence" (Long, McPhillips et al., 2012, p.26). The issue of voice implies that teachers encourage children to give their views. However, in order to do this, there needs to be "training for adults to overcome their resistance to children's involvement" (Lundy, 2007, p.935). Students' voices could be powerfully used to inform action and this will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have continued to deal with the themes identified previously. I have re-visited the literature from chapter three and shared some insights from professional practice. In the final chapter, I will conclude by specifically addressing the embedded questions outlined at the end of chapter three. I will then proceed to delineate some recommendations based on this research before discerning pertinent areas for possible further research.

# Chapter Eight

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will begin by addressing the embedded questions outlined at the end of chapter three. These questions are:

- **How do the young people understand dyslexia ?**
- **How included do young people feel in this reading school?**
- **How relevant are socio-emotional issues for the young people in the school?**
- **Which teaching approaches are deemed most effective, according to the young people?**

The new knowledge discussed in the previous chapter will inform the content of the answers.

I have included some recommendations as they relate to practice; namely, school improvement for inclusion and teacher education for inclusion. I have suggested ways to use student voice to inform action before identifying possible areas for further research.

## **8.2 Questions**

### **8.2.1 How do the young people understand dyslexia?**

Most students in this group articulated very well their understanding of dyslexia and what it meant to them. They spoke about not feeling different in this setting and how this sense of difference was linked to their identity. They discussed how they viewed themselves compared to peers in mainstream schools. It was as though having dyslexia made them aware of the way they were perceived as being different, as a result of their impairments. The withdrawal process in mainstream schools compounded this feeling of difference. They acknowledged dyslexia as a learning difference and noted that they did indeed learn differently. The common challenges typically associated with dyslexia such as memory and time management were described in detail and the students spoke about the issues they experienced in this regard. These challenges, in the views of the students, were central aspects of dyslexia though they were keen to point out that their individual needs were supported and addressed in this school. This sense of learning differently to their peers who did not have dyslexia, was considered important.

There was a strong sense of group identity linked to dyslexia and the children affirmed one another in their commonalities of experience. The difference highlighted related to the perceived differences between these students and their peers in mainstream schools and not differences between these students. It was evident, however, that these students were all different to each other in many ways. Some positive aspects of dyslexia were emphasised and it appeared that the children understood that many people with dyslexia have aptitudes and talents in certain areas.

### **8.2.2 How included do young people feel in this reading school?**

There was an overwhelming level of satisfaction displayed by the students in the group who all testified to the inclusive nature of the setting. Participating in all aspects of daily school life was emphasised and considered to be particularly important. The attitude of staff and their understanding of any issues experienced by the children was considered to be particularly important. In fact, it was the attitude towards the children and the sensitivity shown that the pupils really valued. It appeared that the staff appreciated the students' challenges and were cognisant of what needed to be put in place to address individual differences. It also appeared that these differences were not always appreciated in former settings.

The opportunities involving access to, and participation in school life was partly due to the nature of the smaller school with fewer pupils in each class. This afforded students more quality time together and with individual teachers. The nature of the relationships and in particular the children's group identity contributed to the sense of belonging and well-being. The references to "we" and "together" made throughout indicated a high level of satisfaction with the current provision, suggesting strong bonds with each other and the staff. They seemed to share a common sense of purpose.

The strong sense of place and almost, ownership of this place, was notable. In addition to the fewer number of children and the size of the school, the resources in the school provided children with a sense of worth and purpose. In particular, the references to sensory materials and the way these were used to meet students' needs was noteworthy. These resources undoubtedly aided students' awareness of self and others in the setting, enabling them to fully participate in school life. The climate of trust and openness to children was strongly in evidence and this certainly contributed to the students' assertions that they felt valued and very much part of "our school".

### **8.2.3 How relevant are socio-emotional issues for the young people in the school?**

All of the children in the group demonstrated strong feelings of self-worth and affirmation in this school and made reference to the supportive nature of the staff in this regard. This attitude of acceptance and flexibility influenced how children felt about approaching tasks. The students' strong self-concept and self-belief emanated from this culture which was created by those working in the school. The relationships formed with each other and with the staff has led to an increase in self-esteem and self-concept. This was in stark contrast to the way some of the students articulated their negative self-images when attending previous schools. This has significant implications for mainstream practice.

The constant comparisons drawn between the two experiences was marked and it highlighted the positive effects of the current setting on the children's self-perceptions. An interesting point emerged relating to the common assumption that dyslexia is responsible for lowering students' self-esteem and self-concept. While this was true for these children in mainstream schools, the positive regard in which the students viewed themselves is incongruent with this contention. As discussed earlier, it was the understanding of difference and diversity which the staff demonstrated, along with careful attentions to resources, which really changed how the pupils felt about themselves. As this indicates the contextual impact of dyslexia, it offers *all* practitioners some points for reflection.

The high, yet realistic expectations of staff in the reading school appears to have set these students up for personal success. They were no longer unwilling to request assistance and were assertive in approaching adults. They were of the view that they were not only heard in this school, but were truly listened to. As discussed throughout this study, there is now an onus on *all* practitioners in *all* schools to identify ways to listen attentively to *all* children.



#### **8.2.4 Which teaching approaches are deemed most effective, according to the young people?**

The children articulated their views of pedagogies which they found beneficial. Interestingly, they did not refer to dyslexia-specific programmes used in schools but highlighted strategies which they deemed worthwhile. These methodologies could be considered beneficial for all children. They emphasised the fact that teachers needed to consider students' individual learning preferences, which appeared to be determined by interest and the task at hand. The multi-sensory approach to pedagogy, with a focus on learner differences, featured in this setting and was valued by the children.

