



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

Voices spoken in the cracks  
Listening to the literacy experiences of students with intellectual disability in a  
Maltese Secondary School.

Amanda Schembri Muscat

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctorate in Education [EdD]

The University of Sheffield  
The Faculty of School of Education

20<sup>th</sup> July, 2023.

## DEDICATION

*..... to my grandparents whom I dearly lost during this journey.*

*Nanna Ricarda, recently Nannu Joe and Nanna Tessie on the day of my submission*

*Their anticipation and encouragement in this doctorate never faltered*

*..... to my husband Gilbert*

*For him, loving me and supporting me in achieving my dream was not a question of "If" but a question of "When"*

*..... to my parents*

*For their unconditional support in believing in me and supporting me in my studies since ever*

*.....to Hazel and Naia my twins*

*Your compassion and support in this big book that mummy wrote was admirable.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Words cannot express how thankful and deeply indebted I am, to my dissertation supervisor Dr. Themesa Y Neckles. Her support and guidance in this journey has been constant and her feedback and advice invaluable.

I am also grateful for my doctoral funding body. The research work disclosed in this publication is funded by the Tertiary Education Scholarships Scheme.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the students who participated as well as their parents and educators, whose willingness and eagerness to give their contribution has made this research an enjoyable one with unforgettable moments.

Finally, I'd like to recognize the never-ending investment and priority my parents have dedicated to my education since I was little. Thanks goes to my parents in law who have been of tremendous support throughout my years of study.

Heartfelt thanks to my husband, who was a continuous source of encouragement and support in my studies and in raising our kids even when I had to spend more time on my computer rather than in parks.

Lastly grateful for my precious twins, for being super behaved girls, who on a number of weekends preferred studying Peppa Pig books whilst mummy is writing her big book.

I am blessed to have been surrounded by such a supportive network throughout this doctoral journey.

## ABSTRACT

Students with intellectual disability in Maltese Secondary schools attend a Core Curriculum Programme for their literacy learning. Yet their voices, locally, were never explored in relation to their literacy curricular experiences. The purpose of this thesis is to listen to a group of students in a mainstream secondary context and gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences, explore the suitability of the literacy curriculum, and identify perceptions of parents and educators as well as approaches that educators utilise which determine the literacy learning experience.

The thesis is a qualitative research and uses a case study approach. Individual student interviews provided a platform to narrate their literacy experience, substantiated with in-class overt observations in literacy lessons to understand their realities further. Interviews with parents, Senior Management Team and educators shed light on the context, situated beliefs and perceptions of these stakeholders. The data gathered was analysed and manually coded with the use of a thematic approach. The application of the Social Model of Disability as a theory provided a lens through which the students' experiences were evaluated.

The study utilised literature on the emergence of student voice, engagement within the class environment, and literacy learning and strategies. Findings indicate that students with intellectual disability have communicated their literacy experiences in relation to preferences in language learning, challenges encountered and preferred topics relating to personal interests. These were expressed verbally throughout the student interviews as well as evidenced through their engagement process in literacy lessons. Insights obtained from educators and parental experiences further validated the students' voices. Parents were pivotal in pointing out disabling barriers such as lack of use of ICT in the class and lack of home-school collaborative practices. Notions of ableism and disabling practices were identified as perpetuating through teaching and learning and the examination process. Ableism was evidently unveiled through situated beliefs and internalised assumptions in educators and senior management team. Strategies observed in the teaching and learning of literacy in the classrooms link directly to Universal Design for Learning and Assessment, and these were interpreted in the context of the students' experiences.

The study addresses gaps in the literature on allowing student voice to guide policy and practice on literacy learning. It also provides more insight into the process used in research to elicit the voices of students with intellectual disability. Recommendations focus primarily on listening to student voices regularly in the classroom, maximising student potential through ICT, and balancing literacy lesson content to provide a holistic literacy experience.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	i
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	i
LIST OF FIGURES .....	ii
LIST OF CHARTS .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
DECLARATION.....	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Overview.....	1
1.2 Outline of the research.....	1
1.2.1 Aim and objectives of the research.....	2
1.2.2 Research questions .....	3
1.3 Background and Motivation .....	4
1.4 The Research Problem.....	6
1.5 The Maltese education system.....	7
1.6 The Significance of the study.....	8
1.7 Conclusion and Structure of the dissertation.....	11
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
2.1 Introduction.....	13
2.2 Theoretical framework underpinning this research .....	15
2.3 Conceptualizing students' voices. ....	19
2.4 Intellectual disability.....	22

2.5 Intellectual disability – voicing preferences .....	25
2.6 Intellectual disability and learning in inclusive settings.....	27
2.7 Literacy as a concept .....	29
2.8 Intellectual disability and literacy learning .....	31
2.9 Literacy accessibility for students with intellectual disability .....	33
2.10 Emergent Literacy and cognitive skills.....	35
2.11 Evidenced Literacy behaviours within the classroom.....	37
2.12 Literacy components and the students with intellectual disability .....	37
2.13 Classroom Engagement as a complex Construct.....	42
2.14 Literacy engagement.....	48
2.15 Educator’s role in learning and engagement .....	50
2.16 The parents’ perspectives on literacy learning.....	52
2.17 Conclusion .....	54
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	57
3.1 Introduction.....	57
3.2 Positionality and guiding principles .....	59
3.3 The Methodological Approach .....	62
3.4 Research in Small States: Insider Researcher .....	63
3.5 Research Strategy- Case Study .....	66
3.6 Epistemological considerations for choosing case study research.....	68
3.7 Participants and sampling technique .....	69
3.8 Profile of the student participants .....	72
3.9 Piloting the study.....	74
3.10 Data collection and participation process .....	75
3.11 Student interviews .....	79
3.12 Semi- Structured interviews with parents, LSEs and Senior Management Team.....	88

3.13 Class observations .....	92
3 .....	98
3.14 Ethical considerations .....	99
3.15 Data analysis.....	109
3.16 Crystallisation: Quality of the present research. ....	113
3.17 Conclusion .....	114
CHAPTER 4: STAKEHOLDERS' SUMMARIES.....	117
4.1 Introduction.....	117
4.2 Analysis of Student Interviews .....	117
4.3 Analysis of LSEs Interviews .....	132
4.4 Analysis of SMT Interviews .....	139
4.5 Analysis of Parents Interviews .....	146
4.6 Conclusion .....	159
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION .....	161
5.1 Introduction.....	161
5.2 Theme 1 – “I talk more”; “Stop! Go away” - The manifestations of student voices.....	162
5.3 Theme 2 – Parental perceptions and experiences on Literacy Learning .....	175
5.4 Theme 3 – Ableism and disabling practices.....	181
5.5 Theme 4: Universal Design for Learning and Assessment .....	188
5.6 Conclusion .....	198
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION .....	201
6.1 Introduction.....	201
6.2 The summary of the study.....	201
6.3 Addressing the Research Questions .....	202
6.4 Limitations of the study.....	208
6.5 Potential for further research .....	210

6.6 Recommendations .....	211
6.7 Conclusive remarks. ....	212
REFERENCES .....	1
APPENDIX A: OPEN ENDED AND CLOSE ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS -SYMWRITER VERSION .....	1
APPENDIX B: SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – SMT AND PARENTS .....	3
APPENDIX C: OBSERVATION TOOL .....	5
APPENDIX D: UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD RESEARCH ETHICAL APPROVAL.....	19
APPENDIX E: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY IN SCHOOLS.....	20
APPENDIX F: EMAIL FROM HEAD OF SCHOOL.....	22
APPENDIX G: INFORMATION EMAIL TO SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM .....	23
APPENDIX H: SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM CONSENT FORM .....	24
APPENDIX I: EMAIL SENT TO CCP CLASS EDUCATORS AND CONSENT FORM OF LSES .....	25
APPENDIX J: PARENT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM .....	27
APPENDIX K: STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM .....	30
APPENDIX L: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF STUDENTS.....	37
APPENDIX M: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF PARENTS .....	53
APPENDIX N: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF SMT .....	62
APPENDIX O: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF LSES .....	70
APPENDIX P: OBSERVATION FIELD NOTES.....	73
APPENDIX Q: TABLES WITH CODES FOR LSES, SMT AND PARENTS .....	91
APPENDIX R: CODING MAPS GENERATED .....	99



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAC: Augmentative and Alternative Communication

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ASD : Autism Spectrum Disorder

CAST: Centre for Applied Special Technology

CCP: Core Curriculum Programme

DSM 5: Diagnostic Statistical Manual 5

GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation

HOD Inclusion: Head of Department Inclusion

HOS: Head of School

ICT: Information Communication Technology

IT: Information Technology

IEP: Individual Education Plan

IQ: Intelligent Quotient

LSE/s: Learning Support Educator/s

LEA: Language Education Approach

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

SMT: Senior Management Team

UDL: Universal Design for Learning

UNCRPD: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

WHO: World Health Organisation

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Use of SymWriter and use of simple vocabulary .....	77
Figure 2 Strata of gatekeepers in the present research .....	99
Figure 3 Option to ask questions.....	105
Figure 4 The right not to participate .....	106
Figure 5 Easy sentence structure with pictures .....	107
Figure 6 Yes and No switches .....	107
Figure 7 Stop Visual .....	108

## LIST OF CHARTS

Chart 1 Sampling procedure of participants .....	71
Chart 2 Student Interviews Coding Map .....	99
Chart 3 LSEs Interviews Coding Map .....	99
Chart 4 SMT Interviews Coding Map .....	100
Chart 5 Parent Interviews Coding Map .....	101

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Key indicating student pseudo names .....	71
Table 2 Key indicating SMT pseudonyms .....	72
Table 3 Question options for student interviews .....	83

## DECLARATION

*I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means ([www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means)). This work has not been previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.*

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*'What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered?'*  
(Fullan, 1991, p. 70)

### 1.1 Overview

I have taken up Fullan's (1991) challenge to authorise the voice and perspective of students with intellectual disability. In this initial chapter, I intend to set the stage for the present research and introduce the notion of the voice of the student with an intellectual disability in relation to curriculum experiences in a secondary school in Malta. The curricular focus involves literacy experiences, mainly in Maltese and English lessons. In this chapter, I will also set the context of the Maltese schools and the inclusion system. The purpose of the research will be discussed, considering the research problem, and the research questions will be outlined accordingly. The main intention of this study is to create a platform for the main stakeholders and students with intellectual disability to voice their experiences and be valued as citizens in Maltese society. The intentions of the present study are outlined next.

### 1.2 Outline of the research

The dissertation aims at delving into the experiences of students aged 13-16 years who attend a Core Curriculum Programme in a Mainstream Secondary School in the Southern Region of Malta. Literacy experiences were chosen as the main focus. The concept of Literacy in this dissertation refers to a reading and writing continuum and proficiency, which are part of a broader set of skills, including digital and media literacy skills, as well as employment-related skills (UNESCO, 2023). Narratives were elicited using a qualitative method of inquiry in the hope of providing a platform for students with intellectual disability to voice what matters to them as well as filling in the gaps of local research in relation to disability, particularly intellectual disability. The narratives I intend to construct in this dissertation will mainly aim at understanding and acting upon the experiences of individuals with intellectual disability who are currently in mainstream school. This research journey highlights and prioritise the students as the main participants and stakeholders. Nonetheless, stakeholders such as educators and parents of these children were still heard to gain a holistic picture of these experiences. Various themes of substantive importance emerged throughout this journey. Amongst these were the concept of voice in students with intellectual disability, the notion of engagement, and the way inclusion is conceived within a Secondary school, amongst others.

An important aspect of this study is understanding who the main participants are in this present research. The sample of secondary school students who participated has Autism or Down Syndrome, which causes a secondary intellectual disability or cognitive impairment and language difficulties or related communication challenges. For the purpose of this dissertation, this term will be used instead of intellectual/cognitive impairment as it is the terminology used in the Maltese context. This is discussed in the national Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools (MEDE, 2019) and reflected in the Equal Opportunities Act, Act XXIV of 2016.

The DSM-5 (Cooper, 2018) Diagnostic Criteria describes intellectual disability as including challenges in relation to intellectual functioning, including aspects such as reasoning, problem-solving, thinking abstractly, judgement, and learning academically and from experiences. It also affects communication, social participation and independent living skills. According to Shaw & Jankowska (2018), there are four levels of difficulty: mild, moderate, severe and profound. The mild difficulty is related to acquiring and comprehending complex language concepts and academic skills. The moderate level is characterised by difficulties in “language and capacity for the acquisition of academic skills affected but are generally limited to basic skills” (Patel et al., 2018, p.3), whilst the severe level is characterised by very limited language and the capacity for the acquisition of academic skills and the latter would require daily support and supervision (Shaw & Jankowska, 2018). Finally, the profound difficulty has very limited communication and the capacity for academic acquisition is restricted. This project focuses on students with mild, moderate and severe intellectual disability within the mainstream school setting. In the Maltese educational system, students with profound and multiple learning difficulties are educated in specialised settings called Resource Centres at the Primary as well at the Secondary level.

The specific aim and objectives of the research are identified next.

### 1.2.1 Aim and objectives of the research

The aim of the research is to explore the literacy curricular experiences of secondary school students with mild, moderate and severe intellectual disability.

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- a. Determine the lived literacy experiences of a group of secondary students aged 13-16 years in the Core Curriculum Programme
- b. Explore the parents' perception of the literacy curricular experiences that their children are receiving through the Core Curriculum Programme
- c. Investigate the suitability of the curriculum in light of students' literacy experience.
- d. Identify any teaching strategies or approaches which teachers and support educators can adopt to further support and enhance literacy learning for secondary school students with intellectual disability.

#### 1.2.2 Research questions

This section outlines four research questions that this research sought to address. This is followed by a rationale for the choices of questions. My research uses qualitative methods to explore the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of learning literacy for a small group of secondary school students with intellectual disability?
2. How do their parents perceive their children's experience of learning literacy in secondary schools?
3. How suitable and engaging is a mainstream literacy curriculum for students with intellectual disability?
4. What approaches can educators adopt to support and enhance literacy learning for secondary school students with mild, moderate and severe intellectual disability?

Choosing the four research questions has been a process that was important in ensuring that students' voices emerge strongly. The first research question intended to listen to the students' experiences themselves and give priority to their voices. Through this, I opted and planned to listen to what matters to them in class, what interests them and what barriers they encounter during literacy learning. I intended to capture these experiences through observation in classrooms and student interviews, whereby questions target specific aspects



related to learning Maltese and English. Complementing the student voices, I formulated the second research question around their parents' experiences and perceptions of literacy learning. The support provided by parents at home is core to literacy learning for students with intellectual disability, and thus their narratives are valuable and parental interviews enabled this. Witnessing the teaching and learning in literacy in the CCP class was another facet that I strive to explore, and this provides the basis for the third research question. I believe that students communicate extensively through their behaviours whilst engaging with the curriculum. The students' engaging behaviours or lack of them are considered as part of the voice of the student, and the interplay of educators, peers and school management shed light into the nature of the learning experiences for this group of students whilst providing evidence on how educators' perceptions and conceptions can perpetuate through the various levels of teaching and learning. As a final research question, I focus on what can be done in practice to provide a rich and engaging literacy experience to students with intellectual disability, and this is also based on the experiences of the students themselves. The intention of this research question is to collate good practices and effective strategies to guide educators in the provision of literacy learning.

In the next section, I discuss what motivated me to steer my research in such a direction and what background, in terms of studies and experience, has led me to want to listen to the voices of these students.

### 1.3 Background and Motivation

Nineteen years ago, I graduated as a Speech and Language Pathologist from the University of Malta. Soon after graduation, I immersed myself in a novel experience that of a Supply Teacher in a Special School. The Head of School greeted me with, "You're assigned to Class twelve, and you may start your work in the class". On stepping into the classroom, I found nine male teenagers doing small knob puzzles. It was a scene that still troubles me to date. The inappropriateness of the activities created a turmoil of emotions related to inadequate learning experiences for these students, who all had an intellectual disability. Such activities and learning experiences were far from appropriate for teenagers. Following a hard year of trying to change the mindset of my class team, I spent another year teaching students with complex and co-morbid conditions.

Up to the year 2020, my work within the Education Ministry was linked with supporting educators in creating meaningful educational experiences for students with disability, especially those with intellectual challenges. In 2010, I finalised my Inclusive Education studies at Masters Level, and for my dissertation, I researched the experiences of students with Autism in relation to literacy exposure and acquisition. Fairness, social justice, equity, and equal opportunities, amongst others, are part of the personal values that I have carried with me in my various positions. Carr (1995) even affirms that as researchers, we cannot carry out educational research which is value-neutral and depersonalised (MacDonald, 1993). Decades ago, Rokeach (1973) upheld that individuals have moral values, and even during research, the person feels inclined to study phenomena that do not feel right at that particular moment. Such moral values combined with social values reflect the manner that the researcher feels that a particular society should function.

One particular experience in my role as Education Officer has piqued my interest in focusing my research on literacy and listening to the students themselves. During my work as an Education Officer in Inclusion, my colleagues and I carried out focus groups with students with ASD, parents, professionals working in the area, NGOs etc. A strong theme that emerged was the aspiration that more students with ASD and intellectual disability finish complementary schooling with key literacy skills and other functional academic skills in order to be skilled for independent living and employment. This close encounter with students and significant stakeholders developed a larger innate desire and sense of urgency to look into the educational journey of these students in the secondary school cycle. The strongest voice came from the students themselves, and I decided that their voices would be my research's main focus. The reality was showing that there are groups of students who are of further risk of exclusion, especially those with intellectual disability.

Finally, I feel that the present study allows me to fuse my interest and knowledge of a speech and language pathologist as well as a warranted special education teacher and even though throughout my career, I was fortunate enough to work in both of these roles, however being able to merge skills throughout the writing journey of this dissertation is very positive and rewarding. At the beginning of this dissertation, I carried out in-depth research locally and on an international level regarding students with intellectual disability and opportunities to be

involved in research and voice their experiences, and this is how the research problem is formulated.

#### 1.4 The Research Problem

Research conducted in the area of study has mainly targeted the minimisation and prevention of challenges related to individuals with intellectual disability at the expense of listening and comprehending the lived experience of these students, creating a disabling effect on the individuals and their families (Goodley, 2000). Dempsey & Nankervis (2005) discussed that research endeavours related to empowerment and educational entitlement have attempted to provide an ideological basis for better living standards for individuals with intellectual disability. Dowse (2009) debates that certain research styles attempt to silence or disregard the voice of students with intellectual disability, leading them to lower standards of education and, thus, poor literacy skills. In this research, I ensured not to employ research styles by which I construct the individual with intellectual disability as problematic but instead sought to be a catalyst for 'support of genuine engagement, authentic participation, inclusive design and strong voice for people with intellectual disability' (Dowse, 2009 p. 143). Such a notion echoes the paradigm I undertook of inclusion research with students with intellectual disability, which is delved into in the next chapter. Furthermore, a thorough comprehension of the students' own perspective on the matter provides insights to stakeholders informing educational policy and practice. In line with Hollomotz's (2017) recommendation, I approached this research with a positive mindset that individuals with intellectual disability can express themselves, whilst as a researcher, I need to explore methods to suit the students' communicative styles.

One particular challenge, internationally and also locally, is the dearth of research that exists on listening to the voices of students with intellectual disability (Okyere et al., 2020), which can possibly inform practicalities and approaches to methods that can support such students (Jolley et al., 2018). Thus, this study will aim to fill in the knowledge gap on disability, particularly intellectual disability. In this research, students with intellectual disability are considered participants rather than subjects, as the research was conducted with them. I had to be mindful of various aspects, including ethical considerations, throughout the research journey. The process presented in this dissertation will also tackle the solutions employed to mitigate these to ensure that the voices of students emerge. In addition, in the present study, I am not presumptuous that I am projecting the voices of the disability because students with

intellectual disability have various perspectives; they are multi-layered and possibly some have different experiences to the ones elicited in this research. The outcomes of this research could possibly inform and influence changes in the learning experiences and inclusive schooling for these students but; above all, I aim to demonstrate that it is worth exploring and listening to the voices of students with intellectual disability and that they should serve as the primary informants for implementing an inclusive educational system.

In the next section, I shall provide information about Malta and its education system. Having lived in Malta all my life, I know certain practices and structures within the Maltese education context are second nature. For this reason, I want to provide a context for my study so the reader to understand better some practices and occurrences that might later be evidenced in this dissertation.