The use of co-operative learning structures such as flexible group-work was considered imperative; it appeared to promote success and the children were likely to participate more fully. Teachers' pacing and momentum of lessons, allowing sufficient time to process information was also considered beneficial. Some students were emphatic that teachers should ask students how they learn best and should tailor programmes and instruction to suit individual preferences. While the children valued certain pedagogical approaches, it was also apparent that the *hidden curriculum* was important. The values and attitudes of the staff trumped all instructional approaches as essential components of good teaching. Patience and understanding were considered essential. Furthermore, listening and responding to children in a sensitive way was regarded as paramount to "effective" teaching.

#### **8.3 Student voice to inform action**

Student voice highlights the importance of providing a space for children to express their views (Billington, 2006; Jones, 2005; Lundy, 2007; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009; Motherway, 2009; Slee, 2009). However, it is not sufficient to provide a space for children to express their

views without listening and, ultimately, acting on these views (Lundy, 2007). It is imperative that children's rights to express their opinions are respected "if barriers to participation are to be overcome and literacy standards are to be raised" (Long, McPhillips et al., 2012, p.26). However, Lundy (2007) cautions against using the term "student voice" lightly and insists "that pupil involvement in decision making is a permanent, non-negotiable right" (Lundy, 2007, p.940).

The children at the centre of this study spoke about the importance of being listened to. They also emphasised that motivation and participation are increased when teachers provide tasks which appeal to their strengths and interests. Some possible ways to involve children include "the organisation of fun activities such as plays, puppet shows, videos and drawing projects" (Lundy, 2007, p.935). These co-operative, child centred activities give children space to express their views on issues important to them.

Ryan (2009) conducted research to identify places in the school where children felt included or excluded. Each child was provided with a camera and encouraged to take photographs around the school. The students presented their findings to an adult audience, highlighting areas where "reasonable adjustments" could be made. Having this audience and potential impact may be considered important as it moves beyond merely listening to a place of action (Lundy, 2007). This methodology to elicit student voice could be used with a variety of children, including those with dyslexia. It is important to recognise that children "have the capacity to reflect on and verbalise their needs and their knowledge of what helps them to progress in literacy" (Long, McPhillips et al., 2012, p.26). When practitioners consider their views, it is more likely that standards for all will be raised. Creative methodologies, including image making, may be particularly beneficial. However, whichever methodologies are used,

attention should always be paid to energising voice, illustrating voice and interpreting voice (Long, McPhilips et al., 2012, p.26). So, while providing the space for children to express themselves is a starting point, practitioners should identify ways for this voice to impact practice.

#### **8.4. Recommendations for Practice**

##### **School Improvement for Inclusion**

While this study has demonstrated high levels of pupil satisfaction with the reading school, it offers practitioners in mainstream contexts some points for reflection. Although the children in this school were not different to children in other settings, they did testify to different ways of learning. Some of the beneficial methodologies referred to in this group included group-work and multi-sensory approaches to learning (Davis and Florian, 2004; Norwich and Lewis, 2001; Rix, Hall et al., 2009; Smith and Barr, 2008; Westwood, 2013). The young people also emphasised the importance of making connections to make sense of new material. A connective pedagogy (Smith and Barr, 2008), focusing on tasks and methodologies which link with children's experience may, therefore, be worthwhile. By employing methodologies which facilitate children's "ability to connect", children may be more likely to participate. This has implications for providing reading resources which resonate with children as well as the length of reading material. Collaborative, "connective" strategies recommended include choral reading and the jigsaw approach. Moreover, as inclusion is the responsibility of all practitioners (Florian and Rouse, 2009), there needs to be a concerted effort to develop strategies which support *all* children.

Teachers need to be equipped with skills to work with all children, respecting the tenet of learner diversity in *all* schools (EADSNE, 2015) As processing information and time management were particularly challenging for these children, it may be an opportunity for teachers to engage with methodologies which promote access and participation for all. Providing extra time to complete tasks is of particular importance (Reid, 2003). These children articulated the benefits of sensory resources to self-regulate and to attend to tasks. This sensory component of dyslexia may also be understood in the context of mainstream classrooms (Armstrong and Squires, 2015); there may be scope for teachers to be aware of the impact of the environment on children's well-being and attention to tasks. They could also provide sensory materials commonly used in sensory rooms such as comfortable seating, theraputty and sensory balls. These resources may benefit all children and not just those with dyslexia.

As these children demonstrated dissatisfaction with being withdrawn for tuition in mainstream schools, it may offer opportunities for teachers to review this practice. As this has also been supported in the literature (Nugent, 2008), it may be an opportune time to consider a flexible approach where children are supported more in the classroom and only withdrawn for very short periods, when necessary. Specialist teachers may have a role here; they could work alongside classroom teachers and offer expert advice to promote access and participation in the regular classroom.

These children indicated that the staff in the reading school adopted a whole school approach, where SNAs worked closely with class teachers. This collaborative approach may be adopted in mainstream settings where class teachers, SNAs and specialist teachers work together more closely. As corroborated by others (Barton, 2003; Rix, Hall et al.,2009), it may be beneficial for school development if all staff underwent courses in school development for

inclusion. It is recommended that any such preparation includes reflections on the concepts of inclusion and learner diversity.

As the children appreciated being listened to in school, it does offer mainstream teachers a chance to listen to these views in order to improve practice (Billington, 2006; Jones, 2005; Lundy, 2007; McPhilips and Shevlin, 2009; Motherway, 2009; Slee, 2009). It could be a worthwhile idea to involve children at the planning stage by inviting them to draw images, take photographs or partake in role play. These methods of eliciting voice may also be used to formatively assess, thereby informing practice.