### 1.5 The Maltese education system

Malta is a relatively small island amidst the Mediterranean Sea, with a population of around 445,000 citizens. The education provided on the island accommodates schools which are mainly led by the State, by the Church as well as Private/independent ones. Within the last two decades, the island adopted and legislated various policies related to inclusive education. The language spoken in Malta is, by far, Maltese. However, English and Maltese are the two official languages of the island, with the acquisition of both especially in the literacy context being equally essential. Thus, complementary school up to the age of 16 is geared towards ensuring that all students are capable of conversing, writing and reading in both languages. In state schools, co-education runs from early years to secondary years. Secondary schools nowadays are accessible to all students irrespective of their abilities. Since 2011, secondary schools have adopted a new system that does not exclude students belonging to previously known 'low ability sectors'; instead, the classes are of mixed ability in most subjects. Banding is still being implemented in literacy subjects, English and Maltese, as well as Mathematics. Banding, in the local context, refers to the process of grouping students in bands according to marks and performance in literacy and Maths exams, offering a way of organising classes which avoid the broad range of achievement normally found in mixed-ability on the one hand and the restricted range of achievement in streamed classes, on the other. The other curricular subjects are taught either in English or the Maltese language. The main aim of secondary schooling is to instil skills such as self-learning and problem-solving to prepare them for further

higher education and being citizens in society. High-stakes exams such as the General Certificate of Education Ordinary level (the SEC exams) are often the exams that students sit for at the end of Secondary schooling, which often opens opportunities for further study and employment. In general, Malta, being a bilingual country, has been struggling with students who leave school early and are also ranked as having weak literacy skills (Martinelli, 2016). These inadequate literacy skills are often the culprit of a comparatively larger number of students not sitting for their ordinary-level examinations (Ali & Farrugia, 2013).

With regards to students with disability generally, these are included within the mainstream setting rather than attending alternative settings. However, in Malta, a number of specialised schools are still functioning and are called Resource Centres, catering for cohorts of children from 3 years and beyond the compulsory school age of 16 years. These are equipped with resources and facilities otherwise absent in mainstream schools. Such schools also provide services on a part-time basis to students with individual educational needs.

In the next section, I discuss the significance of this research for the Maltese Education system and how this will contribute to enhancing the experiences of students with intellectual disability in mainstream schools.

## 1.6 The Significance of the study

In Malta, as is the practice in other countries globally, schools aim to create optimal learning environments whereby students with various backgrounds and abilities can acquire skills and knowledge to become competent and skilful individuals in society and their work environment.

Various local policy documents and initiatives sought to support lifelong learning and learning of key skills required in adulthood, including the National Curriculum Framework, the Learning Outcomes Framework as well as the Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools: Route to Quality Inclusion, all of which will be elaborated on in the course of the dissertation. Yet, my previous experience in the sector has shown that some students still struggle to function within the parameters of mainstream schools and still need to discuss inclusive education as the notions characterising inclusion have not yet been fully integrated and practised within our local learning environments. Having been personally involved in the writing of inclusive education policies and documents, it is my conviction that whilst in a policymaker stance, inclusion is progressive and equitable, the practices and experiences going on for the students are still

riddled with inequalities. Consequently, the literacy experiences are analysed through the students' eyes to allow intellectually disabled students to be equitably heard. A secondary school in the Southern part of Malta has been identified as the setting for the research, and eight students participated in this research.

One national concern is the report by Eurostat (2021) that the island has a high percentage dropout rate, leaving Malta the highest percentage of students in Europe who leave school early in 2020. This situation which is afflicting the nation's educational system, should further instigate local researchers to seek to understand the reasons for this and analyse student experiences to mitigate such dropout rates and provide a high-quality educational experience to all students. Brenner-Camp (2011) highlights that in such a situation, educators and management should recognise the importance of creating partnerships with students in mainstream institutions and involving all students in the decision-making process in school practices. This is primarily done through listening to their experiences and feedback whilst focusing on aspects of motivation and engagement and how these affect students' achievement and well-being. Its relevance to students with intellectual disability is heightened because engagement is a tool that enables these students to progress through their school journey and improve academic achievement. Both notions are identified as priority areas and are researched accordingly in this study.

Thus, the proposed study is intended to impact the Maltese educational system positively; specifically, students with intellectual disability focusing on literacy learning. As identified in UNESCO-IBE (2016), two major aspects that reduce poverty and increase sustainable development and economic growth are education and knowledge. "It is the curriculum that is increasingly viewed as foundational to educational reforms aimed at the achievement of high-quality learning outcomes." (UNESCO-IBE, 2016, p.6). High-quality learning outcomes and proper access and engagement with the literacy curriculum for secondary school students with intellectual disability are prerequisites for independence, a better quality of life, active participation in the community and readiness for job opportunities.

In Maltese mainstream schools, learners aged 11 to 16 years follow a curriculum available at different levels, while students who have intellectual disability often follow a Core Curriculum Programme (henceforth CCP) in literacy subjects, mainly English and Maltese. According to a

curriculum document published in 2013 (Ministry for Education & Employment, 2013), the CCP is described as underpinning the learning outcomes of key competencies related to the European Qualifications Framework, indicating targets to be reached by students up to the age of 16 years. Students who show marked improvement can move up to follow other curricula in higher tracks. Students attending the CCP class have varying degrees of Intellectual disability; thus, teaching experiences, styles, classroom tasks, assessments and strategies are differentiated. Therefore, the intention is to guarantee curricular inclusion and 'age and readiness appropriacy' (Ministry for Education & Employment, 2013, p. 3). The programme allows educators to move to earlier stages of development should a particular concept fails to be assimilated or a skill not been honed yet. Learning targets are set to be meaningful for students, and the lesson is presented in an engaged manner and in a context that supports student interests. The CCP is based on the premise of the spiral curriculum whereby learners replicate the study of a topic at different grade levels and increasing difficulty level and depth. Some learners in the CCP class may not be ready to learn a particular concept or master a new skill; thus, the concept of readiness is up to the educator's judgement, and it is in her/his responsibility to identify the focus of the teaching and learning.

Fundamentally, in relation to this Core Curriculum Programme, this study intends to address an existing knowledge gap in the lived literacy experience of students with intellectual disability. Locally, this phenomenon has been largely unresearched and thus, providing a platform for these students to voice their thoughts on the matter is prioritised. The persistent gap also manifests in the suitability of the CCP in general and its functionality for students with intellectual disability.

Consideration to improve practices on literacy learning, especially for students with disability, will support inching closer to reaching aims set in the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024. This framework sets out to: decrease the number of students whose achievements are characterised by low marks, and raise the bar in science subjects as well as literacy and numeracy in order for outcome-related gaps to diminish. The present research also supports the implementation of another Maltese policy, My Journey (MEDE, 2016), which identifies that a one size fits all system in our secondary schools is unfit. Furthermore, the study aligns with the main recommendation of *Education for All* (European Agency for the Development in Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014) to prioritise a relevant

curriculum embedded in quality teaching and learning. This also follows reports that local educational systems are reinforcing more of an integrative approach for some learners with disabilities rather than an inclusive approach. This can be interpreted as having a percentage of students who are not experiencing curricular inclusion but merely joining a class with peers without experiencing meaningful learning. In addition to this, another local challenge highlighted in the audit report that can be addressed through this research is that educators feel unprepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This happens since the current curriculum, even in the most basic stream (the CCP), still presents a challenge for a percentage of children with intellectual disability. In light of all of this, the focus throughout the research will persist on listening to the voices of the students and how their literacy learning is experienced.

### 1.7 Conclusion and Structure of the dissertation

This chapter provides an introduction to the topic of my research whilst setting out its context and its significance for doing the present research. I explore the context of the research and set the stage by introducing the notion of the voice of the student with an intellectual disability. I have also presented the aim and objectives for this research whilst outlining the four research questions that guide my research. The research problem is also essential to understand the context and the need for this research as it contributes to addressing knowledge gaps in the area and merits the conduct of this research. I also identify literacy as the focus of the experiences narrated. A background to the study is provided whereby the relevance of this research in relation to the Maltese educational context is explained. My background with regard to this study is thoroughly provided, highlighting my past experiences and reflecting the medium in which I undertake this research.

In the second chapter, Literature Review, I purposefully present the background of the study and justify the research gap in the area. The main findings from literature and empirical data define key aspects which are eventually applied in the subsequent chapters. The nature of the literature review is narrative, whereby a comprehensive account is presented, highlighting novel research streams and, in the present case, identifying knowledge gaps in the area of intellectual disability. This chapter further seeks to provide a foundational appraisal of existing approaches and theories that will serve as a lens and roadmap throughout the writing process. These theories are explained, and throughout, a connection to the relevance of the study is



identified. These will support the research and prove that the work presented is grounded in established notions.

The third chapter, Methodology, provides the general research strategies utilised for the undertaking of the research. It also identifies the methods and research instruments used accordingly. It starts with identifying the interpretative paradigm that was applied in this research. It also discusses the communicative approach taken with the participants. A justification of methods used and the process of data collection is presented together with the profile of participants who were chosen as my sample. Finally, the framework applied to analyse data is presented, and concepts related to Thematic Analysis are conferred.

Chapter four, Stakeholders' summaries, provides an account of the research data obtained from the various stakeholders. The chunks of data have been reduced to analysable parts through the organisation and summarising process. Data generated involved various sources, including Class Observations, Discussions and notes provided by educators, Student Interviews, Interviews with the Senior Management team in school, and parents as stakeholders.

Chapter five is the Findings and Discussion and includes the findings culminating from the extensive analysis of the data are critically discussed and compared and contrasted with the literature. The emergence of themes in this chapter is fundamental, and a set of themes emerged from the divergence of sources of data collection. The discussion will also deal with how the data obtained add to the body of knowledge and why the research is significant for the Maltese context and on an international level.

Chapter six, the Conclusion, starts with restating the research problem which was addressed, and a summary of the overall arguments and findings are presented. It also provides an overview of the highlights of the research whilst identifying the current gap in research or knowledge. Broader practical and theoretical implications of the study are presented. New questions for possible future research are posed in this section.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

The present inclusive research is related to the area of disability studies in education. It focuses specifically on Curricular aspects and disability activism, and the intention is to allow the student voices with intellectual disability to emerge. This research intends to address the knowledge gap regarding the experiences of students with intellectual disability. Various decisions have shaped this chapter throughout the writing journey. I felt this chapter was always a work in progress, and was not finalised until the end. The process of scoping review and identifying evidence related to the area under study was a laborious one which involved various steps leading to the present literature review. Initially having based and formulated research questions guided me as to which literature justifies the inclusion of literature. I have used comprehensive and systematic strategies to find the required evidence as well as possibly identifying knowledge gaps. Peer reviewed articles, journals and also the latest books and literature on main areas were considered. On various aspects the recency factor was considered and literature was sought until the last few weeks of the research process and finalizing of the document. Using appropriate search terms related to student voice, literacy, engagement and intellectual disability was an important step to directing me to literature which is of relevance and of high quality as this also affect the credibility of the present work. This process allowed me to summarize research carried out in the area and linking prior findings to this present research whilst integrating knowledge gaps that are available. I have started with visiting the University of Malta in order to identify if there are any studies relating to the Core Curriculum Programme or listening to voices of students in Malta even though this resulted in the negative, confirming the gap in the local scenario. Considering that my research questions were quite established inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined and thus the searches carried out in the databases reflected that. Reading title and abstract of the articles consulted was an important step in deciding which papers are related to the study. The extraction of data was carried out through categories including student voice, intellectual disability, social model of disability, engagement, literacy and parental experiences.

I start the literature review by identifying the main notions related to the research: the concept of student voice, and the concept of engagement and literacy in a wider sense. The aspect of student voice in relation to intellectual disability was prioritised as the crux of the study is as such. Definitions related to intellectual disability and understanding more about the participants and challenges related to the condition are explored in this chapter to provide a context. I have also delved into a review of the literature pertaining to listening to the voices of students with intellectual disability in relation to their educational experiences. Students with intellectual disability have analogous lower achievement levels in literacy in comparison to other students with disabilities (Wei, Blackorby & Schiller, 2011). I consider literacy learning as another focus of this study, and the review in this chapter deals with it thoroughly. Literacy learning provides students with an intellectual disability the possibility to accompany their peers in life experiences, have employment accessibility, cultivate social relations whilst having an enhanced quality of life (Cihak & Smith, 2018). This also enables the students to improve skills and competences required in adult life. (Browder & Spooner, 2014). In order to continue accessing literacy learning, it is important that students are actively engaged in the classrooms. I have considered engagement as another core focus of this study as it is another means used by students to communicate the nature of the literacy experienced in the classroom. Greenstein (2014) discusses that when there is student engagement, and a motivating learning experience, the students approach learning in a more enthused way. In relation to this, Allan (2008) discusses that students with disability in secondary schools are often feeling alienated and may experience feelings of failure and thus listening to the perspectives and experiences of the students themselves, together with observing their engagement in class, provides a more holistic picture of these experiences. In the last part of the literature review, I explore literature related to parents' perspectives and experiences on literacy learning in their children's educational journey. This focus is essential to attain a thorough understanding on how such students experience and engage with the literacy curriculum.

Finally, this research and development of the literature are done in the spirit of the Global Education Monitoring Report (2020), affirming that students should be considered as the central stakeholders in decisions and whatever educational institutions implement. It further adds that practitioners and educational researchers ought to respect this and take account of

the learners' perspectives in their research. All of the decisions carried out in this research in terms of choice of literature and methodology used are based on the social model of disability, which will be initially discussed as the theoretical framework.

## 2.2 Theoretical framework underpinning this research

I have given considerable thought to the theoretical framework that drove this study, which spans the entire process from the idea's conception to the final stages of writing it. The main intention has been to holistically approach this study and have students with intellectual disability be the main narrators of their literacy experiences rather than solely hearing these from parental or educators' perspectives. This approach enables students in interpreting their literacy experience and provides student-centred insight (Morse, 2012). This research allowed me to gain thorough insight of the realities that students experience. I have applied the social model theory of disability. In the social model of disability theory, the main notions of relevance to this research involves participation of students with intellectual disability, equity, removal of barriers, and social justice. This research will enable for any barriers and inequalities to come to light in order to be eradicated, whilst aligning with instigating change and improving literacy curricular accessibility for these students.

Berghs et al. (2019) claims that a disability model "should be a means to change society (and its collective values), in addition to upholding the human dignity of disabled people's lives in every aspect of society" (p.1037) As a theoretical framework, the social model of disability clearly distinguishes between an impairment and a disability by identifying disability as arising from a social environment not fitting the needs of a human body Goering (2015). Shakespeare & Watson (2022) discuss this as a shift in focus from how the physical impairments can be changed into how life of these individuals can be changed. Hughes et al., (2012) discuss that "The social model remained wedded, pretty implacably, to its original insight and, more importantly ... to its practical mission which was to dismantle the barriers that blocked disabled people's participation in society" (p. 310). It is further discussed that the understanding of disability as reflected in society is going to have a direct and strong impact on the lives of individuals with disability (Levitt, 2017)

Levitas (2013) recognises that this is a utopic notion reflecting how barriers and negative experiences can be eliminated. Shakespeare & Watson (2022) delineates this as relocation of

the issue of disability away from the person and closer to the wider social structure whilst attempting to change practices and altering discourse in relation to disability. Berghs et al. (2019) also links denial of fundamental human rights for individuals with disability to a model of disability that aims at creating change and creating a more inclusive society. Furthermore, these authors specify that identifying a model like the social model of disability is a form of justice related to the rights that these individuals have. According to Riddle (2020) the social model of disability allows for an empowerment stance and cause a mobilisation of persons with disability and it corresponds more specifically to the real experiences of these individuals and attempting to identify the origin of the barriers or oppressions experienced. Haegele & Hodge (2016) also determines that when society practices aspects of incapability, neglect or unwillingness to eliminate barriers in the environment this will contribute to excluding the individuals. Equally disabling is what Palmer & Harley (2012) describes as the perception that individuals with impairments are unable or have a lesser ability to be active members of the society.

As per Goering (2015) discuss that in various narratives based on autobiographies, the impairment often results in disadvantages related to the attitudes in the environment which is often unwelcoming and on stricter insistence on the functioning level and thus in this respect utilising this model in this research will point at aspects to ways how social norms can be oppressive and disabling to the students within a school environment. It further states that research should be spurred toward ways, which are social and technological in nature in order to ensure that inclusion is facilitated (Goering, 2015). Uptake of the social model of disability within the secondary school educational context is definitely deserving of more uptake. In fact Shakespeare & Watson (2022) states that research related to exploring the lived experiences of disability and exploring disabling barriers are aspects which impact each other and they support this kind of disability research.

In Gallagher et al., (2017) it is discussed that as a social model, it is socially constructed as the person's attributes cannot be separated from aspects in the environment that contribute to the meaning. Thus, experiences of students are meant to be all different and it is important to determine how society will respond to these. They further discuss that in an educational context, when doing disability educational research, students should be considered as capable

of exceeding the impairments presented with. They also highlight that students are to be considered as an essential source of knowledge and has the required expertise the researcher is seeking to elicit. Biklen (2006) also notes that presuming competence is the approach that should be taken whilst questioning always if a particular phenomenon is working for the individual in question. Relevant to this study is the focus and a closer look into educators' training paths and how these should move away from deficit model and be more critical in their teaching and learning (Gallagher et al., 2017)

As Freire (2006) points out, "It is true that education is not the ultimate lever for social transformation, but without it, transformation cannot occur" (p.69). The importance of inclusive environments is well-documented for students with various disabilities, including those with intellectual disability. School communities are required to equip themselves and provide meaningful lessons in view of these ever-changing school communities. The social model of disability was identified as one of the theories as the principles it represents encompass inclusion and social justice and has various tenants that allow a critical analysis of the educational structures in terms of marginalisation of certain groups. It also has an asset-oriented approach at its core and recognises that students with disabilities are knowledgeable (Graham & Iannacci, 2013)

In the present educational research, a social model of disability will be applied to evaluate any power dynamics which are present in order to create more fair societies (Kincheloe, 2005) to ultimately identify any aspects of oppression and inequalities in the educational context of the students with intellectual disability (Giroux, 1997). As discussed by Wink (2000), one has to acknowledge that a multitude of realities shapes life experiences of individuals and this theory will allow me to point out and reject any structures or pedagogies used which might marginalise a group of students whilst favouring some (Kumashiro & Ngo, 2007). Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2007) further asserts that educational contexts such as schools often perpetuate oppressiveness through a top-down process in a decision, making a curriculum which is prescriptive in nature. This should be an eye-opener to any injustice and practices which are contradictory in nature and instead lead to activism in favour of marginalised groups (McLaren, 2007). Through this research, I will be able to unpack and investigate any inequalities which may cause the marginalisation of students with intellectual disability in the context of literacy lessons in secondary mainstream schools. With the proposed research, it will be

possible to have educators, parents and students themselves thinking in a critical manner to contest any myths, deeply rooted assumptions and oppressions defined by voices which are more dominant in the school context. It will also allow me to observe if teaching in inclusive settings is moving beyond Freire's concept (1971) of banking of education whereby educators disseminate knowledge that passive students receive and be able to challenge educators who still practice traditional methods to shift them out of their comfort zone and apply pedagogies which can meet the needs of students with intellectual disability.

The social model of disability lends itself to the principles of inclusive education and firmly rejects the notion that the individual has a deficit. Instead, it focuses on the notion that a disabled identity is a social construct (Graham & Iannacci, 2013). The social model perspective will be applied in this research, and as a theory, whilst it does not deny the impact and presence of impairment, however, puts the onus on society to eliminate barriers so the impairment is accommodated. The environment around the individual, such as schools, may include physical barriers, attitudinal as well as societal barriers. Removal of these enables persons with disabilities to be on an equal basis with others in terms of opportunities and experiences. In fact, Bolt (2004) identifies the social model of disability as embraced within the consultation process with students with intellectual disability as it considers the learner as being disabled by barriers and attitudes within the society rather than by the impairment. The theory identifies disability as an oppression created by society, i.e., the injustice which is socially produced. I decided to use this model as, from the outset, there is a core dissimilarity between the impairment and the disability concept. The research is also guided by values related to the emancipatory paradigm, which can lead to the empowerment of the students themselves through the opportunities of voicing their experiences. The social model of disability also imprints in the choice of research methods as these need to be inclusive, allowing students to have equal opportunity in voicing their experiences (Wilson, 2004) whilst allowing flexibility of approaches (Lewis & Porter, 2007). Using various methods in the research approach will avoid the limiting effects of a single method is used, referred as 'tokenistic' by Clark (2006).

One important aspect relating to the terminology used in this dissertation is related to the social model of disability. This model has an understanding that disability is created by society due to barriers in the students' environment. Thus, for appropriateness' sake and in line with the social model of disability, using the term intellectual impairment is fitter. This is because,

in following the social model of disability, an understanding of the difference between impairment and disability is essential. In Maltese documentation, such as the Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools (MEDE, 2019), the term 'intellectual disability' is utilised. This term has been widely used in educational psychology reports consulted during the process of identifying participants. Thus, this use of the term has informed my decision to use intellectual disability instead of intellectual impairment. Nonetheless, in the research, I will still explore barriers and question the assumptions of stakeholders involved in the literacy education of these students. In the first part of the review, I discuss the students' voices as a concept and analyse notions relating to intellectual disability and their participation in voicing their thoughts and experiences in the literature.