### **Teacher Education for Inclusion**

While some ideas for school improvement have been presented, many of these recommendations may begin at the initial teacher education stage. As well as focusing on inclusive pedagogies, pre-service teachers may be encouraged to reflect on the ideas of learner difference and societal norms (Florian and Rouse, 2009; Smith and Barr, 2008). As collaboration has been shown to improve experiences for children, student teachers may also be encouraged to collaborate on ways to improve practice. The practice of “lesson study” could be used in this regard as a way of encouraging pre-service teachers to observe and critique each other’s lessons (Ainscow and Miles, 2008). Teacher educators could facilitate this, while encouraging the students to take responsibility for setting up and monitoring its effectiveness. Perhaps this student input may result in an increased awareness of the power of student voice for children in primary school. As language is political (Freire, 1972; Temple, 2005) and was important to these children, there is an opportunity for student teachers to reflect on the impact of language on all children.

As dyslexia is connected to literacy, the phonological theory is often the most accepted theory accounting for the associated learning differences (Poole, 2010). However, as this study has shown, theories which account for the sensory aspect also require consideration. The importance of acknowledging *all* children's sensory needs should be acknowledged by teacher educators. Moreover, this sensory aspect could be included in modules which pertain to all children, not just those with dyslexia. The contentious area of labelling is something which could be addressed during initial teacher education (Cameron and Billington, 2015). It is, perhaps, timely to have conversations with students regarding the existence of dyslexia and the associated label. It could also be worthwhile to listen to the views of student teachers with the label, and how they view having such a label. Perhaps this process of reflection could also impact on the importance they attach to the experiences of young children when they begin their professional careers.

### **8.5 Further Research**

As a result of this project, I have identified the following possible areas for further research, which would build on this thesis as well as previous research.

- A study devised with the students where they are involved in the construction and delivery of the research as well as disseminating the results.
- A visual narrative study, where children record each other speaking about the positive or negative aspects of school. Teachers and SNAs could act as an audience.
- A visual study where children are encouraged to explore and draw images of their perspectives of some aspects of school.

- A large scale study could be undertaken exploring the perspectives of students attending all of the reading schools and reading classes in the country.
- A comparative study could be conducted between the perspectives of students with dyslexia in special schools in Ireland and those in similar settings in another jurisdiction.
- A large longitudinal study which tracks the perspectives of students over a period of a couple of years could be done, starting with the time of entry into a special school and finishing with the point of exit.
- A comprehensive study examining the sensory aspect of dyslexia.
- A similar study using visual methods could be conducted where students could use cameras to identify pertinent spaces and resources.
- A study exploring the link between identity and self-esteem of young people with dyslexia in both mainstream and special settings.
- A small-scale, in-depth study tracking the journey of one child over a couple of years.
- A study evaluating the effects of student input in school planning.
- A follow up study could be done with this particular cohort in a few years when they are attending secondary school. Their perspectives of those schools could be explored as well as comparing their experiences to that of the reading school.
- A study with pre-service teachers with dyslexia; an exploration of their views of the label

## **8.6 Limitations**

Like any research project, there were limitations to this study. The most dominant limitation, it may be said, was the sample size. I worked with one group of students and met these

students on two separate occasions. If the sample size were larger and spanned over a wider geographical and demographical area, the outcomes could have been changed. The data which generated from these sessions was interpreted according to my own researcher positionality and worldview. If I had met this group on other occasions and in a different setting, the data may have been different. The context in which the research took place was, therefore, important and could have influenced the findings. In fact, I decided to limit the size of the group and the number of times we met. The richness of data generated in a particular group, context and time was considered more important than conducting a larger “quantifiable” study.

There is also the question of researcher bias and knowledge. As a teacher educator, with a strong academic and professional background in SEN, it is important to note that I began the process with a pre-existing knowledge base of the potential areas of concern for children with dyslexia. Although the study was inductive, generating themes, I was, admittedly, aware of some possible points of interest before the project began. If this study were undertaken by a researcher without any knowledge or preconceptions of the challenges facing students with dyslexia, the outcomes could possibly have been different.

### **8.7 Self Critique**

While undertaking this small scale study, I have learned a great deal about my own positionality and the subjective way in which I approach research. In particular, I have sought to interrogate the concepts of truth and reality and how they shape my view of the world and what I perceive as worthwhile. I have found the experience of conducting focus groups with young children both rewarding and challenging, particularly as these children may be



considered part of a vulnerable population. The data I obtained from these focus group sessions are rich and offers researchers and practitioners some issues for reflection. However, if I were to design focus group sessions in the future, there are some things I may do differently. Firstly, I would take care and time when constructing questions and omit those questions which may be considered leading. On reflection, the inclusion of such questions was a weakness in this research. Secondly, I would aim to incorporate an element of visual research, such as encouraging children to represent thoughts and responses to certain topics. This may also have enriched the quality of data. Finally, the socio-economic profile of the students was not considered, which, in hindsight, would have enhanced the project.

## **8.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have considered the original embedded questions and have answered each one accordingly. The knowledge which was created from the focus group interviews informed the answers, which all feed into the overarching question which is *What are the views of Young People with Dyslexia on Attending a Special Reading School in Ireland?* I have also included some recommendations for practice, offering points for reflection for *all* teachers and teacher educators. I have outlined areas for potential future research before delineating the study's limitations.

In this research, I have interpreted the voices of young people with dyslexia attending a reading school. Though this was a small-scale study with noted limitations, it presents challenges and opportunities for all practitioners. The issue of student voice, particularly relating to SEN has permeated literature for a long time, without being widely manifested in research or in practice. Let's change that!