### 2.3 Conceptualizing students' voices.

The concept of students' voices is a cross-cutting notion and intertwines with the evolvement of children's rights. Throughout the present research, I use the term students' voices interchangeably with pupils' voices, learners' voices or participants' voices as in the literature. Throughout the research and for the purpose of this literature review, the "multiplicity of students' views, as opposed to the collectiveness of voice" (Messiou, 2019, p.2) will be utilized to represent the diverse voices of the students. Consequently, the term students' voices will be preferred over student's voice as the latter sometimes indicate collectiveness (Reay, 2006) or a common student voice which is not the case with the students with intellectual disability participating in the present research. It is believed that each voice has an opinion and a perspective and is taking part actively (Cook-Sather, 2006). The children's rights approach entitles children to participate in policy and decision-making; however, as discussed by Mangiaracina et al. (2021), various countries struggled with this due to the passive roles of children and their marginal position in communities. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) advocacy for children's rights and acted as a catalyst in the international fora to have their views given due weight. Unfortunately, even though students' voice is a manifestation of inclusion measures, important international policies such as the Incheon Declaration (Mundial & UNICEF, 2016) fails to mention the concept of students' voices even though it commits to ensuring inclusive and equitable education by 2030. On a positive note, in various countries, there has been an ever-increasing interest in cultivating this notion of listening to the participants' voices for various purposes, including legislation, politics and



education (Tangen, 2008). In his definition of the concept of voice, Britzman (1989) refers to it as 'a commitment to voice attests to the right of speaking and being represented' (p. 40). Much relevant to the present study is the conceptual metaphor used by Arnot et al. (2004), which mentions the concept of 'volume', which identifies the ability of the individual to express himself, which is related to the extent these voices are actually heard and by whom. This further links to the power attributed to the voice, which can support shaping and controlling one's life and how power is exercised (Hadfield & Haw, 2001). Rudd (2007) discusses that the conceptualization of students' voices in particular, is strongly linked to changes in the educational contexts, with students being the experts and valued for their insider perspective of the educational experience (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). Messiou (2018) describes that when two studies were carried out, and students were given the possibility to voice their opinions in relation to inclusion in their schools, this gave them the possibility to have a discussion on the teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom. Consequently, the students felt part of the learning process, and engagement was more noticeable besides improving teacher-student relationships.

Another important milestone worth mentioning in the conceptualization of the right of the child to be heard is General comment number 12 (2009), which appealed to take further measures. These measures involve children or groups of children who are at risk of being excluded socially, including children with disabilities (Save the children, 2011). In the report entitled *Evaluation of Legislation, Policy and Practice on Child Participation in the European Union (EU)* (European Commission, 2015), children have prioritised education to express their views; however, the *Save the Children Report* (2011) affirmed that this concept was elusive for the majority of children as listening to their voices was mostly impeded by factors including attitudes, political issues and cultural practices. Mangiaracina et al. (2021) further highlights that when these cultural practices and political practices start changing, an empowering process will allow children to effectively voice their experiences and views and will be truly considered active stakeholders. Promoting the children's involvement in inclusive education is empowering, and this happens when students are included in debates and decision-making processes about what is rightfully theirs, i.e., an inclusive education system which provides them with quality education, equal opportunities, a barrier-free system and acquisition of skills including social ones (Mangiaracina et al., 2021). In relation to inclusive education, Article 24

of the UNCRPD declares that students have a right to it and that inclusive education will prepare them for independent living and in gaining employability skills. It requires that such students are listened to as well as have an active role in matters that have an effect on their life, such as school and education. Taub & Foster (2020) attributes considerable importance to inclusive education as it is “a key driver for inclusion into the rest of the community” (p.276). In relation to inclusive education and learners, Prunty et al. (2012) specifically assert that the views of the students should challenge as well as inform practices within schools and policy related to them rather than leaving students in the periphery of planning and decisions related to their educational experiences. Davis & Watson (2000) argue that frequently the capability of students with an intellectual disability is not recognised by other individuals, and they are often denied the opportunity to voice their perspectives. He further asserts the importance of educators and researchers exploring ‘avenues of communication’ (Davis & Watson, 2000 p.220) to elicit their views. The voices of the students concerned are often silent within the context of accessibility in education, curricular access as well as disability activism have been ignored (Dee-Price, 2019). According to Light & McNaughton (2015), when such student voices are not sought, this result in limited knowledge on what barriers are faced by these students in relation to their educational access, vocation as well community inclusion.

The concept of voice was also enacted in terms of its functional uses by Hadfield & Haw (2001). They refer to three particular functions, being authoritative, critical and therapeutic. The present study seeks to explore the voices of students with intellectual disability for two main reasons, authoritative and critical. The former intends to represent a group of students with similar profiles, i.e. has an intellectual disability and currently attending mainstream secondary school, but also the latter, critical, as it aims to represent the voices which often go unheard and experiences of this group might challenge views, perspectives, policies and also educational practices. In the conceptualization of voice, literature also refers to verbal expression as the assumed mode of communicating. In this research, verbal expression was considered a privilege, but my intention was to also provide a platform for those students whose speech is not necessarily a reliable mode of communication and thus, a broader notion of voice was kept central (Mazzei, 2009). This broader notion is referred to as ‘listening in the cracks’ (Mazzei, 2009, p.3), and this includes silence, gestures, and behaviours which might be resistant at times. Students have the possibility to choose the manner in which they would like

to communicate with adults (Holland et al., 2008). Behaviours are also indicative of the experience that these students experience and can be reacting to the oppression that they experience (MacLure et al., 2010).

In the following section, I discuss the notion of intellectual disability and its connotations in relation to the present research.

## 2.4 Intellectual disability

Intellectual disability has been given various labels and definitions over the years and this was done to provide a description to the perception of cognition and potential of these individuals (Keith & Keith, 2013). Shogren et al. (2017) focus on the link and interaction that individuals with intellectual disability have with their surroundings and the persons they are in contact with. The World Health Organisation (WHO) published a worldwide definition of intellectual disability which is

“A significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information and to learn and apply new skills (impaired intelligence). This results in a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning), and begins before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development” (WHO 2018).

Disability is, therefore, dependent on the extent to which societal inclusion and child’s participation are affected. The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) defines intellectual disability as featuring challenges in the intellectual and conceptual functioning, adaptive behaviours as well as in the social domain (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (2020) defines intellectual disability as having limitations in intellectual functions as well as adaptive behaviours, all of which start before the age of eighteen years. This latter definition embraces the notion of existing barriers and experiences outside of the person with a disability, and as Weller (2011) states, these align with the social model of disability and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). As per McKenzie et al. (2016), the incidence of intellectual disability is around 1-2% of the population. Children diagnosed with intellectual disability have difficulties related to intellectual functioning, including planning, judgement, academic learning, and reasoning. They also have difficulties in adaptive functioning, which affects life skills and have challenges

in becoming independent in certain aspects, e.g., communication, social involvement as well as living independently (Saad & ElAdl, 2019).

For this reason, and together with international documentation, Intellectual disability is usually synonymous with incompetence and thus, stigmas often result (Luckasson et al., 2002). Ungurean (2021) further discusses that due to this medicalized and negative connotation, the qualities and potential of the individual are often overseen. For the purpose of this research, I am defining intellectual disability as difficulties in mental ability secondary to other conditions such as Autism and Down Syndrome. Such students with intellectual disability have presented with intellectual, practical and social functioning challenges, such as learning, performing personal care and school tasks and understanding social cues, respectively. In the present study, intellectual disability is also manifested in delays related to receptive and expressive speech and language development as well as reading and writing challenges. I have also considered the notion of Intellectual Quotient (IQ) to determine the eligibility of participants in the study as reflected in their educational, psychological reports. Molnar (2016) asserts that there is a universal acceptance that intellectual disability is characterised by a below-average measure of cognitive functioning which is usually reflected in an IQ test, with scores of around 70-75 indicating this limitation. This is documented in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (5<sup>th</sup> ed), which explains intellectual function that is usually measured using a psychometric test of intelligence together with a description of adaptive functioning. The description of adaptive functioning determines the degree of support that students with intellectual disability have in learning environments and the community. The child's IQ test on its own is not reliable to provide such detail, and this has been recently encompassed in the diagnosis criteria. Such descriptions are also fundamental especially because IQ scoring reduces validity close to the lower end of the range. Thus, severity is determined through the level of adaptive functioning. The following are descriptions with regard to the various levels of functioning in intellectual disability.

#### 2.4.1 Mild intellectual disability

As discussed in Havercamp & Nevill (2018), mild intellectual disability has an adaptive functioning score of 55-70 and usually appears like typically developing peers. Difficulties are usually identified first when they start schooling as they achieve mostly all developmental

milestones, including motor skills, language and social skills. They may find challenges in literacy and numeracy, such as number recognition and letter recognition. With progression in schooling, concepts become more challenging and fall behind in academic skills (Havercamp & Nevill, 2018). At the secondary level, they usually master basic skills related to literacy and numeracy, but advanced academic progress is limited. These students usually require support in certain situations. In the conceptual domain, abstract thinking and planning might be challenging to develop, and their thinking skills tend to be more concrete. Conversational skills and understanding of social cues may be immature compared to peers. Usually, aspects related to personal care are age expected, but support might be needed in daily living such as managing money (Havercamp & Nevill, 2018).

#### 2.4.2 Moderate intellectual disability

As discussed in Havercamp & Nevill (2018), moderate intellectual disability has an adaptive functioning score of 40 to 55, and usually, difficulties related to various domains start appearing at an early stage. These include language delays and delay in interaction with others besides showing less interest in surrounding events. Intellectual disability is often identified in toddlerhood, and limited language skills are the first indicators. When schooling starts, language is usually still limited, speaking in simple phrases and not using full grammatical sentences (Havercamp & Nevill, 2018). Difficulties persist even when exposed to literacy and numeracy skills. In secondary schooling, whilst being able to communicate properly, they also show basic reading and writing competencies and skills are at the primary level indicating a challenge in the conceptual domain. In the social domain, skills related to decision-making and social judgement is often inadequate. With regard to adaptive skills, more practice and time might be required to establish these (Havercamp & Nevill, 2018).

#### 2.4.3 Severe intellectual disability

As discussed in Havercamp & Nevill (2018), children with severe intellectual disability have an adaptive functioning score of 25-40 and usually show early delays in infancy usually noticeable in motor skills such as walking. These may have a disorder or a genetic condition which contributes to the delays exhibited. In primary schooling, some may be able to walk independently and carry out some adaptive skills, including using the toilet. Single words may remain the primary mode of communication. In secondary schooling, their verbal expression

persists in being limited, whilst their receptive language is better developed. They usually find challenges related to literacy and numeracy and struggle with basic daily living tasks and would need to be supervised during these tasks (Havercamp & Neville, 2018).

#### 2.4.4 Profound intellectual disability

Profound intellectual disability in children has an adaptive functioning score of less than 25 is often identified in infancy, and this is almost always accompanied by various biological conditions. They almost always show multiple biological variances and health problems, which may indicate neurological damage. At the beginning of primary schooling, they may be capable of carrying out tasks such as sitting up, imitating sounds and understanding simple instructions. They often continue to require support from other individuals throughout their lives. Conceptual skills are usually more related to concrete rather than symbolic such as letters and numbers. Limited comprehension of symbolic communication is often present and non-verbal means are usually used to communicate.

According to Ungurean (2021), there has been considerable advancement in identifying the genetic cause of intellectual disability. It further states that around 75% and 50% of severe and mild intellectual disability have a biological basis, respectively. Intellectual disability is also exacerbated by psycho-social aspects such as low social status, aggressive tendencies, neglect and abuse by parents and poor adult-child relationships (Gibbs & Hilburn, 2020). The range of strengths and needs posed by intellectual disability has considerable relevance to this study, and the theoretical foundations of the disability in relation to research are thoroughly discussed next. As discussed earlier, it is my intention that through this study, I also analyse processes related to the involvement of students with intellectual disability in the research process itself, and thus this will be an area which is further explored in the methodology section. In my next section, I explore previous research carried out whereby students with intellectual disability have been given the opportunity to voice their experiences or preferences. This is of utmost relevance to contrast and compare with the data generated in this research.

#### 2.5 Intellectual disability – voicing preferences

Various constructivist methodologies sought to keep students with intellectual disability as the focus of the process involved in teaching and learning in the quest to identify their dream class

and their ideal lessons (Kurt 2016). When students with intellectual disability were involved in research on curriculum content, these students voiced their preference to learn the same content as their peers, with the educator giving an adapted explanation and repetition of the concepts being a core factor (Shogren et al., 2015). Other studies have identified that UDL is the supported notion in mainstream classes with students with intellectual disability (Lowrey et al., 2017). Research conducted by Datta & Taukdar (2017) and supported studies by Fajardo et al. (2014) revealed that students have preferences to adapted texts in order to be more easily read and accessed. Shogren et al. (2015) also documented that students with intellectual disability wanted teachers who are patient and who are ready to help when the content is hard. This research has similar conclusions to Boynton & Mahon (2018) who determined patience and understanding as two important characteristics of teachers who work with students with disabilities. Nonetheless, knowledge of how to create learning experiences is a requisite of the educator. In this regard, research has also concluded that educators find it more challenging to adapt literacy curricula to students with intellectual disability rather than physical and sensory disability (Tones et al., 2017). Furthermore, training is needed to specifically support students with intellectual disability in the class (Subban et al., 2018), especially in relation to inclusive pedagogies. This investment in teacher knowledge is crucial as students have reported feeling more engaged when teachers felt confident, had high expectations, was readily available to support students and had a positive approach towards students (Shogren et al., 2015)

Childhood studies, especially in the context of education, have promoted the use of student interviews as an approach to research, and it links to the notion of listening to the students' voices. Of more relevance to this research are past studies which deal with instances where students were interviewed to give their perspectives on the curriculum and teaching of academic subjects. Research has tried to understand aspects such as the literacy experiences of adolescents with severe disabilities. However, this was done by analysing seventy-five literacy tasks in terms of content, engagement, teaching location and resources used (Ruppar, 2015). Copeland et al. (2021) carried out related research but took the educators' viewpoint in addressing literacy learning with students with complex disability needs. Various researchers have used students' voices to highlight conditions and procedures in the process of actually including students in research and listening to their voices. These include studies such as Cook-

Sather (2002) and Fielding (2001), with the former focusing on the student position and power relations between the student and teacher and the latter dealing mainly with the rhetoric of students' voices and identifying aspects of who allowed to speak and who will listen and how powerful a voice can be. This notion of power is infiltrated in discussions related to inclusive schooling and disability, and this will be explored next in relation to eliciting students' voices in the methodology section. In the section that follows, I discuss the learning opportunities and environment that are supportive to students with intellectual disability and the effects of possible barriers within the learning context.

## 2.6 Intellectual disability and learning in inclusive settings

An increasing number of students with Intellectual disability are learning with their peers in an inclusive learning environment (Williamson et al., 2020). This environment provides the optimal educational opportunity for developing students with intellectual disability (Kramer et al., 2021). Research such as DeBruin (2020) agrees and affirms the development of social skills and affective aspects that support learning. Successful inclusive education is characterised by the knowledge of peers about the condition (Alnahdi et al., 2020) and the attitudes of these peers (Freer, 2021). This is also evident when educators embrace the principles of inclusion and can recognise its benefits (Heyder et al., 2020). This does not hold if educators have prejudices and negative connotations about students with intellectual disability (Karman et al., 2022). These are often evident when the individuals lack knowledge about the student with an intellectual disability, and consequently, it affects attitudinal change (Marom et al., 2007).

In the local scenario, students who have an intellectual disability are predominantly receiving education in mainstream schools even though they may be segregated for academic learning, and they often join peers in experiences which are not academic such as break time. Even though these students attend mainstream schools, however inclusive approaches in the teaching and learning of students with an intellectual disability are the exception rather than the norm (Carnovali, 2017). In the Maltese school where this study is situated, students with intellectual disability have a separate curriculum – the Core Curriculum Programme. This scenario creates a link between the segregated class in a mainstream school and possible lower attainment expectations for students with intellectual disability (Hanreddy & Ostlund, 2020). This is defined as institutional ableism, of which teaching and learning practices are discriminatory in terms of its structure as well as practice (Beratan, 2008). Thus, educators



have to apply an anti-ableist approach and educate these students with intellectual disability through a critical lens to ensure that expectations are kept high. Da-Fonte & Barton-Arwood (2017) also adds that even to date, mainstream teachers still feel unprepared to teach students with Intellectual disability in an inclusive classroom, and thus, an alternate curriculum is often considered the best option. This view is entrenched in the philosophy of ableism, where structures in schools promote the notion of having an alternative curriculum in an alternative setting in the spirit of providing an individualised academic experience. As reflected by the situation in Malta, students with intellectual disability are supported by a Learning Support Educator (LSE) in class, and instruction provided in the Core Curriculum Programme, including Literacy, is at times done by this LSE. This scenario echoes Giangreco's research, where he concludes that whilst these LSEs receive minimal training to prepare them for their role, some after-effects may be negative even if this is unintentional (Giangreco, Broer & Suter, 2011; Giangreco, 2010). In terms of pedagogy used, it was highlighted that when tasks focus on taking care of self, isolated literacy skills and concrete understanding of concepts, this moves away from promoting inclusion of students with intellectual disability (Taub et al., 2019).

According to Dessemontet et al. (2012), when the educational context is inclusive, mainstream schools, rather than segregated, students with intellectual disability experience beneficial developmental aspects in literacy. As discussed by Rao et al. (2017), a framework which can potentially support more inclusivity of students with intellectual disability is the Universal Design of Learning (UDL), and this can provide learning pathways which are flexible for the individual needs and the individual learning targets (CAST, 2019). UDL has already started benefitting students with intellectual disability (Capp, 2017), and it is thus fundamental that the design of literacy instruction is based on the implementation of UDL to fully consider the needs of such students. Meyer, Rose & Gordon (2014) sustains that UDL can be applied for various aspects, including learning methods, targets as well as assessments, ensuring participation, progression in skills as well positive outcomes. UDL encompasses the planning and design of teaching and learning in terms of engagement as a fundamental aspect, together with representation and action (Rao et., 2017). This ensures a wider inclusion for students with significant disabilities, including those with moderate to severe intellectual disability, leading to more positive experiences in the inclusive class and consequently better outcomes academically, socially and behaviourally (Sailor & Mc Cart (2014). Wehmeyer (2006) has further

highlighted the importance of students with intellectual disability having experiences which are meaningful. This allows for content and skill learning. In order for these experiences to be relevant, some practices are necessary. These include the use of visual systems, employing positive reinforcement strategies, as well as systematic instruction (Browder et al., 2014)

There are a number of other pedagogies that are responsive to the needs of students with Intellectual disability. These include project-based learning as well as embedded instruction. The former learning approach is described by Bell (2010) as an inquiry model whereby students learn and work towards developing a resolution to a real-life problem, supporting real-world understandings (Mkrttchian, 2018) as well as employing a stronger approach that does not rely on skills taught in isolation (Hanreddy & Ostlund, 2020). Using embedded instruction as another possible approach continues to build on the remediation model, which focuses on an area that needs to catch up, like typically developing peers. It is characterised by providing opportunities for students to practice and evidence their learning, individualised support for learning as well as curriculum adaptations and modifications (Downing, 2010). The use of formative assessment techniques is a well-supported strategy in inclusive learning environments (Hattie, 2012), as it provides educators of students with intellectual disability a tool to gauge skills and understanding, providing a snap-shot of the level of that particular student.

Following a thorough overview of the learning context of students with intellectual disability and considering the curricular focus of this study is Literacy, I will explore this concept further in the next section.

## 2.7 Literacy as a concept

Literacy, a broad concept indeed, is mostly related to the encompassment of the ability to read and write. These literacy skills are often viewed as important factors for individuals to progress in their knowledge acquisition and to fully participate in society (UNESCO, 2004). Nowadays, literacy is defined as a fundamental human right rather than a privilege (UNESCO, 2014). Lunsford et al. (1990) refer to this right as being denied to a number of individuals, including those with intellectual disability due to perceived incapability of learning literacy skills and thus, denial in access was the resulting situation (Copeland & Keefe, 2007). Papen (2005) determines that it is of high value to be literate in society; however, the concept is dominated

by school-based notions characterised by basic skills mastery and standardised tests and examinations. Morgan et al. (2011) asserts this concept and the challenges it creates for students with intellectual disability mainly due to their literacy levels which do not conform with the standards. It is further exacerbated by the society around them that assumes that these individuals with intellectual disability have accomplished a basic level of literacy. A contributing factor is narrow definition that literacy poses and the need to broaden the concept for these students to be valued as literate participants in their community. A broadened definition of literacy is provided by Keefe & Copeland (2011), stating that this notion changes across an individual's life and its existence is on a continuum which can range to various principles, including relating with others, transmitting and receiving information as well as empowerment potential. An analysis of the literacy instruction indicates that students with intellectual disability have been routinely provided with limited literacy instruction or excluded (Agran, 2011), leaving this population of students lacking functional capabilities in society. Literacy for learners with intellectual disability should directly ameliorate the quality of their life and provide them with gains in both academic aspects as well as social aspects. (Westling & Fox, 2009)

In this study, I will seek to understand the concept of literacy being employed at schools in relation to students with intellectual disability. Historically, the definition of literacy has transformed itself to include more diversification and mastering of skills that go beyond decoding (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004). Various ethnographic studies have shown that the transformation was unheeded with students with intellectual disability (Chopra, 2001) and instead is still deeply rooted in the basic mastery stage (Katims, 2000). This research will allow me to explore the perspective through which literacy is taught. I want to particularly focus on whether it is taught through a teacher-centred approach where students are passive and characterised by direct strategies or whether a more engaging medium is used. Several lines of evidence suggest that this former method has proved to be beneficial in achieving functional literacy skills in a percentage of students with intellectual disability (Allor et al., 2010). Katims (2000) draws a distinction between mastering basic skills and being engaged in literacy processes which are used for communication and pleasure purposes and call for the necessary action to broaden the concept of literacy social practices. Morgan et al., (2011) stress the need for this in order 'to ensure that literacy teaching and learning is relevant and meaningful in the

lives of adults with intellectual disability' (p. 113). In order to evaluate the meaningfulness and engagement happening within the literacy learning concept, an ideological model for literacy (Street, 1984) is applied, which posits skills learnt are dependent on the learning context. Lonsdale & McCurry (2004) discuss that in order to learn meaningfulness and engagement level, one can find challenges as students with intellectual disability may have challenges and barriers in narrating a story verbally, but this should not preclude from listening to these experiences, and instead, the ideological model calls for ways to explore and adopt in order to extract these narratives.