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# **APPENDICES**

# APPENDIX A

## Research Study Information Sheet – Board of Management

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Trevor O' Brien and I am a lecturer in Special Education at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. I am currently undertaking a Doctorate in Education at The University of Sheffield, U.K. and as a partial requirement of the Doctorate, I intend to submit a substantial research project in the area of dyslexia. The title of my thesis is **An exploration of the views of young children with dyslexia on attending a special reading school.**

The research I wish to undertake aims to examine the perspectives of students with dyslexia on attending a special reading school. In specific terms, the researcher intends to listen intently and to elicit the views of young people with dyslexia. It is hoped that the study will provide an insight into the child's perspectives and will, in turn, enhance the quality of provision for students.

It is intended that the research will take the form of a focus group, which will consist of between six and eight children. The researcher hopes to meet this group on two separate occasions. A system of random selection will be employed where the students will be assigned a number and I will identify six children for the research (each number corresponding to a student).

If the Board grants permission to this piece of research, parental permission will be sought and only those pupils whose parents agreed to the research, will be included in the research sample. Pupil's permission will also be sought and only those willing to participate will be involved with the opportunity to opt out at any stage.

All information will be **anonymous** and **confidential** and will be used solely for the purpose of research. Should you be willing to agree with children in the school participating in the research, I would be delighted to meet with you to discuss the details of the research in greater detail. Please do

not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. Thank you for your co-operation and I look forward to your response.

**Contact Details:** If you need to contact me with any questions/queries regarding this study my contact details are as follows: [trevor.obrien@mic.ul.ie](mailto:trevor.obrien@mic.ul.ie) or telephone (061) 204780.

If you have concerns about the study and wish to contact somebody independently, please [contact D.Goodley@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:D.Goodley@sheffield.ac.uk)

Yours Sincerely,

---

**(Adapted from MIC Repository)**

## APPENDIX B

### Parent Information and Consent Form

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

My name is Trevor O' Brien and I am a lecturer in Special Education at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. I am currently undertaking a Doctorate in Education at The University of Sheffield, U.K. and as a partial requirement of the Doctorate, I intend to submit a substantial research project in the area of dyslexia. The title of my thesis is **An exploration of the views of young children with dyslexia on attending a special primary school.**

The research I wish to undertake aims to examine the perspectives of students with dyslexia on attending a special reading school. In specific terms, the researcher intends to listen intently and to elicit the views of young people with dyslexia. It is hoped that the study will provide an insight into the child's perspectives and will, in turn, enhance the quality of provision for students.

All information collected about your child will be completely **confidential** and **anonymous** and your child will not be identifiable from the research. Your child does not have to take part in the test or can withdraw from the test at any time should he or she wish, without giving any reason. This will not disadvantage your child in any way. There are no risks to your child participating in this study and this research will provide valuable data in relation their perspectives on learning. I would be grateful if you could detach the permission slip and return it indicating whether or not you would like your child to be involved in the research. I would also be grateful if you could talk to your child about this study and ask him/her to complete the child informed consent slip below. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or queries. Thank you for your co-operation and I look forward to your response. **(Adapted from MIC Repository)**

**Contact Details:**

If you need to contact me with any questions/queries regarding this study my contact details are as follows: [trevor.obrien@mic.ul.ie](mailto:trevor.obrien@mic.ul.ie) or telephone (061) 204780.

If you have concerns about the study and wish to contact somebody independently, please contact [D.Goodley@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:D.Goodley@sheffield.ac.uk)

Yours Sincerely,

---

Trevor O' Brien

**(Adapted from MIC Repository)**

---

**Parent/Guardian consent**

I do/do not (delete as appropriate) give permission for \_\_\_\_\_ to be part of this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Parent/Guardian

## APPENDIX C

### Child information and Consent

My name is Trevor O' Brien and I am inviting you to take part in a project I am currently doing. This project is on the topic of dyslexia and what pupils think of school. The project will involve listening to what you have to say about how you learn best and what you particularly like about school and maybe some things you dislike. The reason I am doing this project is to gather some information about your opinions about learning and to make learning easier, as well as to make school more enjoyable. You will not be on your own as you will be in a group with five other children. I will meet this group twice.

I will ask the group some questions about school and you can say as much or as little as you like. You will not be forced to answer any question and whatever you say in the group is "confidential". This means that I will not tell anyone your name and what you said. I will record what everybody in the group has to say but when I am writing down what you said, I will use a false name. You do not have to agree to take part in the project if you do not want to. If you do agree, you will be free to opt out at any time.

Yours sincerely,

---

Trevor O' Brien

---

**(Adapted from MIC Repository)**



**Child consent**

I do/do not (delete as appropriate) agree \_\_\_\_\_ to be part of this study.

If I agree, I know that I am free to withdraw/opt-out at any time and this will not affect me in any way.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (Pupil)

## APPENDIX D

### Focus Group Schedule

Would you like to tell me about the school?

What do you like about the school?

Is there anything in particular that you don't like?

What are the main differences between this school and your old school?

How do you feel about learning in this school?

Is it easier to learn here? Why?

Do you do the same subjects as you did before? Is there any difference?

Do you feel part of all the lessons in the school? Tell me more.

Which subject do you feel you like/dislike the most? Why?

What about things you do in school outside of the class- yard time, trips, concerts...?

Do you feel that you are always happy to take part? Why?

Is there a place in school that you really like?

Is there a place you don't like to go or to be/Why?

Did you feel the same in your old school? Why? Why not?

Are you happy in this school? Why?

Do you think that you are a good reader?

Do you like to read? Why? Why not?

Did you like to read in your other school?

Do you think that what you say is important in school? Why? Give me an example.

Is it easy to learn here?

Do you like learning here?

Do you think that it is easier to learn when you feel good about yourself? Why?

Does having dyslexia change how you feel about school/learning?

What does popular mean? Do you think that you are popular/unpopular?

Does this have anything to do with learning?

If you needed help in class, would you ask? Would you have done this in your old school?

When in class, do you like to work alone? Why?/ Why not?

What about in pairs? Why? Give me an example?

Do you like to work in a group? Why? Give me an example?

Do you talk about what you are learning in class? Is this a good idea?

Tell me about the materials that your teacher uses? Do they help you to learn?

Is there anything which your teacher does that you think really helps you to learn?

Why do you think this is so? Did your teacher in your old school do this?

Are there particular programmes used here which you think are good?

If you could give me a "tip" as to how to be a "better" teacher what would it be?

Think about a subject you like and how you learn best. Tell me about this

Do you prefer to listen to the teacher all of the time?

What about pictures and diagrams? Do these help you to learn? Give me an example?

Do you prefer to use materials as a way to learn best?

What about a mixture of listening, looking and doing? Is this a good idea or not?

Is one more important than the other? What do you think?

Which way is easier to learn?

## Appendix E - Open Coding

I'd say, I think maybe first you kind of feel all different, because it's a big change, a really big change. It's I don't know, it's like there is smaller class and there is not much people...there is only like 10 or 11 people in your classroom and there is usually like 30 or something in your old school. And you are not afraid or anything to put up your hand and just ask for help or anything. Yes, I think that's easier as well when you go into this school

difference

class size

lack of fear in school

feeling included

**Ok what else would you like to tell me about the school, anybody else, that you can think about it when the others are talking?**

Yes, you don't have to be nervous to go into this school, because everyone is exactly like you. It's not like you are going to be made a joke of or anything like that, because they have the exact same thing as you, maybe even some worse or different than you. So yes you really shouldn't be nervous if you are going to a school like this, if you are a...a school like this or this school exactly. So yes.

lack of fear

group idea

difference

**Ok, ok great anybody else? Ok if you were to tell somebody about this school how would you describe it?**

Well it's like you know the way usually in your school, you are not always with the same people, you are always in the same...you are with the people that are...like we go into maths class and we are in...some people are in maths different groups of maths class, so it's easier for them. So in your old school, you'd be like...you could really really bad at maths and the others could be really good at maths, and you'd be

grouping?

inclusive teaching

the same thing, and it's easier to kind of...because you know what you are doing and everybody....

knowing what to expect

Yes but if everyone is ok, I'll just work by myself and get it done fast.

**And about a subject that you mightn't be comfortable with.**

Group.

**Why would you say a group?**

More brains more people, more brains.

**Yes more ideas maybe.**

I like working with... ?

**Working along and working in pairs, and you made a good point that it's good to maybe work in a group of you are not comfortable with something.**

I like working in pairs.

Sometimes I like working on my own, because kind of like...sometimes you have to work on your own and...I mean I like working in pairs too because you can get it worked, say if we were doing comprehension someone can read out the questions and you are writing it.

**If they are working together.**

I think it's easier to work by yourself, I have a way...I have a way of doing something

**Yes you have your own way.**

group work  
collaborative work

pair work  
inclusive teaching  
comfortable

multi-sensory

individual work ?

And if somebody comes along and they do it a different way I get frustrate and I don't like that. People change it and stuff like that, unless I change it myself I don't like it.

different way  
Knowing what to expect

**What would you say about that?**

Yes....it depends some stuff...I have no problem being by myself or with a person...so it's sort of like whatever the teacher wants...do something or just be with or just be by myself I won't mind.

**So it depends and it depends on the subject as well, you made an interesting point a well how you feel you learn best. So if I was to say to you, group, pair working along, is there one way that you feel it's easier to learn or that you prefer?**

Myself.

Individual work

If I don't know what to do probably pairs or a group.

group work pair work

Yes, group.

group work

**What about the materials, when I say materials the things that your teacher would use in the class they teach in, the stuff that they use.**

Drawing it out. Pin it out on front of you teaching you that way...a visual sort of start. So you see what you are going to be doing.

visual resource  
multi-sensory

Same as any other school.

the same?

Yes but that can easily help because some people don't write that down.

different

Some people have different....different comprehension...so they...he/she has to work on her own...there is no one else that works on the same comprehension as her, so she'll have to get a lot of help, sometimes that's good, in a group.

group work  
differentiation

You could ask someone beside you as well.

**Yes but to be in a group is handy there. What would you say? Great. Now if I say to you is there anything that your teacher does that makes it really easy to learn?**

When you read through it, goes through some of the questions with us. If there is 10 questions he'll go through about 5, but he needs to go through the whole questions.

shorter content

**So go through what you have to do first?**

But now they make it tougher for us, he does only half of it....

individual differences?

So they are slowly preparing us.

knowing what to expect

**For secondary school, by showing you the questions?**

Doing half and then...he's not going to show us how to do it, he did one and he didn't show us the questions.

Or you can put up your hand and ask what does this mean and that.

Requesting assistance

Yes what does this word mean.

And what does that mean and what does the question mean.

**Now if I were to say to you and think about this one, if you were to give me a tip as to be a better teacher, what would you tell me?**

Do it slowly, take your time.

slow  
pace

**When you say take your time?**

slow pace

Don't rush through it, and say there is a long word and people did not understand it, don't just read it away, stop and explain the word. Say it's the start of the sentence you'd go to the end of the sentence or there is a small paragraph and you go to the end of the paragraph and there would be a couple of words there and you go through the words with the children, you'd ask them, do you....