In the next section, I will be taking a closer look at the specifics of literacy learning with students with intellectual disability and how literature explores this notion.

## 2.8 Intellectual disability and literacy learning

Literacy learning has been generally identified as a priority in the curriculum for learners with disabilities, especially those with severe challenges (Agran, 2011). Local and international policies have rightfully set the expectation for literacy learning for all students, including those with intellectual disability. Literacy instruction has previously been disregarded for this population of students for various reasons. Browder et al. (2009) identify three reasons to explain this scenario. Initially is the bias of perceived denial of competencies that students with intellectual disability have, i.e., the assumption that students with low IQ would be unable to learn literacy skills required for reading. Secondly, such students are considered capable of learning basic things such as functional sight reading of certain words and fail to achieve skills related to decoding. Lastly, the notion that speech and language impairments are often delayed in students with intellectual disability, and thus this is considered as precluding literacy instruction. Research in the past two decades have indicated that adolescents with intellectual disability are actually able to reach high achievement levels in reading, which is much more than expected (Allor et al., 2014). They continue to expand on this notion by suggesting that when various components are integrated, learners with intellectual disability become more independent. These include phonics, phonemic and phonological awareness together with functional reading. For students with moderate to severe intellectual disability, literacy learning is done through the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (Ruppar, 2015) as literacy components of reading and writing and communication, listening and speaking are inexorably linked (Sturm & Clendon, 2004)

The development of literacy competencies in students has been identified as critical as it serves as a foundation for other academic and life skills. Literacy competencies encompass reading and writing skills as well as the use of language both in the receptive and verbal aspect. Kozol (1985) describes literacy skills as being significant for all children, whether they have a disability or not. Since the early 1990s, a forefront collective awareness started to emerge on the risks involved of insufficient literacy ability. Students with intellectual disability, especially those with a moderate and severe disability has rarely been considered in this regard (Erickson et al., 2010). However, recently more effort has been employed to find ways to provide comprehensive, appropriate and functional literacy experiences to such students. Literacy instruction for students with intellectual disability needs to support challenges in various literacy skills, including decoding words, word recognition, and understanding of texts which are often present in students with intellectual disability (Griffen, 2017). For this group of students, ensuring access to literacy and supporting reading skills development will ensure gaining and maintaining employment (Kutner et al., 2007) and will allow them to function competently as adults through the development of independent living skills, vocational skills as well as communication and social skills (Ford, Davern & Schnorr, 2001). For a systematic advancement in literacy achievement, students need to be engaged throughout their literacy lessons (Kim et al., 2016), as this has been proven to be directly related to meaning construction (Parsons et al., 2015). Furthermore, Browder (2001) asserts that a subject such as literacy should have functional skills embedded within its teaching and learning as these skills will help students with intellectual disability become productive citizens and supports outcomes when they finish their complementary schooling (Bouck & Joshi, 2012). Powell-Smith et al. (2008) state that when students have gained functional living skills, this opens more opportunities for social relations and acceptance. Use of digital platforms increases the opportunities for interactions and according to Caton & Chapman (2016), literacy skills are fundamental to enable individuals with intellectual disability to create connections. Ultimately, the aim is to become competent adults, involved community citizens and productive members of the society (Ysseldyke et al., 2006). In supported living environments, especially when independent living is not possible, literacy skills are fundamental in daily decision making, and leads to an enhanced quality of life in the various environments (Evans & Fredericks, 1991).

In order for students with intellectual disability to function productively and independently in integrated adult environments, they have to be involved in their school journey, and their voice should be sought. This requires an approach which asserts that individuals with intellectual disability know best about their own lives and that their literacy competencies are valued and recognised by society. This was led by the social justice philosophy, which sought to enhance the inclusion of students with intellectual disability in mainstream schools, and this required that students with moderate and severe levels of disability also have a communication system be it augmentative or alternative to the verbal expression (Connor, 2014).

In line with the concept of literacy and its importance to students with intellectual disability the aspect of accessibility versus the possible barriers that impede accessibility is an important notion to be regarded, especially in light of the social model of disability applied in this research. Thus, literacy accessibility is considered an important aspect in this review, and it will be discussed next.

## 2.9 Literacy accessibility for students with intellectual disability

Accessing literacy is an important aspect of the population of students with intellectual disability. Empirical studies focusing on literacy learning in students with intellectual disability are limited, especially in relation to how these students access literacy. McKenzie (2009) identified a number of common activities in literacy learning that include reading aloud, following news daily, circle time and following timetables and thus, this was not a contextualised experience for them. This agrees with the observations of Koppenhaver & Yoder (1993) who had identified isolated learning activities, e.g. fill in the blank texts, reading words without a context, as well as practising spelling rules. Yet another study by Ryndak et al. (1999) identified that when students were in a segregated school, there was little connection between the instructional tasks and everyday experiences. Ruppar (2015) observed literacy tasks across schools in various districts and found that reading activities required limited engagement, and worksheets were dominantly used with little relevance to functional purposes of literacy. Also, these students with intellectual disability rarely used AAC devices to access literacy. It was also observed that limited time was spent on writing and phonics, as this is critical to communicating using AAC devices independently. AAC, for such students, is a pathway to communication and language development (Ruppar, 2017). In the study, Ruppar (2015) also observed that even though educators were committed to literacy teaching, their rote

instruction still persisted. Questioning used was also limited to low-level questions avoiding higher-level ones, and if the latter is provided, this was done by giving a choice which does not support the learner's possibility for expressing oneself (Ruppar, 2015). Yet another study in 2011 by Causton-Theoharis et al. showed that literacy instruction is carried out without a context, disconnected from an engaging curriculum and restricted further the literacy learning opportunities.

Molina (2017) discusses the importance of assessing the student's level of symbolic understanding. Demchak (2010) describes these are symbolic representations which progress from the concrete, tangible symbols progressing towards abstract concepts such as line drawings and the written word. This is central to literacy accessibility as when students are presented with a symbolism level that they cannot understand, this makes it impossible for them to create meaning and understand, thus limiting literacy development (Beukleman & Miranda, 2013). Demchak (2010) further suggests the practice of using combined symbols when students have a severe intellectual disability to establish the meaning of a concept. Yet according to Lemons et., al (2015) it is stated that even though this knowledge is widely accessible in research, educators are still uncertain about how to design literacy and deliver it to students with intellectual disability.

When literacy is accessed through the Universal Design in Learning (UDL) concept, the principles embedded within will provide a framework that is also appropriate for students with intellectual disability. The provision in UDL includes providing multiple ways to access information and knowledge, approach activities, and engage in learning (CAST, 2019). This will ensure accessibility of material a priori instead of creating adaptations for a small number of students during lessons. Effective use of teaching assistants (Downing, 2005) and peer support (Carter & Kennedy, 2006) can also be considered as universal. One of the basic principles of the UDL is engagement which asserts that encompassing the ideas of motivation and ensuring engagement during the learning process is what give a purpose for learning. This engagement construct is debated in further detail in section 2.13, initially as a general term and subsequently in relation to literacy and students with intellectual disability. Before delving into classroom engagement, I will explore a more comprehensive review of the terms of emergent literacy and the aspects of comprehensive instruction strategies. These aspects were a major

aspect of the observations carried out in schools throughout this research and thus are essential to represent literature related to them.

## 2.10 Emergent Literacy and cognitive skills

The term emergent literacy is widely used to describe the manner in which students with significant challenges progress in literacy learning to become “independent readers, writers and symbolic communicators when given appropriate support and experience over time” (Erickson & Koppenhaver, 2020, p.4) It also incorporates the behaviours related to reading and writing to develop into the conventional manner. These emergent literacy skills are evidenced in early years but continue to progress in later development, including in secondary schools. According to Inoue et al. (2018), it can include print awareness, phonemic and phonological awareness, as well as speech and language skills which include comprehension and expression, grammatical knowledge as well as narration skills (Lenhart et al., 2022). Comprehension skills during reading tasks are also a fundamental aspect which can equip the students with the skills to learn to read and later allow them to navigate through text for meaningful purposes (Suggate et al., 2018).

Various researchers have identified the cognitive aspect as a determinant in the achievement of proficient reading and writing skills (Ne’eman & Shaul, 2022). One of the required cognitive skills is the verbal short-term memory and working memory, which are highly critical to the conversion of a grapheme to a phoneme and linked with the ability to read (Moll et al., 2016) as it enables the student to remember information hears and reconstructing it when heard. Working memory is significant as it allows the learner to preserve knowledge and be able to hold this information whilst new distractors and new knowledge are available in the surroundings. Thus, learners can remember the plans, evaluate alternatives and make a conclusive decision (Ne’eman & Shaul, 2022). Various authors, such as Purpura et al. (2017), have surmised that complex language skills are attributed to working memory.

Another cognitive skill identified as determining factor is the rapid naming ability related to stimuli, including symbols, letters, numbers, colours etc. (Georgiou et al., 2008). Its relevance extends to reading as there is a similarity in retrieving phonological knowledge from memory once visual stimuli are presented (Partanen & Siegel, 2014). Research by Warmington & Hulme (2012) further contributes to this by asserting that the capability of naming a visual stimulus



can also be seen when phonological awareness is not related. These skills are found in identifying words and non-words. Wolf et al. (2000) determined that when the naming of letters and numbers is slow, this usually attests to challenges to rapid retrieval from memory and general information processing, consequently affecting reading ability (Kirby et al., 2010).

A third cognitive skill which directly impacts reading ability is visual perception. Studies such as Memis & Sivri (2016) have identified a link between the two especially due to the initial stages of reading and writing, whereby the visual modality is responsible for focusing on the sequence of letters and structure of the word. This sequence and structure need to be stored in the working memory and converted to their respective sounds and meaning identified from it (Gvion & Friedmann, 2004). Ne'eman & Shaul (2022) further states that research has identified various aspects related to the visual perception required for reading, and these include visual memory, attention range and visual discrimination with visual memory in the short term (Ellis & Large, 1988) and visual attention span (Bosse et al., 2007) being linked with the learning of reading. In the latter, the longer the word, the more visual attention span is required.

As highlighted, reading is complex, and the ability of a student to manage words, the meaning of sounds and syntax is a determinant factor in reading. Ne'eman & Shaul (2022) further attributes the ability to manage all of these processes when executive functions are intact; however, when students with intellectual disability are impacted by impaired executive function, literacy skills are bound to suffer. They further add that when low scores in domains of print knowledge, vocabulary and phonological awareness are present, they persist in exhibiting lower literacy skills and will show challenges in learning how to read (Greenwood et al., 2020). Garrels (2019) discuss that when students with intellectual disability are learning literacy, challenges such as information processing, the ability to think abstractly and generalisation usually hinder proficiency. In my next section, I will explore further common behaviours that are evidenced in literacy learning as documented in the literature. This information has provided a beneficial background and knowledge to observe in further detail aspects related to literacy learning during class observations.

### 2.11 Evidenced Literacy behaviours within the classroom

Literacy is a complex skill, and various models have emerged to explain the intricate relationship between the different components. Literacy tasks are avenues which allow the student to ultimately progress towards more efficient reading skills besides being an indicator of overall academic achievement. Gomwalk (2018) discusses that in literacy tasks such as reading, inferential comprehension of knowledge is key. Lere (2013) discusses that students with intellectual disability mostly struggle with the aspect of comprehension. This is mostly due to language delays that are often present in these groups of students and delays are often seen both in understanding and expressive language skills (Fletcher et al., 2004). This is also dependent on the degree of intellectual disability, and the higher the degree of severity of intellectual disability, the poorer the competency is expected (Ozegya, 2015). For the purpose of this study, I will be delving in further depth into the mild and moderate level of functioning as this mirror the participants' profile. In the quest to observe literacy skills in the classrooms, I chose an approach by which I can observe behaviours of literacy learning. Landis et al. (2010) advocate that when dealing with literacy and reading comprehension of students with intellectual disability it is important to use the 'psycholinguistic approach', an instructional methodology also known as the 'Language Experience Approach' (LEA). This concept provides a way to improve reading comprehension through the focus on language skills – listening and speaking to then move on to higher-order literacy skills such as comprehension. In line with this model is the observation tool used in the present study to observe behaviours of literacy learning in the classroom, which is further discussed in the methodology section.

Having identified the complex notion of literacy and how various components of it are intricately linked, each aspect will be discussed separately to recognise its due importance in the literature. I believe that tackling these aspects is essential as these are evidently dealt with in the data-gathering tools used in classroom observations whilst discussed specifically with students and the other stakeholders during interviews.

### 2.12 Literacy components and the students with intellectual disability

A considerable number of students who have an intellectual disability have insufficient literacy level required for participating actively in the community, in work places as well as for lifelong

learning. The US Department of Education (2015) states that there is 2.5 times more likelihood for students with intellectual disability to read below basic level of literacy achievement than same-age peers without disability. Literacy components are all relevant to students, especially those with intellectual disability. UNESCO (2012) considers literacy as identifying and understanding, creating, communicating and computing written texts which are associated with diverse contexts. It is further highlighted by Adzongo & Swande (2014) that educators of students with intellectual disability have to find the appropriate teaching methods to ensure that reading develops especially to be able to read functionally in their communities. This is best seen as a continuum of learning across these strands of literacy in order for students to develop knowledge to potentially participate in their community and society at large. Rattanarich (2008) have identified various aspects as to why students with intellectual disability would not have developed skills in the various strands of literacy. These include insufficient training for educators on how to teach basic literacy, inappropriate learning resources, lack of specialised reading educators, an increased dropout rate in secondary schools, as well as cultural bias and deficiency perception of stakeholders in power. On the other hand, Erickson & Koppenhaver (2020) have identified 10 factors which are essential for learning in reading and writing to happen. These include “knowledgeable others, means of communication and interaction, repetition with variety, cognitive engagement, cognitive clarity, personal connection to the curriculum, encouragement of risk-taking, comprehensive instruction, significant time allocation and high expectations” (p.16). The next three subsections will deal with the various components of literacy and describe the empirical studies carried out in relation to students with Intellectual Disability

#### 2.12.1 Oral Language component of Literacy

Oral language is considered as the foundation of reading and writing, with each influencing the other throughout the educational journey. It also provides the foundation for text comprehension. Oral Language is at the core of various other skills, including phonics and spellings, phonemic awareness, text comprehension and written expression, vocabulary and morphology as well as syntax skills. In the realm of students with intellectual disability, symbolic communication and the means of communication is intrinsic to this strand. In relation to students with intellectual disability, oral language skills include listening and speaking abilities. This is because, initially, they need to have a system which allows them to communicate and

interact (Erickson & Kopenhaver, 2020). They further add that “symbolic communication can be learned in the process of acquiring increasingly sophisticated emergent literacy understandings, but it is essential to conventional literacy” (Erickson & Kopenhaver, 2020, p.17). It is particularly relevant to literacy learning as they can be able to voice preferences on their reading genres and what literacy activities they prefer. Ikwen (2013) discuss that students with intellectual disability gain reading and writing skills through listening to peers and to their class teacher. Dahl, as early as 1981 argued that the first connection between speech in the form of sounds and meanings and print in the form of visual images of letters and words in text is created through receptive and expressive skills. In the classroom, educators can encourage expressive skills by having open discussion and expressing ideas in an interactive manner whilst using questioning techniques which are inquisitive (Matther & Goldstein, 2005). Talking freely about events happening around them and in their everyday life is core to the development of expressive skills and supports the usage of various sentence patterns besides supporting critical analytic and thought formation processes (Ikwen, 2013). Oyetunde (1987) discuss that vocabulary and learning of words are reflected in the expression of students and for words which are known, the educators just need to link these to the graphical symbols. When words are not in the student’s expressive or reading vocabulary, but there is a present mental representation of it, then the educator needs to activate these through recall of past experience and learning the written word. Furthermore, when students with intellectual disability do not have the mental concept of a word or previous experience of it, the educator needs to build up the experience and then proceed to the writing representation of the word.

### 2.12.2 Reading component of literacy

Learning to read is often identified as one of the major struggles for students with intellectual disability (Channell et al., 2013). The reading skills are composed of two aspects according to Gough & Tunmer (1986) and these include the ability to identify words in print – word recognition as well as the ability to extract meaning from the text – reading comprehension. When students are in secondary schooling, focus is then moved towards comprehension whilst in earlier years focus is more in word recognition. In the presence of an intellectual disability,

students might still be focusing on the word level, and thus skills related to it will still be discussed. These include phonological decoding, orthographic processing as well as rapid automatized naming. Phonological decoding skills in students with intellectual disability are observed to improve when programs implemented target this skill (Wise et al., 2010). Phonological awareness skills which are part of phonological decoding skills are seen to be fundamental for reading development in learners with intellectual disability (Adlof et al., 2018). The study by Channell et al. (2013) has confirmed that further intervention is required with secondary-age students with intellectual disability, and this should incorporate phonological awareness training, including identifying sounds in the beginning, middle and end, segmenting words, oral blending etc. Lemons et al. (2015) describe this instruction as supporting letter-sound knowledge, together with the reading of words as part of a phonics-based instruction. When it is instructed as part of comprehensive literacy teaching, word identification, print conceptualisations (Colozzo et al., 2016) as well as text comprehension (Adlof et al., 2018) are improved. It further supports word decoding abilities in order to generalise to reading new vocabulary (Ahlgrim-Delzell et al., 2016)

Phonological memory, another skill encompassed in phonological decoding skills, has been found to be relatively low in students with intellectual disability when compared to typical developing and thus could also explain the lack of reading skills (Naess et al., 2011). With regards to orthographic processing, i.e. the ability of recognition of visual patterns of letters, in a study carried out by Loveall & Connors (2013), it was concluded that students with intellectual disability manage to gain orthographic skills during phonological decoding. With regards to Rapid Automatised naming, i.e. the ability to name rapidly vocabulary related to colours, number, alphabet etc, sparse data exists; however, it is evident that students with intellectual disability often perform similarly to students with typical development of the same mental age (Ypsilanti et al., 2006)

With regards to comprehension, Ozegya (2015) discuss that initially, it is fundamental to prioritise sight reading of vocabulary as this is essential for reading. Without the ability to recognise vocabulary words in continuous text, comprehension will not develop (Ikwen, 2013). Erickson & Geist (2016) have discussed that students with intellectual disability often struggle to comprehend text above the first-grade level. They also find it hard to comprehend text which is of high level and make inferences (van Wingerden et al., 2014). This mainly stems from

a delay in receptive language (Haebig & Sterling, 2017) and vocabulary understanding together with slowness of vocabulary acquisition as they grow older (Cuskelly et al., 2016). Vocabulary instruction plays an important part in comprehension development and this can be carried out through various ways such as helping student identify the definition of words, providing direct instruction of words, and connecting novel and known vocabulary (Beck et al., 2002). There are several approaches that can support learner's vocabulary learning and these include building curiosity and getting students interested on new words (Beck et al., 2013), engaging in interactive read alouds, selecting which vocabulary is to be taught.

### 2.12.3 Writing component of literacy.

According to Koppenhaver & Erickson (2013) writing is "a process of constructing texts in traditional orthography, either print or Braille, that communicate experiences, thoughts, feelings, and understandings for diverse audiences and purposes" (p.1). Various skills are required for it to be possible. Garrels (2019) identify ideation, thought organisation, spelling abilities, and vocabulary knowledge as some of these. Erickson & Koppenhaver (2020) discuss that it is common practice to observe practices in the classrooms whereby students with intellectual disabilities are required to fill in the blanks, memorising lists for spelling tasks, reordering words to make sentences, amongst others; however, these all fail to support students in communicating their own thoughts or to write for various purposes. Graham et al. (2012) emphasise that technology should be incorporated in all aspects of instruction as these benefit writing skills and outcomes. Wollak & Koppenhaver (2011) discuss the importance of students with intellectual disability feeling motivated to write and aspects that positively influence engagement, including the use of technology, peer interactions and having writing audiences. Erickson & Koppenhaver (2020) further states that use of assistive technology is useful when the writing act with pen and paper is too laborious. The support of keyboard and word processor is key in writing.

In both reading and writing aspects, it is argued that motivation or lack of it can greatly affect their instruction. Nishimura et al. (2013) discuss that this motivation lessens as students progress to the secondary level. This is problematic as motivation is an indicator to the learners' reading comprehension abilities and writing development (Cartwright et al., 2016). According to Morgan & Fuchs (2007), there is a bidirectional correlation between will and

writing skills achievement and thus, it is highly suggested that this is addressed in settings especially where students with intellectual disability are being taught. Together with motivation, another aspect which is highly relevant in the context of a classroom is the notion of engagement as this is core for improved learning outcomes of learners. (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2007). Motivation is considered as pre-requisite to having a student engaged in learning and thus bettering academic achievements (Ryan & Deci, 2009). In the next section, the construct of classroom engagement will be discussed thoroughly, as this notion is considered essential in identifying the experiences of students with intellectual disability in literacy learning.

### 2.13 Classroom Engagement as a complex Construct

Described as a multi-faceted concept, classroom engagement entails a long history of consideration and research. As early as 1913, John Dewey argued that children have an innate capability to engage with their environment, and learning happens consequently. When this claim is a foundation upon which Vygotsky's prerogative (1978) is built, one can foresee that when students are taught in an engaging classroom, with activities that match the child's development level, learning is bound to happen (Hruby et al., 2016). Recently, considerable literature has grown up around the theme of classroom engagement, and this applies to the context of students with and without disability. Palmgren et al. (2017) have identified a gap in research and knowledge as students with intellectual disability and other disabilities are greatly under-represented in relation to student engagement, with the majority of research carried out through perceptions of educators or from students' self-assessments. Both methods can be challenging due to the disability as "often the engagement behaviours or processes to be identified are internal" (So et al., 2022, p.27). Recent studies such as Le Lant & Lawson (2019) mention the need to recognise the importance of student engagement for students with intellectual disability even because it acts as prevention to potentially dropping out of school early. Fredericks et al., 2016 discuss that indicators that show engagement in students are malleable and identifying the level of engagement of students at risk, especially those with a disability, is important so preventive measures can be implemented (Lehr et al., 2004). Data from countries such as Australia and the United States show that students with disabilities are twice as much to drop out in the former, whilst in the latter, the percentages are even higher (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011; Stark & Noel, 2015). This further indicates the

importance of representing students with intellectual disability in research related to student engagement. Glicken (2009) further states that the correlation between disengagement and dropout rates is even perceived as early as primary years; thus, researching student engagement with students with intellectual disability should initiate as early as primary years.

Engagement within the classroom depends on a number of conditions in the class, and these have been identified as significant in determining whether a lesson is enjoyable or not. Active learning is a determinant factor usually cited in studies (Leger et al., 2014) and this refers to lessons which are designed and implemented to give a hands-on experience to students (Felix & Brown, 2011). Educators commonly plan for active learning to happen in the classroom and are concerned with the degree to which students will engage in the tasks in a meaningful manner (Ellis, 2014). Active learning has its roots in Bodner's (1986) constructivist theory of knowledge, which has students constructing and creating knowledge rather than merely being transferred by the educator onto the mind of the student. Having social contact and communicating with each other underpins active learning and has its root in what Dewey (1997) states "all human experience is ultimately social: that involves contact and communication" (p.38). Dewey (1997) further argues the educator's concern should be to identify concrete aspects of the environment which can be conducive to the learning experiences which ultimately lead them to growth. This notion echoes student-centred learning as opposed to teacher-centred learning (Michael, 2006) and is characterised by learning which is inquiry-based, enhanced by the use of technology as well as peer collaboration. In the constructivist scenario, the learners are the dominant agents of learning and knowledge creation (Holec & Marynowski, 2020). Yet another condition identified is the opportunity for the challenge that supports students to learn and wanting to learn more, which is interpreted by Hobby (2002) refers to the notion of interest and being stimulated and fascinated in class. Bond & Bedenlier (2019) further states that digital technology is a potentially positive resource in student engagement, especially in areas of interest. Finally, a factor documented to provide for engagement in the class is individual achievement and planning. This is particularly documented in the literature for students with intellectual disability as when targets are set and strategies offered to improve these help students be more successful (Hopkins, 2008). McIntyre, Pedder & Ruddock (2005) and previously Hobby (2002) identified this dimension as educators recognising the individual needs and differences



of students and work is consequently pitched for the various abilities. An additional aspect required for curriculum engagement is learning motivation which has an increased effect on effectiveness in teaching. ARCS (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction) Model (Keller, 2010) relates to four factors required for students to engage in learning. Regarding the aspect of attention, it relates to educators providing stimulating learner's curiosity and interest maintenance throughout. This is required in order for students to remain engaged and focused in the lesson. Techniques identified for sustaining attention in class include perceptual arousal, inquiry arousal as well as variability (Keller, 2010). Relevance relates particularly to students with intellectual disability to make teaching and learning related to their everyday life situations in order for these to be meaningful. This can be done through the use of real-world situations, and relating to prior knowledge will support students with intellectual disability to perceive the relevance. The third factor, confidence, relates to a basic human need which is competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This supports the theory that high expectancy for success will increase self-efficacy and result in motivation for learning (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Enhancing this confidence in students with intellectual disability includes practising autonomy by including them in choice-making. The last aspect, satisfaction, relates to sustained motivation for learning resulting in positive consequences through a feeling of having mastered a skill or accomplished a challenging task (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Various dimensions of engagement have been presented in research and sometimes even conflicting; however, it remains a critical notion for learning to happen (Fisher et al., 2018). The literature outlines a triad perspective of engagement which includes the cognitive, behavioural and emotional components (Fisher et al., 2018). These aspects of engagement are particularly applicable to engagement with the language, a concept developed by Svalberg (2009), which discusses that in the context of learning a language embedded in literacy experiences, the language is the object, whilst the learner is the agent. It is discussed that a cognitively engaged student is "alert, pays focused attention and constructs their own knowledge" (Svalberg, 2009, p.247). Emotionally or effectively, the students show "a positive, purposeful, willing and autonomous disposition towards the object (language, the language and/or what it represents)" (Svalberg, 2009, p.247). Regarding social engagement, a student will interact with his surroundings and initiate interactions with educators and peers. These three modes of engagement will be discussed in further detail in the upcoming sub-sections,

and their relevance to students with intellectual disability will be highlighted. Discussion and literature identified in these sub-sections are the basis of the development of part of the observation tools used in this dissertation. Le Lant & Lawson (2019), in their study, has developed a student engagement checklist with a condensed list of components and observable descriptions. These were particularly targeted at students who have intellectual disability coupled with speech and language difficulties. Cognitive engagement has not been featured in earlier research, and as a researcher, I deemed this tool as most appropriate to use in my research. As a researcher, it gave me the opportunity to use such a tool in order “to provide detailed, qualitative descriptions of when and where a behaviour occurred” (Le Lant & Lawson, 2019, p. 312). This will enable me to create a richer narrative (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012) of the literacy experiences of students with intellectual disability when coupled with student and parent interviews.

#### 2.13.1 Cognitive Engagement

The cognitive aspect is the one given more potential significance as it reflects on how much the students actually master in terms of concepts and content (Fisher et al., 2018). Bond & Bedenlier (2019) refers to cognitive engagement as “deep learning strategies, self-regulation and understanding” (p.13). It is expressed as the effort placed in learning, engaging in tasks required to understand complex notions and skills and being able to achieve aims by being able to self-regulate (Furlong & Christenson, 2008). Finn & Zimmer (2012) further describe cognitive engagement as selecting important information through learning strategies and then integrating this knowledge with pre-existing knowledge. These learning strategies may include rehearsal, elaboration and summarising (Winnie, 1996). Ben-Eliyahu et al. (2018) discuss that cognitive engagement contributes to more on-task time, a positive response to reading and writing, enhanced comprehension, more reading inside and outside of the class environment, and more participation in literacy lessons. Kim et al. (2016) and Guthrie & Klauda (2014) have identified various instructional practices that enhance cognitive engagement. These include support to being independent in reading, choosing reading genres related to the student’s lives, collaborative work with peers, access of highly interesting texts, and a highly involved educator. Students must feel that the work carried out in the class is relevant, worth the attention and that it will lead to future benefits (Flowerday & Shell, 2015). Erickson & Kopenhaver (2020) states that growth in cognitive engagement is evident when fewer

worksheets and assessments are used and instead, there are personalised reading and writing activities based in an environment which contains a vast range of books as well as high-level interactive practices between students themselves. Another concept related to cognitive engagement is cognitive clarity. Goodwin (2018) describes it as having students understand the relevance and significance of the concepts; they are learning by questioning the worthiness and purpose of it. It also enables students to identify knowledge that is worth focusing on and storing and knowledge which can be forgotten (Richards & Frankland, 2017). Literacy cognitive clarity is only built through engaged learners and in the presence of meaningful texts and those which are of high interest. Erickson & Kopenhaver (2020) discuss that cognitive clarity is a prerequisite for cognitive engagement to follow for learning to generalise and for the applied use of skills learned.

Cognitive engagement is usually one of the most challenging to observe and document, with various researchers attempting to create tools for this. For example, Chi & Wylie (2014) attempted to identify methods of observable measures of engagement such as making gestures while reading, paraphrasing as well as questions asked. These methods and others (e.g., Helme & Clarke, 2001) have been identified as having some major flaws by Le Lant & Lawson (2019). These include cognitive engagement aspects which are not included in one assessment tool and are not fit to be used in the classroom during lesson time. Thus, a tool developed by them ensured that it represents cognitive engagement that can be observed throughout the task completion time span whilst being transferable from one task to another.

Furthermore, it was concluded that cognitive engagement could be enhanced in students with intellectual disability by explicitly teaching cognitive approaches. It is “based on the need to equip students with the ability to eventually self-monitor their responses by applying a learnt strategy to a problem, and ultimately generalising the learnt strategy to other situations, tasks or settings” (Le Lant, 2015, p. 261). The author further adds that this can happen when tasks are planned according to the learner’s experience and motivations, as this will support learning, and learners will be more able to select and recall to ultimately understand concepts presented to them. Ertmer & Ottenbreit Leftwich (2013) discuss that cognitive engagement can be enhanced by integrating technology into the learning process whilst inferencing personal significance with the content being taught (Jonassen, 2013). Belo et al. (2013) further support this by inviting the educator with the subject, pedagogical and technological

knowledge to support literacy skills whilst selecting the most appropriate tools or methods to suit the class's needs.

### 2.13.2 Affective Engagement

Another component, emotional or affective engagement, refers to how learners feel about their schooling experience in terms of educators, peers as well as the content being learned in an academic manner (Fisher et al., 2018). It is described as “positive reactions to the learning environment, peer and teacher, as well as students’ sense of belonging and interest” by Bond & Bedenlier (2019, p.13). It also refers to the willingness to participate in classroom activities. Skinner & Belmont (1993) states that this can be identified in a class as the learner will look bored, happy, sad or anxious, i.e. a physical display of emotion (Lutz et al., 2006). In literacy learning, there has been a noticeable tendency for an interplay of the three engagement factors, mainly cognitive, behaviour and affective. In recent studies, a particular emphasis is given placed on the affective aspect (Sato, 2017; Han & Hyland, 2015). Svalberg (2018) discusses that affective engagement with the language process is mainly influenced by the topic of the task, perception of oneself and group dynamics. It is also affected by power variables within the classrooms, friendships and differences or similarities in values. (Svalberg, 2018). Hollingshead et al. (2018) discuss that literature on affective engagement in reference to students with an intellectual disability is absent, especially those who are severe. He further adds that usually, research stops at exploring happiness (Lancioni et al., 2005); however, more research in this area is necessary as it can give a better understanding of their needs. The understanding of affective engagement in the population of learners with intellectual disability has relevance in meaningful participation in an inclusive classroom (Ryndak et al., 2013). Hollingshead et al., (2018) concluded through their study that students with intellectual disability show emotions irrespective of their language capabilities. It may look different in students and depend on processing stimuli around them and the nature of the interaction with people around them.

### 2.13.3 Behavioural Engagement

Various studies have shed light on the behaviours of student engagement. These are fundamental to enhancing the learning experiences of students (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). The behavioural component involves how learners act in terms of participating in class

activities, completing class tasks as well as their body posture throughout the learning experience (Hruby et al., 2016). Bond & Bedenlier (2019) refers to behavioural engagement as “participation, persistence and positive conduct” (p. 13). Furthermore, on the aspects of participation and conduct, Le Lant (2015) states that behavioural problems and disengagement is evident when students perceive a task as being too challenging or when they make a mistake because this led to avoidance behaviours. Ryan & Deci (2000) discuss that avoidance behaviours are used by students as a protection to eventual failure. According to Fredericks et al., (2004), a student is considered behaviourally engaged when actively participating in a learning task as this is fundamental to improving academic concepts. It is also evidenced by their participation in school activities, following lesson rules as well as in their task completion. Furthermore, Lutz et al. (2006) indicate that body language, such as posture and yawns, may give an indication of the level of behaviour engagement

As can clearly be deduced, cognitive, affective and behavioural factors are interdependent and interact with each other. In the next section, I will delve deeper into engagement in literacy tasks which is directly relevant to the study.

#### 2.14 Literacy engagement

In learning experiences, engagement has been conserved as correlating to academic success (LeLant & Lawson, 2019). With regard to literary tasks, Kim et al. (2016) discusses that engagement must be fully present to gain reading progress. Parsons et al. (2015), together with other researchers, have confirmed a direct link between engagement and being able to understand and construct meaning from the text in hand. Conversely, when students are neither engaged nor motivated, this creates a barrier to success in literacy. Jang et al. (2015) further add that whilst not all students are easily engaged in literary tasks, educators must understand the engagement concept more thoroughly to support students in exploring their interests for greater engagement. Studies such as Kurth et al. (2017) found that students with intellectual disability and complex language needs were the least engaged during literacy tasks.

Tracey & Morrow (2017) refers to engagement as the frequency with which students read and the ability to sustain attention throughout a literacy task. However, researchers such as Serravallo (2015) describe engagement as multifaceted and includes processes related to emotion, behaviour and cognition. This involves the enjoyment of attending and engaging in a

literacy task, effort exerted by the student and metacognitive skills involved, respectively (Shernoff, 2013). When students are provided with opportunities to collaborate during a literacy task, they become more engaged (Hudson, 2016). Springer et al. (2017) further concluded that literacy achievement and engagement should relate together symbiotically and the “vehicle through which the classroom instruction influences student outcomes” (Irvin et al., 2007, p. 29). Various researchers have concluded that a leading predictor of literary achievement is engagement (Parsons et al., 2015), and thus, activities in the classroom should revolve around heightening engagement levels to consequently also develop receptive and expressive language skills, especially in students with Intellectual disability (Lightner & Wilkinson, 2016). Various researchers also attest to the importance of activity or task design presented for further engagement in class. Friend (2017) identifies various elements that should characterise the tasks and these include pertinence to the student’s life as well as choice within the task. Vast studies carried out by Guthrie (1996) on engagement and task designs indicate various important aspects which can be applied to students with intellectual disability. They highlighted the aspect of increasing engagement when teachers used concrete objects in various content areas, making learning personalised together with integrating literacy with student’s prior knowledge of the topic under discussion. Providing students with options to express what they learnt, such as verbal, visual, written etc., also leads to greater engagement within the class (Guthrie 1996)

To support this, educators need to ensure to provide students with a choice of various similar books or series sequels. Furthermore, research carried out by Parsons and colleagues (2015) on literacy tasks engagement, provided literacy tasks to ten-year-old students of mixed performance levels and their engagement was recorded. The behavioural engagement was identified through observations, affective and cognitive engagement was measured through interviewing techniques, and students’ perceptions of academic tasks were gathered through the use of rating scales. These researchers have analysed the anecdotes and rating scales and have identified that the highest engagement is observed with authentic activities and giving choice to the students, as well as tasks which supports cooperative learning. Parsons et al., (2015) discuss that cooperative learning is best facilitated when educators strategically design student groupings in the classroom. Furthermore, in their research they found that activities based on solely use of worksheets and those which were perceived as challenging indicated a

lower level of engagement in students. This is in line with Adams & Torchia's (1998) which identified "seatwork" as related to lower engagement levels observed in students. Contributing to this low engagement level in tasks was the perception of the task complexity and the students' competencies.

### 2.15 Educator's role in learning and engagement

Addressing the question on how inclusion and disability is conceptualised by educators is a determinant factor as to how inclusive schooling is practised. Biklen (2000) refers to the interplay of factors as an 'exercise of power' (p. 337). Through the social mode of disability, one can redefine the meaning of disability with the ultimate aim of fostering inclusive participation of individuals with disabilities. Various themes emerge from the critical theory of disability and the educator's role in teaching academic subjects in schools. One of these themes depicts a resistance towards a static perception of disability, a meaning that does not shift. This echoes what Thomson (1996) refers to as a perpetuation of attitudes and constructs on a daily occurrence. These understandings are imposed, and stereotypes are embedded culturally. These stances provide a context for marginalisation and what Kliever (1998) refers to 'pessimism' as the individual may be seen as lacking interest in literacy or being non-literate. This often leads to students with disabilities experiencing barriers to learning which in itself is discriminatory. Thus, having an educator as an ally to ensure participatory learning experiences is key and deserving for these students (Biklen, 2000). Listening to an insider perspective and accounts of students with disabilities is also significant in informing inclusive practices and is vital for educators and peers. When this is accepted and valued, it is possible to recognise how learners with intellectual disability can lead their educational journeys as well as be a respected source of knowledge and information to professionals in the field when these are creating inclusive practices (Billington, 2006)

The voice of students at the primary and secondary level is of value to educators as their words and experiences as students are an influential tool to generate educator self-reflection, and practice is improved accordingly. (Flutter, 2007) This process is catalytic in nature because, as cited in Rudduck & Flutter (2003), it encourages educators "to see the familiar differently and to contemplate alternative approaches, role and practices" (p.141). The benefits of allowing students' voices to guide teaching and learning betterment are increasingly encouraged and

sustained throughout research studies as it also 'unlocks the shackles of habit' (Flutter, 2007 p.352), binding the educators to practices which are familiar.

With regard to engagement and achievement in students, educators have a powerful effect. According to Palmgren et al. (2017), when a relationship is fostered in the classroom with both peers and educators, students readily engage more in learning. They further add that when the relationship is poor, rejection is also experienced. Le Lant & Lawson (2019) discuss that students with intellectual disability are aware and are able to recognise how peers and educators socialise with them and may even compare their academic abilities with others. Educators are particularly important at this phase as instances of disengagement should be identified and tackled. Tomlinson (2017) confirms this because when educators are attentive and know their students thoroughly, a higher engagement level is evident in the learning process. This was identified as particularly relevant when an educator creates an environment of belonging, establishes high expectations and planning of learning is planned to cater to all students' needs in the classroom. This also applies in relation to literacy instruction. Vollet et al. (2017) determined that the involvement of the educator is highly related to learner engagement, and this also applies to students with intellectual disability. Similarly, in a study conducted by Pantaleo (2016) it was evidenced that high expectations of educators have a positive impact on literacy engagement and literacy perseverance. She further determined that when an educator's expectation is developmental, appropriate learners tend to be more engaged. Studies such as Strati et al. (2016) concluded that a factor that increased engagement in students was specific feedback to the students from the teacher. They further found that through scaffolding, development feedback and by proper questioning techniques, it was possible to increase the engagement of students as they can sense the individual and closely consideration of the teacher to the individual work and effort (Fisher et al., 2016). Scaffolding, being a core principle of the Universal Design of Learning, is "a balance between obtaining and maintaining a child's engagement, simplifying the task when needed, providing confidence for risk-taking, marking relevant information, and demonstrating potential solutions" (Coyne et al., 2012 p. 164). The importance of scaffolding is used in a manner that the educator withdraws or provides support for literacy development and learning. Almasi (2003) discusses that to have this balance, the educator must be knowledgeable about the strengths and needs



of the student, the curricular content and an understanding of how to provide the right level of challenge.

According to Palacios (2017), the experience and skills of educators have a direct impact on the learner's reading achievement and growth in vocabulary. Park et al. (2017) further state that when educators know their students individually, take care of their learning and involve them in it actively, more efficient learning in literacy happens. This notion is extended outside of the immediate classroom as these beliefs and values cultivated by the educators are transferred to the perception of capability within reading and writing tasks and in various learning environments (Wigfield et al., 2015). Yet another aspect which has an impact on the learners' capacity to learn in class is the attitudes of the educators. Bock & Erickson (2015), through their research, found that the attitudes of educators towards students with moderate to severe intellectual disability is reflective of their beliefs about such students and is influenced by the school context (Timberlake, 2016). The educators' beliefs affect the class culture and impact both teaching methods and content delivered to the students (Ruppar, 2017).

Another link in the chain of support system for students with an intellectual disability is the role of the parents and their involvement in their child's educational journey. In this research, I also explore the perspective of parents, and thus the literature related to it is considered as well.

### 2.16 The parents' perspectives on literacy learning

The importance of the parents' role in the education of children with intellectual disability is uncontested. They are usually the persons who are most knowledgeable about their child's strengths and needs. The views of parents are thus an important loop in the chain, even in the name of literacy experiences and learning in the secondary school. When researching children having intellectual disability it is common that researchers include proxies, e.g. parents or educators, to solicit the perspective or experiences of these children (Franck & Joshi, 2017). This may be problematic as their view or experience does not necessarily represent their child's experience. Alston-Abel & Berninger (2017) discuss that parents of children who do not have a disability are consulted on their views on literacy for their children. According to Šukys et al. (2015), educators should ensure good collaboration with parents of students with intellectual

disability. Collaborating with educators and parents whilst researching children's experiences allows for a holistic understanding rather than a partial understanding of the students' realities. Just as different students in schools have varied experiences, even parents may have diverse perspectives. Sheehan & Sheehan (2000) discuss that parents and other relatives close to students with intellectual disability have always contributed to a successful literacy experience.