Teacher  
understand

**Does that happen in your old school, does it happen now?**

Yes. When we are doing the comprehension and some of us are reading, you stop and say, what does this word mean.

slower pace

comfortable  
with learning

What do you think is going to happen or something like that.

And he tells you to guess before he tells you.

~~stop~~ guessing

**That's a really good one to guess.**

Yes so it helps us to piece together things faster.

making  
connections

**So if you were to give me a few tips to be a better teacher you'd say, take your time, would be one?**

Yes.

**Another one would be, the one that you said get people to guess?**

Yes and explain.

explicit teaching



In what way, you are all nodding when I say explain so what do you mean by that?

Sort of...go through each question but don't give them the complete answer, like, give half the answer so they have to work on the half.

And the question he asks he answers in it...

explicit teaching  
scaffolding  
modeling

Sometimes he explains it too much and then he gives the answer by accident.

And sometimes how does that help you to learn do you think?

Because you can remember it.

memory

If you see the word once I think you will remember, the last time, so that's why we really read, because we can remember the words from the last day.

remembering  
making connections  
connections

And do you find that too that you can remember things better, if it is explained properly. And would you say it's very different to your school before? you are all nodding again.

Yes, but you also have to be patient with your students.

being patient

not rushing

I'm picking up a lot of tips there now, be patient.

Be patient because again they came here to learn not to be criticised.

patience

So you are saying something now that...it's not that we said this already that we were discussing but saying things in a different way, we do that a lot don't we. You said to be patient and we were talking about taking your time, so it's sort of different isn't it?

It's a different word but same meaning.

difference

## Appendix F - Categories (Red)

FEELING DIFFERENT

I'd say, I think maybe first you kind of feel all different, because it's a big change, a really big change. It's I don't know, it's like there is smaller class and there is not much people...there is only like 10 or 11 people in your classroom and there is usually like 30 or something in your old school. And you are not afraid or anything to put up your hand and just ask for help or anything. Yes, I think that's easier as well when you go into this school

SMALLER SCHOOL

COMFORTABLE

COMFORTABLE

difference

class size

lack of fear in school

feeling included

Ok what else would you like to tell me about the school, anybody else, that you can think about it when the others are talking?

Yes, you don't have to be nervous to go into this school, because everyone is exactly like you. It's not like you are going to be made a joke of or anything like that, because they have the exact same thing as you, maybe even some worse or different than you. So yes you really shouldn't be nervous if you are going to a school like this, if you are a...a school like this or this school exactly. So yes.

COMFORTABLE

FEELING DIFFERENT

lack of fear

group ident

difference

Ok, ok great anybody else? Ok if you were to tell somebody about this school how would you describe it?

Well it's like you know the way usually in your school, you are not always with the same people, you are always in the same...you are with the people that are...like we go into maths class and we are in...some people are in maths different groups of maths class, so it's easier for them. So in your old school, you'd be like...you could really really bad at maths and the others could be really good at maths, and you'd be still doing the same thing. Whereas we go into different maths groups and we do all the same thing, and it's easier to kind of...because you know what you are doing and everybody....

GROUPWORK  
INCLUSIVE  
TEACHING

EXPECTATIONS

grouping?

inclusive teaching

knowing what to expect

Yes but if everyone is ok, I'll just work by myself and get it done fast.

And about a subject that you mightn't be comfortable with.

Group.

Why would you say a group?

GROUPWORK

More brains more people, more brains.

group work

GROUPWORK

Yes more ideas maybe.

collaborative work

I like working with... ?

Working along and working in pairs, and you made a good point that it's good to maybe work in a group of you are not comfortable with something.

COLLABORATIVE WORK,

I like working in pairs.

pair work  
inclusive teaching  
comfortable

FEELING COMFORTABLE

Sometimes I like working on my own, because kind of like...sometimes you have to work on your own and...I mean I like working in pairs too because you can get it worked, say if we were doing comprehension someone can read out the questions and you are writing it.

multi-sensory

If they are working together.

INDIVIDUAL

I think it's easier to work by yourself, I have a way...I have a way of doing something

individual work?

Yes you have your own way.

# DIFFERENT WAYS OF LEARNING

And if somebody comes along and they do it a different way I get frustrate and I don't like that. People change it and stuff like that, unless I change it myself I don't like it.

different way  
knowing what to expect

# EXPECTATIONS

What would you say about that?

Yes...it depends some stuff...I have no problem being by myself or with a person...so it's sort of like whatever the teacher wants...do something or just be with or just be by myself I won't mind.

So it depends and it depends on the subject as well, you made an interesting point a well how you feel you learn best. So if I was to say to you, group, pair working along, is there one way that you feel it's easier to learn or that you prefer?

Myself.

individual work

# COLLABORATIVE

If I don't know what to do probably pairs or a group.

group work

pair work

# COLLABORATIVE

Yes, group.

group work

What about the materials, when I say materials the things that your teacher would use in the class they teach in, the stuff that they use.

# INCLUSIVE TEACHING

Drawing it out. Pin it out on front of you teaching you that way...a visual sort of start. So you see what you are going to be doing.

visual resource  
multi-sensory

Same as any other school.

the same?

Yes but that can easily help because some people don't write that down.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF LEARNING

different

Some people have different...different comprehension...so they...he/she has to work on her own...there is no one else that works on the same comprehension as her, so she'll have to get a lot of help, sometimes that's good, in a group.

group work  
differentiation

COLLABORATION.  
INCLUSIVE TEACHING

You could ask someone beside you as well.