Research carried out by Al Otaiba et al. (2009) reveals that parents have high expectations for literacy development and identified as important to be able to read books, even for pleasure, being able to read signs for safety reasons and community signs for integration within the local community together with literacy skills required for eventual employment. They further document that parents themselves support literacy by providing a home environment which is literacy rich. The parents interviewed also showed belief in the abilities of their children even when outsiders such as educators do not. This is referred to parents having a 'local understanding' of their children, which is a deep knowledge which is interactive, and there is an 'interdependent relationship in which both participants infer valued capacities and competence on the other...and allows those in positions of relative authority or power to see in idiosyncratic behaviour demonstrations of understanding that are otherwise dismissed or disregarded by more distant observers' (Kliwer & Biklen, 2001 p.4) They further found out that when schools dismiss the abilities that these parents are observing in their children, they do not tend to question it or push the school to acknowledge and build on these abilities. This leads to aspects of parent advocacy in literacy matters; however, literature and research is limited in the area (Duffy, 2013). In one such study, Trainor (2010) outlined four parent approaches to advocacy: intuitive advocates, disability experts, strategists and change agents. Intuitive advocates are intimately knowledgeable about their children and use this to handle a situation that arises.

On the other hand, disability experts have a deeper understanding of the disability of their child and provide information, e.g. on transitions when a change is in the process. Strategists are more knowledgeable about the policies and laws surrounding inclusive education and refer to these to advocate for their children. Change agents are the parents who create a change in the overall system through their knowledge of policies and inter-personal connections together with financial assets. Trainor (2010) further discusses that the last two types of advocacies are usually the most successful kind. Hess et al. (2006) further reports that parents

feel that school management carries out education decisions without consulting them in various situations. These parents end up feeling 'othered' (Hess et al., 2006 p. 152), and these parents are often faced with either complying with the situation or advocating in order to show their disapproval.

In relation to literacy and students with intellectual disability, in his article, Wakeman et al. (2021) state that "there is no literature that examines literacy content and instructional priorities from the perspective of parents of students with ID [intellectual disability]" (p.88). In their study, they attempted to address this gap in the literature and provide insights into these perspectives. Considering the parents' perspectives is useful as they can document the direct impact on their child's life, and when they collaborate with the educators, they can be critical partners (Lalvani & Hale, 2015). The insight of parents can provide information on how effective teaching instruction is and what they expect in having successful literacy ability (Wakeman et al., 2021).

In their research, Wakeman et al. (2021) attempted to divulge the parents' views on literacy learning for their children with intellectual disability. In this survey, parents were asked about their priorities for their child to learn in literacy and barriers to progressing in literacy. They have identified that most schools are focusing on reading and listening comprehension and less on phonological awareness and letter knowledge. As priorities, the parents identified being able to understand a text they have read and follow written instructions as very important; however, the ability to read (93.3%) was the highest priority. They felt that this skill actually makes a difference in the child's quality of life and outcomes. Functional writing was also identified as a priority skill. The greatest barriers identified included distractibility and not being able to understand the text, and difficulty in holding the writing tool in case of writing. Lack of engagement and interest in the topic was also identified as possible challenges. (Wakeman et al., 2021)

## 2.17 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the pillars of this research, which are mainly intellectual disability, engagement, student voice, and literacy. The review of the literature was pivotal in the design of the methodology used to collect the data on students' voices.

This chapter also sought to explore notions of engagement in literacy learning and the role of the parents and educators as stakeholders. In this qualitative research, the participants' voices are central, and thus this literature review also explored the conceptualization of voice and its relevance to the social model of disability. Another thoroughly studied aspect was understanding concepts related to intellectual disability to set the context for later related aspects. This chapter further had the intention to explore the benefits and importance of listening and findings ways to elicit the students' voices. This was carried out by placing them in the context of educational developments and, as a right, embedded within the legislation. Listening to the voices of students with intellectual disability has been documented to create inherent challenges. However, past research has also suggested ways to overcome these. Furthermore, an important element in evidence-based practice involves acknowledging and knowing what the individual prefers and what they value.

In the next chapter, the methods used to carry out the fieldwork will be discussed, placing particular emphasis on the choice behind methods employed, which include classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with students, parents and educators. Considering participants are students and have intellectual disability this required a vast range of ethical considerations that needed to be taken into consideration, and thus, these are discussed in great detail in the next section. Another important aspect dealt with in the upcoming chapter also involves the aspect of positionality and my stance in this dissertation and the way this has affected my choices throughout.



## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

*“As global citizens, we are no longer called to just interpret the world, which was the mandate of traditional qualitative inquiry. Today we are called to change the worlds and to change it in ways that resist injustice while celebrating freedom and full inclusive, participatory democracy”*

*(Denzin, 2019. p. 723)*

### 3.1 Introduction

As a Maltese, European and global citizen, the quote by Denzin (2019) encompasses my values and the ultimate purpose of my research in the spirit of inclusion and active participation of students with intellectual disability. The study's overarching aim is to study the literacy curricular experiences of students with mild, moderate and severe intellectual disability in a mainstream secondary. The objectives I identified seek to determine these lived literacy experiences during the CCP programme in Maltese and English lessons and thus investigate the programme's suitability and engagement that these students exhibit during such lessons. I also intended to explore the parental perspectives and experiences in relation to these literacy experiences. Another objective of the research was to be able to identify what strategies and approaches enhance literacy learning for students with intellectual disability in secondary schools and how educators can use these for meaningful literacy experiences. Based on these objectives, I have outlined the following four research questions and a qualitative approach to the study was taken in order to address them appropriately.

1. What are the experiences of learning literacy for a small group of secondary school students with intellectual disability?
2. How do their parents perceive their children's experience of learning literacy in secondary schools?
3. How suitable and engaging is a mainstream literacy curriculum for students with intellectual disability?
4. What approaches can educators adopt to support and enhance literacy learning for secondary school students with mild, moderate and severe intellectual disability?

In this chapter, I address key methodological decisions undertaken to attest to the importance of providing opportunities for students to voice their thoughts and experiences. Throughout the methodology chapter, I provide an overview of the approach taken, including the choice

of the case study, the methods employed, sampling aspects, and the procedure utilised. I also discuss in depth the techniques and methods used in data collection and the participation process, which is core to eliciting experiences when researching with participants with intellectual disability. Throughout the engagement with the literature consulted, I confirmed the importance of literacy learning, and this has been researched in relation to engagement on various occasions (Friend, 2017; Vollett et al., 2017). Whilst the plethora of peer-reviewed research on the subject is significant, I felt that a deeper analysis needs to be conducted on the experiences of literacy in students with intellectual disability. Bishton & Lindsay (2011) clearly asserts the need for all students to have their voice captured and to influence the educational environment. In this chapter, I also address methodological considerations in researching intellectually disabled students' voices in relation to their literacy experiences. Research has been generally focused on minimising or preventing problems related to intellectual disability (Rioux & Bach, 1994) rather than understanding the lived experiences of these individuals, creating a disabling effect (Goodley, 2000). In recent years, research and practice endeavours have focused on empowerment and inclusive communities and developed an ideology to better the lives of individuals with intellectual disability (Dempsey & Nankervis, 2005), including education entitlement. Dowse (2009) has debated that various research styles attempted to silence the voice of individuals with intellectual disability, predestining them to lower-level standards of literacy and education. I had no intention of being another non-disabled person constructing the student with an intellectual disability as the problem other (Dowse, 2009). Instead, I hope that it serves the purpose of 'support of genuine engagement, authentic participation, inclusive design and strong voice for people with intellectual disability' (Dowse, 2009, p. 143). The methods I have chosen and the design of the research had the purpose of enacting a platform whereby these students can voice their opinion. In an extensive section of this chapter, I explore ethical considerations related to the research, which were essential in understanding the subjective experiences of students with intellectual disability.

In the next part, I explain my positionality in this research and what aspects influenced my decisions in the choice of research and methodology employed.

### 3.2 Positionality and guiding principles

“We do not parachute into the field with empty heads and a few pencils or a tape-recorder in our pockets ready to record the “facts.” (England, 1994, p.248)

Indeed, I felt I parachuted into the field with a baggage of emotions, experiences, setbacks and values which influence how I interact with my surroundings, reflecting the medium in which I undertake this research. The way I approached this research was not value-free but value-laden, which is truthful to Halliday (2002), who asserts that educational research can never be approached value-free. There are various reflections I can make on my educational journey and my career in education and speech and language pathology. Values have consistently guided my decisions, my battles, and my convictions in my everyday work. Reflected in this study, I relate to the philosophical basis of Humanism as throughout the process, I ensure that the study of children’s lived experiences is done through their eyes rather than solely through the perspective of parents or researchers. As a researcher and educator, I firmly believe in the humanist philosophy of education as I recognise that children in learning contexts are responsible for learning and have a degree of control and choice in the process. Thus, in a learning context, the educator facilitates learning, whereby the student directs learning. I particularly acknowledge that this philosophy is particularly relevant to students with intellectual disability as a perception of various inabilities may cause society to prevent giving choices to such students. Educators in such a philosophy are encouraged to support student growth and provide a liberating context for learning. In relation to this, I feel that the work I have done as an Education Officer in secondary schools always embraced this aspect of humanism. An overarching aim of the humanism education philosophy is to provide the necessary support to realise and maximise the optimal potential of a student (Billings & Halstead, 2009). Through the classroom observations, the support strategies and system utilised in the CCP English and Maltese lessons could be thoroughly evaluated.

The Humanism philosophy was identified as the foundation of this research as I believe in subjectivism and that experiences and thoughts are present in an individual's mind. Fundamentally, the reality of an individual is projected on experiences, and emotions lived in a particular situation. In relation to this notion, I have experienced learning situations with students in their respective classrooms, and this has provided me with insight related to their literacy learning. Playle (1995) asserts that the aspect of subjectivity and individual meaning



may appear unclear to some, but it is what humanism is particularly concerned with. In agreement with Bevis (1989), the reality is truly in the individual person. Being free to choose is a notion which is highly embedded in the humanism philosophy. Yet another core notion is that of knowledge which is primarily gained through the individual's experience of learning (Kleiman, 2007). As a humanist researcher, I value Traynor's (2009) assertion that highlights how qualitative methods of inquiry are more suited for soliciting the lived experiences of students with intellectual disability. This has influenced my decision to employ qualitative methodology to listen to the experiences of these students. I also relate to this philosophy as it enables an activism stance as the tenets of humanism are the valuing and responsibility we have towards each other, especially in eliciting voices of those who are often excluded from being listened. The importance of this is stated by Khatib, Sarem and Hamidi (2013), who claim that humanist education "emphasizes the importance of the inner world of the learner and places the individual's thought, emotions and feelings at the forefront of all human development." (p.45). Another important concept of empowerment has its due relevance to the population of students with intellectual disability, and this is highlighted as a benefit to humanistic education (Veugelers, 2011). I also find the humanistic paradigm relevant to my research as it rejects identifying the deficits of students with intellectual disabilities when teaching students, and instead, it positively focuses on developing the best of their abilities. In terms of my educational and work-related background, I experienced a greater awareness and value of utilizing students' voices in educational research, and these have both ontological stances and are also rights-based. My ontological stance in this research is that in agreement with Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher (2009), I view children with intellectual disability as social actors, and the experiences they have should be expressed by themselves, and thus it was fundamental for me that my research listens to their voices first hand (Greene & Hill, 2005). My experience of this agrees with Okyere et al. (2020), who assert that even though the process may be challenging however, students with an intellectual disability still remain 'active social actors capable of expressing their own views about issues that concern them' (p.2). A model that echoes the intention of this research is the model developed by Lundy (2007), which focuses on four interrelated elements space, voice, audience and influence. In this research, children of secondary school age participated, and efforts were made to involve them, assuring a space and prospect to express their experience and views. Secondly, these students were exposed to necessary methods and augmentative means to facilitate their voice

and self-expression. Despite the progression of qualitative research and the use of augmentative and alternative means of communication, students with intellectual disability with limited or no spoken verbal language, rarely participate in research cohorts (Dee-Price, 2020). The rights-based stance also has a personal meaning for me. A catalyst for the increased awareness of utilising students' voices has been The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (United Nations, 2006). A very powerful experience that I had throughout my career is representing my country in Geneva, Switzerland, at the United Nations offices in a panel discussion on how our country is safeguarding the rights of students with intellectual disability in the quest for inclusion. This experience has particularly influenced me in promoting by right, a drive for disabled people to express their experiences and opinions on matters which impact their life and through this intense experience, I strengthened the importance of recognizing that it is their right to voice opinion and make decisions on matters or programmes that concern them directly. The Convention gave the impetus for the promotion of inclusion through participation in research (Gilbert, 2004), especially if this has an effect on their lives (Baxter et al. 2001). This recognizes the potential to empower individuals with a disability and avoid protectionism (Boote et al. 2002). It also ended a phase where the intellectual disability 'justified unequal treatment, rampant paternalism and a patient for life ideology' (Taua et al., 2014). Besides being a fundamental right (Watson et al., 2012), it also provides benefits for individuals, which are educational, social and scientific in nature (McDonald & Kidney, 2012). A premise of the present research is that all children need to be listened to and need to have their voices facilitated. Reinforcing this is Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989). Another important aspect for me is that the voices of students is given their authenticity and value, which Kumar (2011) refers as the 'truth'. Thus, my rationale for using a qualitative approach for this research is to seek to establish the individual experiences of these students, which will be shaped by the students' construct of social reality (Neuman, 2014). Through the research, I seek to understand the literacy learning experiences of secondary school students who have an intellectual disability but also to understand the context where the research was situated, factors influencing their experiences, as well as their thoughts on the matters relevant to them. The separate research questions and objectives of the present study lend themselves to extracting the meaning of the entire experience of these students, a principle referred as 'hermeneutic circle' by Creswell (2014). In the quest to discover these experiences with the

student participants, a qualitative methodology was fit to be employed, and I will address this next.

### 3.3 The Methodological Approach

I chose a qualitative methodology as my intention is to deepen the understanding of a particular phenomenon. It was also chosen because data were collected in the natural environment of the participants and also contended with notions that are concerning for humans and society (Creswell, 2015). Through the choice of a qualitative research method, I had access to data and information about individuals that is not possible to be quantified (Bhandari, 2020). This kind of scientific methodology is focused on the “understanding and explanation of the dynamics of social relations” (Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017 p.370) and is not related to ‘numerical representativity’ and objectivity. These authors further discuss that through qualitative research, there is a higher proximity between the researcher and the participants. Additionally, Hogan et al. (2009) consider qualitative methodology multifaceted and allows me to explore the individual’s experiences and perspectives. As described by Silverman (2020), this research enables us to comprehend what is important for individuals through the disclosure of their experience.

Woods & Sikes (2022), suggest that qualitative research has a set of features which mainly include being focused on a natural setting for the students, an interest in understanding experience and perspectives, a detailed focus on processes evident and finally, it has an inductive style for analysing data. In this research journey, using a qualitative approach enabled me to consider the school's natural setting as closely as possible to approximate reality. In representing the real experiences, I was particularly cautious on the methods used, and I am also aware that my writing, despite being affected by subjectivism and personal interpretation, however, it should seek to represent it as faithfully as possible (Hammersley 1990; Snow & Morrill, 1995). I attempted to understand the meaning of students’ expressions, words, silences, and behaviours (Woods & Sikes, 2022). A further understanding of the observed process was highly relevant to this research. This targets the changes in the students’ behaviours in the classroom, how the literacy curriculum is implemented, and how educators’ roles impact teaching and learning, amongst others.

This research was carried out based on the transformative framework for educational research (Mertens, 2005), which sought to identify inequities that might have led to discrimination and confront these in the context of students with intellectual disabilities, which, socially and educationally is considered as marginalised or at risk of being as such (Osler & Osler, 2002). In addition, research is often done on rather than with students with intellectual disability (Humphrey & Parkinson, 2006). Thus, this research provided these students with a forum for their experiences to be heard with a conviction of having them as participants who are knowledgeable and worthy of their views. In this research, the everyday lived experience and methods to explore their voice in all of this was sought. This was done in the context of school and the literacy classrooms where these experiences occurred. The intention of the study was to provide a platform for students with intellectual disability to voice experiences, thoughts and emotions in respected, open and rigorous environment (Herrero, Gasset & Garcia, 2020). Irvine (2010) highlights that even though qualitative methods have gained popularity, research on individuals with Intellectual disability still remains scarce, and the little available gives a minimal portrayal of the experiences of persons with intellectual disability (McDonald & Patka, 2012). O'Day & Killeen (2002) considers the importance of the use of qualitative methods as this 'has much to tell us about the complexity of the disability experience that other types of research do not capture' (p.12). Furthermore, considering that the priority is understanding the representation built from their literacy experiences, Jones (2007) further adds that research design has to address challenges related to cognition and communication faced by these students. In my next section, I discuss the intricate aspects of carrying out this research as an insider researcher within a small state context and the issues pertaining to the situation.

### 3.4 Research in Small States: Insider Researcher

In the present study, I am mindful of the fact that my status is that of an insider researcher and that this study is carried out in a small state, Malta. Aspects pertaining to these two related notions are explored in the context of this study. Griffith (1998) discusses that a researcher's positionality is an epistemological issue that impacts the created knowledge. Particular concern was taken of the choice of methodology in considering the power relationship between the students and myself, even because they are regarded as a vulnerable group. A deeper appreciation of ethical considerations related to this aspect will be discussed further in this chapter. Merriam et al. (2001) discuss that the researcher's positionality will influence the

research, whether this is an insider or outside of the research, and this is in line with the fact that qualitative research is value-laden. Throughout my years, I have supported schools as an Early Interventionist and later on as an Education Officer in Inclusion in the island's Southern region. This led me to start this research in a Secondary school which was not new to me. Senior Management Team representing the school were colleagues of mine, and we collaborated for various years in supporting students in the same school. Furthermore, a considerable number of participants (5 out of 8) were familiar to me as I had supported them in early and primary years, supported schools in their transition from primary and secondary, and attended some of their yearly IEPs. In addition to this, the parents of these children were also familiar to me and they recalled that I supported them throughout their son's or daughter's educational journey. Finally, LSEs supporting the students were familiar to me as well as they were my students during their training of formation in becoming LSEs or have worked together in supporting other students. These experiences and the positive relationship I always kept with the school, and parents facilitated the smooth process of accessing participants and educators accordingly. I was quite astounded at the positive reaction I received and their willingness to support me in this personal endeavour. My feelings resonate with Corbin-Dwyer & Buckle (2009), who discuss that there is a tendency that carrying out research as an insider is advantageous as participants will be more willing to share their experiences besides being more familiar with the context. I am also in agreement with Labaree (2002) that the negotiations of access and developing observational and interviewing schedules would be quite straightforward. Savvides et al. (2014) argue with this familiarity comes potential risks and bias; thus, being mindful of this was a huge responsibility for me. A disadvantage of being an insider researcher could be that participants might refrain from mentioning certain aspects as they assume shared knowledge, i.e., that I know them considering I frequented the school many times before (Turnbull, 2000). I experienced this disadvantage when interviewing Senior Management Team [SMT] members as discussions on the area of study were sometimes an occurrence within the schools when I visited premises to support students and staff. These aspects were addressed through further probing and follow-up questions. Finally, I still feel that in view that I was an insider researcher, I was better positioned to understand the phenomenon under study as it provided me with better insight. A definite disadvantage of this stance is the greater risk of bias. Albeit unintentionally, however, bias from my end can result in a deviation from the truth in the educational research

process. Particular care was taken throughout, and these will be discussed accordingly throughout this chapter.

I gave particular attention to issues relating to sensitivities when conducting research in small states. Malta, being one of those states, with less than half a million citizens, like any small state, “are not simply scaled-down versions of large countries; rather, they have an ecology of their own.” (Morrison, 2006 p. 249). The present research in van Meter (2000) and Lee’s (1993) terms are considered as sensitive research because it created a possible threat to the participants and other people involved in it. The content being discussed is quite new for the island, especially when in relation to students with intellectual disability. There are cultural factors that might affect as well as possible scrutiny and information disclosure that exposes the persons involved. This is particularly relevant because, as Farrugia (2002) discusses, the same person can have various roles or positions in the sector. Morrison (2006) has identified various potential challenges to conducting research. I encountered a considerable number of these throughout the research. Local schools, especially secondary schools, are a few in Malta; thus, these schools are easily over researched by outsiders and insiders. On approaching the school, the Head of School informed me that the school identified is a common one to carry out research, and they have researchers on a very regular basis. I took particular care not to expose educational managers who are quite distinctive in their roles. Their participation was kept confidential by ensuring school name and college name were not evidenced anywhere. Instead, the region of the school was mentioned, i.e. the Southern region of Malta.