Yes but to be in a group is handy there. What would you say? Great. Now if I say to you is there anything that your teacher does that makes it really easy to learn?

DIFFERENT WAYS OF LEARNING

UNDERSTANDING

When you read through it, goes through some of the questions with us. If there is 10 questions he'll go through about 5, but he needs to go through the whole questions.

shorter content

So go through what you have to do first?

UNDERSTANDING

But now they make it tougher for us, he does only half of it....

individual differences?

EXPECTATIONS

So they are slowly preparing us.

knowing what to expect

staff understanding

For secondary school, by showing you the questions?

Doing half and then...he's not going to show us how to do it, he did one and he didn't show us the questions.

COMFORTABLE

Or you can put up your hand and ask what does this mean and that.

Requesting assistance

UNDERSTANDING

Yes what does this word mean.

And what does that mean and what does the question mean.

Now if I were to say to you and think about this one, if you were to give me a tip as to be a better teacher, what would you tell me?

UNDERSTANDING  
INCLUSIVE TEACHING

slow  
pace

Do it slowly, take your time.

When you say take your time?

UNDERSTANDING.

slow pace

INCLUSIVE  
TEACHING.

Don't rush through it, and say there is a long word and people did not understand it, don't just read it away, stop and explain the word. Say it's the start of the sentence you'd go to the end of the sentence or there is a small paragraph and you go to the end of the paragraph and there would be a couple of words there and you go through the words with the children, you'd ask them, do you....

Teacher  
understanding

Does that happen in your old school, does it happen now?

Yes. When we are doing the comprehension and some of us are reading, you stop and say, what does this word mean.

slower pace  
comfortable  
with learning

COMFORTABLE

What do you think is going to happen or something like that.

And he tells you to guess before he tells you.

guessing

That's a really good one to guess.

INCLUSIVE  
TEACHING

Yes so it helps us to piece together things faster.

making  
connections

So if you were to give me a few tips to be a better teacher you'd say, take your time, would be one?

Yes.

Another one would be, the one that you said get people to guess?

INCLUSIVE  
TEACHING

Yes and explain.

explicit teaching

In what way, you are all nodding when I say explain so what do you mean by that?

Sort of...go through each question but don't give them the complete answer, like give half the answer so they have to work on the half.

And the question he asks he answers in it...

Sometimes he explains it too much and then he gives the answer by accident.

And sometimes how does that help you to learn do you think?

Because you can remember it.

If you see the word once I think you will remember, the last time, so that's why we really read, because we can remember the words from the last day.

And do you find that too that you can remember things better, if it is explained properly. And would you say it's very different to your school before? you are all nodding again.

Yes, but you also have to be patient with your students.

I'm picking up a lot of tips there now, be patient.

Be patient because again they came here to learn not to be criticised.

So you are saying something now that...it's not that we said this already that we were discussing but saying things in a different way, we do that a lot don't we. You said to be patient and we were talking about taking your time, so it's sort of different isn't it?

It's a different word but same meaning.

INCLUSIVE TEACHING

DIFFERENT WAYS OF LEARNING

INCLUSIVE TEACHING

UNDERSTANDING INCLUSIVE TEACHING

UNDERSTANDING

DIFFERENT WAYS OF LEARNING

memory

remembering  
making connections  
connections

being patient  
not rushing

patience

scaffolding  
modeling

explicit teaching

difference

## Appendix G - Themes (Blue)

### FEELING DIFFERENT - DIFFERENCE

SMALLER SCHOOL

I'd say, I think maybe first you kind of feel all different, because it's a big change, a SENSE OF PLACE really big change. It's I don't know, it's like there is smaller class and there is not much people...there is only like 10 or 11 people in your classroom and there is

difference

class size

COMFORTABLE

usually like 30 or something in your old school. And you are not afraid or anything to put up your hand and just ask for help or anything. Yes, I think that's easier as well

lack of fear in school

COMFORTABLE

when you go into this school

feeling included

### SENSE OF PLACE

Ok what else would you like to tell me about the school, anybody else, that you can think about it when the others are talking?

### SOCIO EMOTIONAL

Yes, you don't have to be nervous to go into this school, because everyone is exactly like you. It's not like you are going to be made a joke of or anything like that, because they have the exact same thing as you, maybe even some worse or different than you. So yes you really shouldn't be nervous if you are going to a school like this, if you are a...a school like this or this school exactly. So yes.

lack of fear

group idea

difference

COMFORTABLE

FEELING DIFFERENT

DIFFERENCE

Ok, ok great anybody else? Ok if you were to tell somebody about this school how would you describe it?

GROUPWORK

INCLUSIVE TEACHING

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

Well it's like you know the way usually in your school, you are not always with the same people, you are always in the same...you are with the people that are...like we go into maths class and we are in...some people are in maths different groups of maths class, so it's easier for them. So in your old school, you'd be like...you could really really bad at maths and the others could be really good at maths, and you'd be still doing the same thing. Whereas we go into different maths groups and we do all the same thing, and it's easier to kind of...because you know what you are doing and everybody....

grouping?

inclusive teaching

knowing what to expect

EXPECTATIONS

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY



Yes but if everyone is ok, I'll just work by myself and get it done fast.

And about a subject that you mightn't be comfortable with.

Group.

Why would you say a group?

GROUP WORK

More brains more people, more brains.

GROUPWORK

Yes more ideas maybe.

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

group work

collaborative work

I like working with... ?

Working along and working in pairs, and you made a good point that it's good to maybe work in a group of you are not comfortable with something.