Another aspect which I have experienced is that educators feared being identified or being traceable before disclosing what they really thought about the exams that students had to sit for. The ethical principle of confidentiality was maintained within the school, and I carried out fieldwork in safer places where it is unlikely to become ‘public knowledge’ (Morrison, 2006, p.254). I also ensured that they could not be heard by colleagues (Sciberras & Schembri, 2020). Sciberras & Schembri (2020) discuss that the latter is of particular relevance to Malta as “institutions are easily identifiable, and this, therefore, increases the risk of the participating sample becoming recognisable and jeopardising their anonymity and confidentiality” (p.42). Moosa (2013) further discuss that this is an ethical concern because if only one person becomes identifiable, then the others might be exposed, and this is especially so in a case study when the present research is the case. In accordance with suggestions from Sciberras &

Schembri (2020), I considered various aspects in order for the research to be ethically sound. Initially, pseudonyms were given to students' parents, educators and the Senior Management team to protect their identity. I also assured and communicated with participants that confidentiality and anonymity are maintained in order to ensure that educators still keep their level of openness. This episode with educators, specifically LSEs, reflects a notion of power, which is inherently a factor in educational research and students' voices. Foucault (1980) describes power as being interpersonal, dispersed, and created. Relevant to the present study is the way in which the aspects related to the literacy experiences of these students are located vis-à-vis myself as the researcher when these are given the opportunity to share their experiences. Research in this area also warns of possible challenges that might result. MacBeath et al. (2003) presage the flaw of a research which only encourages the voice of those who are more powerful, and I am aware that when these educators were being interviewed, this aspect of power might have been felt in my presence. This links with various possible biases that can feature in such a study. Due to the fact that I was an insider researcher, participant bias can arise. Referred to as acquiescence bias, this happens when participants tend to agree with the researcher even if their opinion is different even due to perceived power differences. In order to avoid this, I framed questions as open-ended in order to prevent the subjects from agreeing or disagreeing accordingly but instead give a true answer. Another risk of the insider researcher stance and aspects of power is the social desirability bias involving subjects who answer inaccurately to be liked and more accepted. In this study, questions were asked in an open-ended manner using a tone that any response is good in order to get representative answers.

Various aspects relating to the insider researcher role I had in the research and the fact that the research was carried out in the Maltese islands provided an intricate situation and areas that had to be considered thoroughly. In my next section, I will look in further depth into the Methodological approach used and the justification of why a case study design was used.

### 3.5 Research Strategy- Case Study

In the present study, I utilise a case study as a methodological approach. Case study is described as being characterised by detail, richness, comprehensiveness and also within case variance (Flyvbjerg, 2011) and Simons (1996) describes case study research as allowing a researcher to comprehend complexity in specific contexts. I chose case study because it was

advantageous due to its high conceptual validity, allows me to have a sounder understanding of the literacy context of these students and the processes involved. One shortcoming of applying this case study approach involves selection bias which may under or over-state relationships or links in the phenomena under study (Flyvberg, 2011). In fact, this aspect of selection bias and how I counteracted it will be discussed in the section of Sampling. To counteract these shortcomings, Bassey (2010) suggests that the research be oriented in the natural context of the participants and enough information should be available to ensure that salient notions of the case are represented.

In choosing a case study in the secondary school, I intend to resonate with what Ely et al. (1991) describes: "Qualitative researchers work to be accepted and trusted in their roles, to construct deep understandings about what they are studying and to have some basis for deciding what is important and relevant and what is not" (p.51). Denzin & Lincoln (2005) mention the closeness of the relationship established amid the researcher and notion under study and highlights the "socially constructed nature of reality" (p.10).

Thomas (2011) identifies case study research as being a stand-alone in educational research which is qualitative in nature (Denzin & Lincoln (2011). I have used this approach as it provided me with a level of flexibility which other approaches even though qualitative in nature, do not provide. (Hyett, Kenny & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Another reason I have chosen this approach as according to Merriam (2009), this methodology is "particularistic, descriptive and heuristic" (p.46) and the students' intentions, core values and realities are deeply connected and preserved. On another note, case studies in nature can be very unique and diverse (Ghesquiere, Maes & Vandenberghe, 2004). Regarding this diversity, I agree with Yin (1989) whereby he highlights that when case study is utilised the information sources established will contribute to the uniqueness of a specific environment such as the Maltese context and the secondary school environment that these students frequent.

It is queried that at times case study research possess mainly related to the quality and rigour in terms of validity and reliability criteria (Tight, 2010). To counteract for this, I follow advice by Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift (2014), which is providing thorough explanation of the rigour and processes utilised in this research. This resonates with Hallberg (2013) which supports that



providing a detailed study design will ensure quality and credibility of the research, referred to as methodological integrity (Morse, 2012).

### 3.6 Epistemological considerations for choosing case study research

Crowe et al. (2011) discuss that in identifying the research design some aspects to question involve whether an understanding of a phenomenon is better carried out in a naturalistic manner. When carrying out a case study approach, my epistemological standpoint determines the kind of study. I have an interpretive epistemological standpoint in this research, and it involves understanding the processes and deriving meaning from various outlooks. The choice of case study research was deemed fit for this research as the area being explored is still relatively new, and I need to gain concrete knowledge of what is happening. In the group under exploration, students with intellectual disability are rarely listened to in relation to their experiences and opinions, and the case study objective will allow me to do intensive research on it accordingly. Case study research also allowed me to discover and comprehend complex phenomena, and considering research is being done in educational settings, this also makes it fit for the intention. As discussed in Tellis (1997), through a case study, I was able to utilise methods like in class observations to recognise and reconstruct the process and outcome of the experiences of these students in literacy learning. Case study research also allowed me to obtain multiple data from schools, and it offered a possibility for crystallisation (refer to section 3.16). This has been done through the use of student interviews, adult interviews as well as class observations. Yin (1994) describes case study research as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p.23). Finally, my intention was to identify the best methodology that provided me with the flexibility required to ensure that emotions, experiences, thoughts and feelings are better revealed (Silverman, 2013)

In the next section, I explain the choice of participants, i.e. the sampling technique utilised and the inclusion criteria identified for this research.

### 3.7 Participants and sampling technique

The phase of data gathering and the choice of participants were crucial in this research. According to Bernard (2017), this phase contributes to the comprehension of the theoretical framework identified for the study. As outlined by Miles & Huberman (2014), the justification behind the selected participant sample should also align with the objectives of the study with the ontological and epistemological perspectives. As noted by Robinson (2014), randomised sampling will fail to yield the required information, and only particular individuals can hold the required experiences to explore subject in question and yield useful data. For this reason, non-probability sampling was implemented to identify the participants. In non-probability sampling, “subjective methods are used to decide which elements are included in the sample” (Etikan 2016, p.1). As a researcher, I had criteria in mind, and the participants chosen were those who suited the purpose of the research. The purposive sampling technique was used in this research and I deliberately chose the participants based on particular qualities that they possess. According to Bernard (2017), the researcher decides what needs to be disclosed and identifies the participants who may be able to provide this information by virtue of experience. There are various types of sampling methods; however, the one employed in this research is criterion sampling. According to Suri (2011), this is used when the researcher is attempting to have a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. Furthermore, the sample chosen is related to criteria which are pre-determined and inclusion as well as exclusion criteria are identified.

Participants identified for this research are students aged 13 to 16 years with intellectual disability who are attending mainstream secondary school in Malta. This corresponds to students being in Years 9, 10 and 11 of secondary schooling. These students were identified through purposive sampling as this approach was identified as integrating into the present research logic. The participants identified all had to meet the following pre-defined criteria including:

- Age between 13 and 16 years
- Student at a mainstream secondary school
- Intellectual disability (mild, moderate or severe) recognised through educational psychologist report

- Able to communicate verbally or through the use of a device or alternative communication system.
- Attending CCP classrooms for literacy

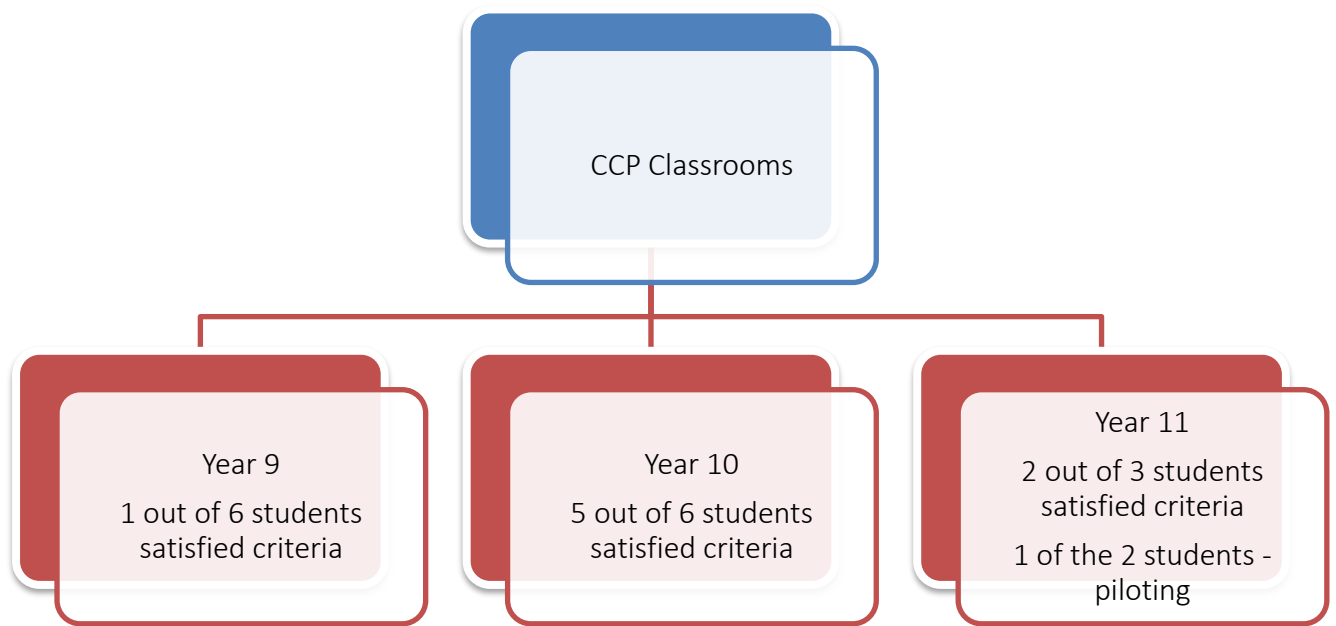
One of the aspects I was mindful of is the possible selection bias which may involve some students having an opportunity more than others to participate, ending up with some participants that could be over-represented and others under-represented. In this study, the initial number of students to be identified was nine (three mild, three moderate, and three severe); however, on negotiating access, it transpired that the three students who would have met the criteria of having a severe intellectual disability were receiving their education in the resource centre. In order to ensure that all students have the possibility to voice their experiences, I considered all the samples of Grade 9, 10 and 11 students who attended the CCP class. Students who satisfied the criteria of having a mild and moderate intellectual disability were identified as potential participants. These added up to 8, one of which was involved in the piloting of the study.

As discussed in Hollomotz (2017), the term intellectual disability entails having students with a varied range of communicative abilities, styles as well as preferences. In the mentioned article, it is suggested that as a researcher, I approach the participants with a “stance that people with intellectual disability can speak for themselves and that it is the researcher’s task to facilitate this process, rather than focusing on what a respondent may not be able to do” (Hollomotz, 2017, p.167). These learners were drawn from one chosen mainstream secondary school in the southern region of Malta. The finalised sample incorporated four students who were identified as having a mild intellectual disability and four students as having a moderate intellectual disability.

Access to the participants involved a number of steps. Following permissions from Sheffield University ethical board and the Ministry of Education in Malta, an email was sent to the Head of School whereby a link to the assistant heads and inclusion co-ordinator was facilitated. Communication links were created, with each of them keeping the Head of School in copy in any correspondence. In this research, the Head of School was the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper is mainly an individual who has control over accessing an institution, e.g., a school, as in the present case. The role of the gatekeeper in this research and further detail on consent will be

dealt with later when ethical considerations are discussed in Section 3.14. The Assistant Heads of Years 9, 10 and 11 carried out a thorough evaluation of the student files and identified major challenges for each student in the CCP class and IQ score according to the latest psychological report. Chart 1 below indicates the findings of this task and how the students were all considered as participants. Eventually, all parents and children consented to participate in the present research.

*Chart 1 Sampling procedure of participants*



The following is a key that represents students, including demographic information and the severity of intellectual disability as indicated in reports.

*Table 1 Key indicating student pseudo names*

Grade	Student	Gender	Age	Severity of Intellectual Disability
Grade 9	Ian	Male	13	Mild
Grade 10	Andrew	Male	15	Moderate
Grade 10	Adolf	Male	14	Mild
Grade 10	Zaya	Female	15	Mild
Grade 10	Simon	Male	15	Moderate
Grade 10	Shane	Male	15	Moderate

Grade 11	Nora	Female	16	Mild
Grade 11	Adam	Male	15	Moderate

In this study, reference to the parents or LSEs will be according to the name of the student e.g. Adolf's parent or Shane's LSE. Only LSEs of Grade 10 students were involved in the interviews.

The below table shows the adult participants that were involved in the interviews related to the Senior Management team

*Table 2 Key indicating SMT pseudonyms*

Role	Key	Years of experience in school
Head of Department Inclusion	HOD Inc	10 years
Head of School	HOS	12 years

### 3.8 Profile of the student participants

The following is a profile of students who agreed to participate in the interviews. Pseudonyms are being used throughout to protect the anonymity of the students themselves. It was possible to make these observations throughout the hours of visits carried out in the classrooms.

**Ian** – The student has a mild intellectual disability and learning difficulties mostly related to memory in terms of retention and retrieval of verbally communicated information. He has poor verbal communication, unable to follow simple instructions and second explanations are required in class. Prompting is required on a regular basis, and a short attention span is evident. He is able to understand and speak English, and he is independent in life skills. He shows a strong interest in technology, especially in computers. He also needs verbal ability exercises focusing on sentence structures and construction in Maltese.

**Andrew** – The student has a moderate intellectual disability and also has Autism. He is able to understand Maltese and the English language. He gets easily distracted and bored and needs prompting frequently. He can work with animated power points and animated panels, quizzes,

games and more pictures in worksheets. Spelling and handwriting are areas that still needs improving. Literacy aspects that still intervention include answering yes and no after listening to a text being read. He needs support in reasoning skills. He can have up to 2 turns in conversation, and he can initiate conversation spontaneously but needs verbal prompts to maintain the same subject throughout the conversation.

**Adolf** – The student has a mild intellectual disability and is also diagnosed with Autism. He needs a second explanation for him to understand a topic at school. He can follow instructions but finds it difficult to express himself clearly. He is attentive when given instructions but sometimes repeats the words he hears. He needs reassurance in school when working on literacy tasks, especially when he is doing his work in an appropriate manner. He can read on his own however needs support to understand certain words and sentences.

**Zaya** – The student has a mild intellectual disability with no secondary diagnosis. She has learning difficulties and is still improving sight word reading and her comprehension skills, especially in Maltese. Using punctuation and writing grammatically correct sentences are also areas that need intervention. She has challenges in retaining and recalling information which impacts her learning. Literacy difficulties, together with poor focusing, lack of perseverance in tackling cognitively challenging tasks as well as difficulties in nonverbal reasoning all impact her learning process.

**Simon** – The student has a moderate intellectual disability with a diagnosis of Autism. He has a good visual memory. He is very strong in computer use. He needs continuous prompting to help him to concentrate on the task at hand. He gets overwhelmed when presented with challenging work, and he gets very anxious. He also struggles with handwriting. He needs to be able to read a text and understand it. He prefers listening to online stories. His verbal abilities are his greatest challenge, and meaningful speech is used for communication purposes other than meeting his needs. Nonverbally communication is better, and he points vaguely in the direction of what he needs, reaches out for what he wants or leads adults to support him.

**Shane** – The student has a moderate intellectual disability with a diagnosis of Autism. He is very shy and has communication difficulties. He finds it difficult to stay focused for a considerable amount of time. He still needs to work on sight words and improving his comprehension skills. Regarding writing, he still needs to be able to write between the lines and leave appropriate

spacing. The writing of sentences which are grammatically correct is an area which also needs to develop.

**Nora** – The student has a mild intellectual disability and has Down Syndrome. She requires prompting to remain focused during a task. Her sitting tolerance is very good during class. Sometimes she indicates difficulty with auditory memory, but her visual skills are her strength. She enjoys reading; however, after a long passage, she is not able to recall what she has read. She is able to write and she is independent in life adaptive skills. At times during lessons struggles with recalling information or episodes that happened before.

**Adam** - The student has a moderate intellectual disability and Autism. He finds it difficult to focus throughout a task and needs prompting. Visuals help a lot in understanding. He can read sentences; however, his comprehension skills are still poor. He can verbally express himself when he is asked simple questions in class.

Following this initial consent from each school's management team, written consent was gained from each pupil's parents for the observations to commence. Consent from parents and assent from students is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter. In the next section, an overview of the piloting of the study will be dealt with in detail.

### 3.9 Piloting the study

Pilot studies can serve various purposes, and one of them is to enhance the research quality, reliability and validity, and this is the reason it was a crucial part of the present research design (Gudmundsdottir & Brock-Utne, 2010)

For this research, I piloted the study in order to pre-test three aspects. It was done to acclimatise to the class environment during class observations, to test the suitability of the observation tool used with regard to identifying areas related to engagement, inclusion and literacy skills. It also supported me in testing student interviews with a student in order to identify whether any additional resources will be needed and how questions would be adapted. Another aim of the pilot project was that the parent interview could be held and interview questions could be tested accordingly.

The pilot study conducted had various benefits to me as a researcher and to the data collection process as it allowed me to explore:

- a) if there are any limitations in the recruitment of the participants within the CCP classrooms.
- b) the experience of whether parents were interested in collaborating on issues related to literacy
- c) the parents' reaction to the fact that the main voices in the dissertation were going to be their children with intellectual disability.
- d) finding the best place for the student interview

The process also allowed me to practice and improve skills related to qualitative research especially doing student interviews with students with intellectual disability and practising how probing or changing the format of the questions can help. It further gave me insight into identifying whether the sample is enough and whether enough data will be generated from student interviews. It also allowed me to ask pertinent questions to parents and identify areas which were not tackled, but that parents gave a lot of importance to them. One such example was the aspect of homework which eventually was added to the list of questions in the parental interview.

Next is a description of the data collection process and participation process of the students after their identification through purposive sampling.

### 3.10 Data collection and participation process

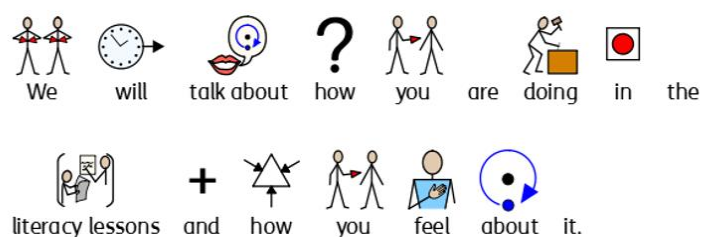
Various researchers have expressed their recognition of having individuals with intellectual disability engaging in research related to inclusion (Lutz, Fisher & Robinson, 2018), and this can be done by utilising appropriate research tools which will enable even students with intellectual disability to engage in it in relation to issues concerning them (MacLeod, Lewis & Robertson, 2014). This mainly stems from the civil rights stance echoing *Nothing about us without us*. In adapting this, paradigm research is practised, seeking to be inclusive of individuals with intellectual disability, especially in aspects related to their life (Nicolaidis et al. 2011). In my case study research, I used various methods for data collection, including student interviews, classroom observations and individual interviews with parents, educators and SMT. I wanted to ensure that the voices of these students were heard and their experiences clearly emerged. I actively ensured that students with intellectual disability felt that research is conducted in a way that provided a proper representation of their viewpoints (Kitchin, 2000).