COLLABORATIVE WORK

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

I like working in pairs.

pair work  
inclusive teaching  
comfortable

FEELING COMFORTABLE

Sometimes I like working on my own, because kind of like...sometimes you have to work on your own and...I mean I like working in pairs too because you can get it worked, say if we were doing comprehension someone can read out the questions and you are writing it.

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

multi-sensory

If they are working together.

INDIVIDUAL

I think it's easier to work by yourself, I have a way...I have a way of doing something

DIFFERENCE ??

Yes you have your own way.

individual work ?

# DIFFERENT WAYS OF LEARNING. DIFFERENCE

And if somebody comes along and they do it a different way I get frustrate and I don't like that. People change it and stuff like that, unless I change it myself I don't like it.

different way  
Knowing what to expect

EXPECTATIONS

STAFF

What would you say about that?

Yes....it depends some stuff...I have no problem being by myself or with a person...so it's sort of like whatever the teacher wants...do something or just be with or just be by myself I won't mind.

So it depends and it depends on the subject as well, you made an interesting point a well how you feel you learn best. So if I was to say to you, group, pair working along, is there one way that you feel it's easier to learn or that you prefer?

Myself.

Individual work

COLLABORATIVE

INCLUSIVE

PEDAGOGY

COLLABORATIVE

If I don't know what to do probably pairs or a group.

group work

pair work

Yes, group.

group work

What about the materials, when I say materials the things that your teacher would use in the class they teach in, the stuff that they use.

Drawing it out. Pin it out on front of you teaching you that way...a visual sort of start. So you see what you are going to be doing.

visual resource  
multi-sensory

Same as any other school.

the same?

INCLUSIVE TEACHING

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

Yes but that can easily help because some people don't write that down.

# DIFFERENT WAYS OF LEARNING

different

## DIFFERENCE

Some people have different...different comprehension...so they...he/she has to work on her own...there is no one else that works on the same comprehension as her, so she'll have to get a lot of help, sometimes that's good, in a group.

group work  
differentiation

## COLLABORATION

## INCLUSIVE TEACHING

You could ask someone beside you as well.

## INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

Yes but to be in a group is handy there. What would you say? Great. Now if I say to you is there anything that your teacher does that makes it really easy to learn?

# DIFFERENT WAYS OF LEARNING

## DIFFERENCE

When you read through it, goes through some of the questions with us. If there is 10 questions he'll go through about 5, but he needs to go through the whole questions.

shorter content

# UNDERSTANDING

## STAFF

So go through what you have to do first?

But now they make it tougher for us, he does only half of it...

individual differences?

# EXPECTATION

## STAFF

So they are slowly preparing us.

knowing what to expect

For secondary school, by showing you the questions?

Doing half and then...he's not going to show us how to do it, he did one and he didn't show us the questions.

COMFORTABLE - STAFF  
- SOCIO-EMOTIONAL?

Or you can put up your hand and ask what does this mean and that.

Requesting assistance

# UNDERSTANDING

## STAFF

Yes what does this word mean.

And what does that mean and what does the question mean.

Now if I were to say to you and think about this one, if you were to give me a tip as to be a better teacher, what would you tell me?

UNDERSTANDING STAFF

- INCLUSIVE TEACHING

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

Do it slowly, take your time.

slow  
pace

When you say take your time?

UNDERSTANDING

STAFF

INCLUSIVE TEACHING

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

slow pace

Don't rush through it, and say there is a long word and people did not understand it, don't just read it away, stop and explain the word. Say it's the start of the sentence you'd go to the end of the sentence or there is a small paragraph and you go to the end of the paragraph and there would be a couple of words there and you go through the words with the children, you'd ask them, do you....

Teacher understand

Does that happen in your old school, does it happen now?

Yes. When we are doing the comprehension and some of us are reading, you stop and say, what does this word mean.

STAFF / COMFORTABLE

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

slower pace  
comfortable with learning

What do you think is going to happen or something like that.

And he tells you to guess before he tells you.

guessing

That's a really good one to guess.

INCLUSIVE TEACHING

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

Yes so it helps us to piece together things faster.

making connections

So if you were to give me a few tips to be a better teacher you'd say, take your time, would be one?

Yes.

Another one would be, the one that you said get people to guess?

Yes and explain.

INCLUSIVE TEACHING

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

explicit teaching

In what way, you are all nodding when I say explain so what do you mean by that?

INCLUSIVE TEACHING

Sort of...go through each question but don't give them the complete answer, like, give half the answer so they have to work on the half.

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

And the question he asks he answers in it...

st scaffolding  
making

explicit teaching

STAFF

Sometimes he explains it too much and then he gives the answer by accident.

And sometimes how does that help you to learn do you think?

DIFFERENT WAYS OF LEARNING

Because you can remember it.

memory

DIFFERENCE

INCLUSIVE TEACHING

If you see the word once I think you will remember, the last time, so that's why we really read, because we can remember the words from the last day.

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

remembering

making connections  
connections

And do you find that too that you can remember things better, if it is explained properly. And would you say it's very different to your school before? you are all nodding again.

UNDERSTANDING INCLUSIVE TEACHING

Yes, but you also have to be patient with your students.

being patient

STAFF

INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

I'm picking up a lot of tips there now, be patient.

not rushing

UNDERSTANDING

Be patient because again they came here to learn not to be criticised.

patience

STAFF

So you are saying something now that...it's not that we said this already that we were discussing but saying things in a different way, we do that a lot don't we. You said to be patient and we were talking about taking your time, so it's sort of different isn't it?

DIFFERENT WAYS OF LEARNING

It's a different word but same meaning.

difference

DIFFERENCE