Gilbert (2004) describes this part of the process as the most challenging when research is being carried out with individuals with intellectual disability. Studies such as Hamilton et al. (2016) found that, actively or in a passive manner, individuals with intellectual disability are often excluded from research as they are perceived as lacking the ability to comprehend information and capable of decision-making. Iacono (2006) argues about the notion of uneasiness that individuals with intellectual disability have with research. This is due to a history of being exploited and, subsequently, leads to attitudinal protectiveness and lessened accessibility to participatory research. According to Hollomotz (2017), even though this involvement in the research has its benefits, children with intellectual disability are often left out due to challenges encountered which are ethical or methodological in nature. He further adds that avoidance of carrying out research with individuals having intellectual disability could be due to a perception of vulnerability and restrictions related to cognition and language skills as well as behavioural challenges. Some even considered default answers that are possibly given by children with intellectual disability as being a challenge to carry out such research (Lewis, 2009). Okyere et al. (2020) assert that even though the data collection process may be challenging, students with intellectual disability remain 'active social actors capable of expressing their own views about issues that concern them' (p.2). Rigour, validity and controlling bias are important notions to be dealt with at this stage. The relationship I built with the students involved discussing roles and identity because, as Walmsley (1993) noted, there is the risk that if this is not explained, these students might identify the researcher as another professional and consequently might be reluctant to divulge information as the students may feel this as 'professional surveillance' (Booth & Booth, 1996). When individuals with intellectual disability are involved in research, beginning the research and accessing these individuals is a process in itself. In accessing participants, Stalker (1998) identifies three steps of negotiation mainly to gain permits from organisations, e.g., schools, negotiating with school staff to access participants and finally meeting personally with individuals with intellectual disability who might or might not be willing to take part in the research. At this point, the information provided need to be accessible, e.g., through visuals, to gain and maintain consent. As part of the participation process, I visited schools concerned and met with students and LSEs in order to familiarise themselves with me as well as discuss the research aims. This introductory meeting also served the purpose of observing if the student was interested or inclined to participate and become involved in the research. Even though the topic was already set up at

this stage, however through this process, I also discussed with the student and LSE if there were certain topics or issues, they wished that I research in relation to literacy experiences. In fact, during the initial stages, LSEs did not identify any particular aspects; however, closer to the end of the observation sessions, they showed their interest in discussing examinations for students in the CCP class as being June, meant students were getting closer to the exams. This event ed students' mood and engagement within the lesson; thus, as a researcher, I felt the need to focus on this aspect even though it might not have been featured if research was carried out during a different period of the scholastic year. Aspis (1997) is quite critical of how researchers mainly request people with intellectual disability to participate in research who already have a set agenda rather than considering the agenda of students with intellectual disability. This was a real eye-opener, and amendments were carried out in the process to ensure that the voices of these students were heard even in the design process. One important aspect was to keep the discussion with students jargon-free (Stalker, 1998) as well as provide information on the research utilising symbols to supplement communication and understanding (Burke et al., 2003). An information sheet including the details of the research was prepared with symbols using the Symwriter in order to supplement my verbal explanation of the project. Simple vocabulary was used, and linking to their own experience was done, e.g., instead of using the word thesis, the word project was used with them. Instead of using the word university, the word school was used.

*Figure 1 Use of SymWriter and use of simple vocabulary*



In this field, according to Ellem et al. (2008), research with intellectual disability needs to transpire as being respectful, relevant and beneficial to them as well as sensible. McDonald, Kidney & Patka (2013) also points out the willingness of individuals with intellectual disability

to contribute to studies carried out related to their life experiences and settings. Furthermore, they want that this research to value their abilities and contribution, ensuring accessibility to material by providing accommodations and given the opportunity to take their own decision (Woodring et al., 2006). When such individuals have difficulties accessing and understanding information about the research, they appreciate the presence of valuable others to support them in the process (Andre-Barron et al., 2008). For this reason, LSEs were always present during the process of the research in order to provide further information or explanation should this be required in my absence or in the eventuality that they feel more comfortable disclosing any doubts to the LSE rather than to myself.

Particular attention was required when conducting the semi-structured interviews with the students and their LSE. Issues of validity are ingrained in this part of the process. Rogers (1999) has noticed the tendency to choose the last thing said or answer in the affirmative to questions asked, i.e., the acquiesce tendency, and this could be mainly due to the fact that these individuals often encounter situations where others choose for them rather than being given a voice to indicate their opinion or choice (Gilbert, 2004). The approach used to collect data was not homogenous with all participants, and this has been identified as a possibility by Booth & Booth (2003), who identified the possibility of using various approaches. Thus, students with a mild intellectual disability require different methods than those with moderate intellectual disability. Yet another opposed practice to typical research was the process of the semi-structured interview. Usually, the semi-structured interview itself is a good platform for students to reply in a more fluid manner and this indicates a better quality (Kvale, 1996). This approach might not work out the same with students with intellectual disability due to impaired language and communication skills. Booth & Booth (1996) suggests that the researcher should focus on the questions and answers; however, silences and unresponsiveness should be read and noted with the possibility of revisiting some questions or carrying out the interview a number of times. The option of using more direct questions rather than open-ended ones could be a possible strategy to be used with students with intellectual disability, and body language indicated by the participant is fundamental to indicate whether the researcher can continue questioning the participant (Booth & Booth, 1996)

Furthermore, Hamilton et al. (2016), in their study on mental capacity, recommend the use of accommodations which are more person-centred, including assistive technologies, in order to aid understanding of research and inform their decision in participating. In the present research, mental capacity was varied among the participants. Students with mild and moderate intellectual disability participated, and according to Hamilton et al. (2016), individuals with mild intellectual disability are fluent verbally and thus, it is more straightforward to carry out such consent-related decisions. Turnpenny et al. (2015) refer to individuals with moderate intellectual disability as those who are seldom heard and more at risk of being excluded from research. This has been creating a lacuna in the representation of individuals with moderate intellectual disability in educational research (Iacono, 2006). The premise often used in excluding these individuals is the lack of mental capacity to consent and understand the research; however, the UNCRPD insist on the commitment to include not only the capacities of individuals but also those who lack the mental capacity to decide. This should be done through supporting inclusive methods for informed decision-making to be actualised, easy-to-read material, as well as a carer or relative support.

Considering possible literacy challenges in students with intellectual disability, providing varying means to consent rather than exclusively through signing will avoid disabling the participant from taking part in the research. In this research, all of the students could sign or write their names as well as the date of the interview.

In the next sections, the tools identified for data collection will be explored in further detail. Student interviews are the first tool that will be considered in depth.

### 3.11 Student interviews

Utilizing interviews in my qualitative research allowed me to deeply explore 'matters that are unique to the experiences of the interviewees, allowing insights into how different phenomena of interest are experienced and perceived.' (McGrath, Palmgren & Liljedahl, 2019 p. 1002) In principle, the nature of conducting student interviews could be problematic on various fronts. Initially, having student interviews constitutes a power balance which is uneven because it is a student-adult interview and also because this is further amplified considering that the student has an intellectual disability (Emerson et al., 2004). Ample studies document a concern about whether proper descriptions and narration of experiences are even possible

due to limiting cognition and communication abilities (Corby, Taggart, & Cousins, 2015). This may create challenges in the methodology whilst impending on whether the data gathered is valid and reliable (Sigstad 2014). Nonetheless, Sigstad & Garrels (2018) outlines reasons why it is still desirable to have individuals with Intellectual disability participating in research relevant to them. Cummins (2002) states that self-reporting is of higher quality than proxy reports that might originate from guardians or teachers. In accordance with Cummins (2002), the guardian's input will be sought through a focus group, which was considered to provide further information and a possible divergent perspective on the theme under investigation. Furthermore, I agree and adopted the approach of Sigstad & Garrels (2018) that highlights that 'when wanting to assess a subjective experience, the principal source of information should be the person who is at the centre of this experience' (p.693). Walmsley & Johnson (2003) embraces the benefit of having an individual with an Intellectual disability participate in the interviews as this creates a sense of empowerment. The inclusion of participants with intellectual disability in this research does not come without its challenges, and considerations had to be carefully thought. These considerations had the sole aim of maximising the interview's success by suggesting alternative ways to strengthen the participant-interview communicative approach. Research has identified the following aspects as significant enough to obtain this success, and these include rapport building before actually interviewing individuals, use of clear and plain language with visual supports, use of providing additional questions to supplement information as well as facilitating techniques (Antaki 2013; Corby, Taggart & Cousins, 2015; Finlay & Antaki, 2012). Furthermore, in their article, Sigstad & Garrels (2018) also discuss that 'strategies such as expansion, modification of content and format, the use of preliminary questions and the use of physical prompts also contributed to more adequate responses from the respondents.' (p.693). Finally, I was willing to adapt methods to match the exclusivity of each student with intellectual disability. I felt it was a pre-requisite to adopt more flexibility to ensure an equitable platform for sharing experiences in all students.

### 3.11.1 The student interview tool

- The development of the student interview tool involved a number of considerations related to the skills repertoire of students with intellectual disability. Based on Broer, Doyle & Giangreco (2005) several aspects were taken into consideration when designing the tool. The questions identified were designed to support understanding

as much as possible, including simple language and words familiar to the students, e.g., the use of Maltese and English rather than literacy. The questions drafted were a mix of closed and open-ended questions with the possibility of changing open-ended questions to closed questions if the need arises with individual students. Perry & Felce (2002) have identified that limited language abilities can create difficulties in eliciting valid responses, and thus, for the sake of the richness of data, I had to ensure that presenting open-ended questions might result in a brief response and limiting in nature as often they are unable to answer them (Biklen & Moseley, 1988). As per Goodley (1996), as a researcher, I had to be more attentive to the risk of imposing my own interpretations when students are less verbal and more challenging to understand. A study which provided me with a lot of insight when designing the student interview tool is the one by Morrison, Bradshaw & Murphy (2021), which tackles the challenges of individuals with intellectual disabilities when giving witness evidence in court. They specifically explain that interpersonal communication, i.e., a two-way form of communication, happens in giving evidence in court in the same way as a conversation during an interview. According to Cogher (2010), in order to have an efficient exchange between two individuals, factors such as the communication skills of both parties, cognitive skills, language skills, and social and pragmatic skills are all determinants. Thus, when individuals with an Intellectual disability are engaged in conversation, they might find focusing and attending to the exchange quite challenging (Hronis et al., 2017). They might even struggle with the pragmatic aspect of the language and understanding the underlying meanings of what is uttered by the communication partner (Martin et al., 2017). Morrison et al. (2021) have identified a number of communication challenges that are worth considering, and these include memory limitations and the possibility of acquiescence is more evident with lower IQs, when free recall is expected, limited information is provided, and there is an increased likelihood that questions requiring a yes or a no answer yield inaccuracies. Results from the study of Morrison et al. (2021) shed light on various aspects related to the presentation of questions in interviewing individuals with intellectual disability. These are presented hereunder in point form, and these considerations were prioritised when developing the interview tool and during the conduction of the student interviews.

- Point 1: The informative content of the question – When excessive and unnecessary information is provided, individuals tend to struggle with retaining this information, especially if these are presented as long sentences or even in paragraph format. There is a possibility for individuals to auditory process only a part of the question as the information could be overloading to the individual. Consequently, it can create inaccuracies or incomplete replies.
- Point 2: The manner in which a question is asked – Individuals with Intellectual disability might have difficulties in the language used, the structure of the question or sentence uttered, the style of the questions and the pace at which the questions are addressed. If the language used by the communication partner or researcher, in my case, is very complex and abstract in the ideas it is conveying and inference is required, there is the likelihood that students feel confused and fails to understand the question in whole or part thereof. This may also include the use of terminology or jargon that students are not familiar with. Abstract language can also be reflected in questions regarding emotions linked to a particular experience, especially if that experience did not happen recently, as time concepts can even be hard to comprehend. An implication of the present study is that questions on literacy experiences will avoid inferred meaning, such as making predictions, problem-solving, imagining a scenario etc. Another fundamental point is that questions designed should not include multiple parts and should not contain more than one or two key points. Using negatives, questions related to why and how, and statements utilised as questions do not support understanding students with intellectual disability. The pace at which the question is asked is another determinant factor, and saying it slowly, giving ample time for processing is ideal as using a fast pace can create “an inability to follow the questions, difficulties processing the information, confusion and difficulties responding to the questions” (Morrison et al., 2021, p.249)
- Point 3: Length of questioning and retention of information- It has been reported in Morrison et al. (2021) that challenges might present when a lot of information is presented in questions and this includes the length of the questioning process. The implication of the present research is that if students are tired, they will find it more challenging to focus on the questions asked, and retrieval of information is limited.

Indicators of tiredness include difficulty sustaining attention, disengagement, agitation, and zoning out.

- Point 4: Processing skills during interviews – Students with intellectual disability require more time to process instructions or questions and gather meaning from them. They also require added time to reply back. In the context of this research, it was essential that students are given enough time within the question and even between questions.

The student interview tool developed and used in this research includes various guiding questions based on the guidelines of Universal Design for Learning issued by CAST (2020). These include i) questions that offer an alternative accessible reading format, ii) visuals or pictograms included to facilitate visual accessibility of the content, iii) a glossary to further describe any terms which might be difficult. **Appendix A** includes the adapted interview questions in pictorial format.

Table 3 shows three options. Option 1 includes questions which are more open and invite students to describe in certain detail their experiences. Option 2 indicates questions which are simpler in the manner that they are written and easier for students with intellectual disability to understand. Option 3 provides a range of close-ended questions used during the interviews when open-ended questions proved to be more challenging.

*Table 3 Question options for student interviews*

Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
If you had to describe your experience in the English lessons, what would you say?	What is your lesson in English like?  What is your lesson in Maltese like	Do you prefer English or Maltese lessons?
How are English lessons contributing to your development?	How are English/Maltese lessons helping you?	Which is harder, reading or writing?



<b>If you had to choose one new skill or thing you learnt during the English lessons, what would it be?</b>	Say one thing you learnt during the English lesson	What do you prefer grammar or writing a story?
<b>What is the main barrier or hardest thing you encountered?</b>	What is the hardest thing to do during the English/Maltese lessons?	Who helps you in class teacher or LSE?
<b>How did educators address this issue?</b>	Does the teacher help you ?	How does LSE help you?
<b>What were your favourite and least favourite topics?</b>	What was your favourite topic?	What topic do you like?
<b>What can be done to improve the English lessons?</b>	What would a perfect English lesson be like?	What is fun during lessons?
<b>Whenever you needed help, what did you do? Who did you ask for help?</b>	Did you receive enough help when you asked for it?	Do teachers and LSEs help you enough?
<b>How would you describe or rate your relationship with the teacher and LSE in the literacy lesson?</b>	How did you feel when you spoke with the teacher and LSE?	Do you feel happy or sad during literacy lessons?

### 3.11.2 Conducting student interviews – the experience and journey

The student interview is a widely used tool in human and social science, and as used in this research, it involved a number of encounters between the participants and me. As a non-disabled researcher, the tool of conducting student interviews was by far the most challenging part of the research. I opted for this choice of method consciously and with the recognition that these students with intellectual disability are informants who have opinions and

experiences that are worth validating and also reliable in nature. Ingrained in it all is my strong sense of conviction that they actually have a right to express these accordingly on aspects that matter to them. Thus as described by Broun & Heshusius (2004), as a researcher, I am the catalyst to create a transformation and the necessary changes for empowerment. Jones (2007) discusses that using qualitative research instruments such as interviews makes it easier to adapt to the participant's needs to ensure that a voice is being given to them.

The journey to elicit the voices of the students was documented to provide a richer account of how the process progressed. The interview did not have the structure of an oral questionnaire but instead will be semi-structured as it is the kind needed to provide flexibility to explore the theme under study. A setting up of the background was required, and various encounters paved the way for the interview with the students themselves. Various methodological issues are at stake in this research as the students have an intellectual disability and thus may present with communication disorders. An ethnographic approach helps in this study as it enables me to encounter, get to know and establish a climate where students with intellectual disability can feel confident and trust the researcher (Schwartz, 1993). One important characteristic I experienced whilst getting to know these students involved the inter-individual differences that they presented despite having the same disability. Their degree of intellectual disability was known a priori (when participants were identified) and thus, this has been taken into account in the process as it affects the way the student was able to participate in the interview (Galien, 2010). Delaporte (2002) refers to the concept of 'speaking the interviewee's language' (p.11) when conducting student interviews and thus being able to identify competencies and needs for the chosen process. Conducting the student interview did not entail simply meeting and asking questions to the students, but I was aware that the process of meeting with the participants would have an impact on the discourses and experiences narrated. I paid particular attention to the time and space these encounters happened as a familiarization process was required for the students to express themselves freely when the interview happened. This process took around six weeks, and I joined the students in their literacy experiences a number of times before I actually carried out the interview. I also had the possibility to analyse their method of communication, especially when this involved use of alternative means of communication, e.g., visuals. Throughout this time, I sought to immerse myself in the world of the participants. Relevant cautionary advice by Picon (2009) enabled me to find a balance and

not to over-extend this period so that the participant is not confused on the reason of my presence. Bedoin & Scelles (2015) state, 'For people with intellectual disability, such prior encounters help them become familiar with the researcher and enable them to better understand and keep in mind the specifics of the research interview situation.' (p.477). Constant reminders may be required due to limited executive functioning, and for this reason, I drew up a poster sheet, and through the use of visuals, the stage and intention of the research were outlined for clarity purposes as per Petitpierre et al.'s (2013) recommendation. The choice to do face-to-face interviews with the students had various advantages. First of all, I opted to the interview of students following a literacy lesson during break time. This makes it easier for students to recall aspects and experiences they had in literacy. The face-to-face interview also allowed me more flexibility. I could amend questions and probe if the answer was not given. I was also able to watch the nonverbal behaviours and their body language closely and made it evident when certain students were getting tired or fidgety. Throughout these interviews, the communicative approach used with the students left a considerable impact on the answers they give. This notion will be discussed in the next subsection.

### 3.11.3 The communicative approach of the researcher

One aspect that I have already encountered throughout my experiences with students with intellectual disability is the approach used in communicating with such individuals. The derived training from being both a Speech and Language Pathologist and a Special Education teacher equipped me with functional adaptation techniques to enhance my communicative competence. This was still an area I researched vastly as part of the preparation before gaining data; however, little research was found as the information available related more to ethics, building rapport with participants as well as the use of alternative means of communication. One particular approach adopted in the student interview was that of Sigstad & Garrels (2018) whereby in their article a thorough description of the facilitated communication techniques is outlined. Three main strategies are delineated, and these include 'silence and encouraging prompts, rephrasing questions and repeating, paraphrasing and summarizing responses' (Sigstad & Garrels, 2018, p.694)

a) *Silencing and encouraging prompts.* Participants with intellectual disability (at all levels) indicated difficulties relating to verbal understanding and executive functions such as working

memory. Longer processing time is evident with individuals with intellectual disability (Corby, Taggart & Cousins, 2015), and thus when I asked a question, the participant took a longer time to provide an answer, therefore, I ensured that enough time was provided to process the question and reply with the answer required. There were particular instances whereby as a researcher, I was unsure of the meaning of their latency. The silence could be attributed to the slower processing rate or difficulty understanding the question posed. Based on my therapeutic practice with students, I was aware that if the former was challenging, rephrasing my question would have interrupted the thinking process, and this is also pointed out in Carr & O'Reilly (2016) as a potential challenge. To mitigate this situation, I was very sensitive to the student's behaviours (Antaki, 2013). The presence of the Learning Support Educator was fundamental as having more knowledge of the student meant that she could indicate the possible scenario. In view of this, I tried formulating questions in a manner that has simple vocabulary and to the point to support understanding. An example is the use of 'English lesson and Maltese lesson' as opposed to the 'literacy lesson' as the common terminology in the school is the former rather than the latter. Finlay & Lyons (2001) emphasize the importance of using sentences which are structurally easy and ideally using terminology relating to concrete objects. Caldwell (2014), furthermore warns about the challenges created for individuals with intellectual disability when abstract language and concepts are used by the interviewer. On various occasions, I allowed silence periods, and the use of interjections, friendly smile, eye contact for encouragement and nodding signals indicated that I respect the time required to reply.

b) *Rephrasing questions and repeating.* Finlay & Antaki (2012) state that rephrasing questions may be a strategy needed to specify or repeat the intended question, allowing the participant to listen to a differently worded question that can support comprehension. They further add that expanding on the question using concrete terms and defining some terms may support understanding. Sigstad (2017) also suggests that if open-ended questions prove to be hard to understand, altering them into *yes* or *no* question might be beneficial. Following with further specific interrogations could be used if participants with intellectual disability answers in a relatively short manner (Finlay & Antaki, 2012)

c). Paraphrasing and summarising responses: A technique derived from counselling, repeating and summarizing can all be utilized to feedback on the participant's disclosure, supports

reflecting on what has been said and provide the participant to listen to his or her response to finally confirm the answer or otherwise (Lassen, 2014). As a researcher, I used paraphrasing to ensure that I understood what the participant said and correct whether it was inaccurate. This procedure takes time; however, as per McDonald, Conroy & Olick (2016), the time spent in such qualitative interviews gives a valuable message to participants with intellectual disability that their input is valuable and active listening is happening. In my student interviews, I provided a brief summary of what was said to ensure that participants can provide any supplementary information.

Various strategies prove to be essential when interviews are directed towards individuals with intellectual disability; however, these unconventional techniques of conducting interviews ensure a platform for these students to voice their literacy experiences accordingly. At times coupling this data with other methods to elicit the parents' experiences is beneficial. In the next part, the adult participants' interviews will be discussed whereby parents, LSEs and SMTs perspectives were sought.

### 3.12 Semi- Structured interviews with parents, LSEs and Senior Management Team.

Semi-structured interviews were the tool identified to carry out an in-depth understanding of the parents' perspectives and experiences regarding their child's literacy. They were also chosen to delve deeper into inclusive matters with the Senior Management team. These qualitative interviews, as mentioned by Kvale (1996), are utilised to try and understand the phenomena under research from the participants' point of view. Sewell (2009) further discuss that it aims to unfold and uncover their lived experiences and their meanings. My aim during these interviews was to guide the parents into an extended discussion on the literacy experiences of their children (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). They further add that in semi-structured interviews; the researcher is in control of the direction of the discussion. However, as a researcher, the journey of these interviews does not leave me unaffected because, as Kvale (1996) states, this instigates a reflective process that leads the researcher and even participants to a varied way of self-understanding. On a more technical aspect, Dunne et al. (2005) consider interviews as being a flexible research tool, highly adaptable, and thus, it is important that as a researcher, I understand my positionality in it.

### 3.12.1 Rationale for Choice

Semi-structured interviews are described as exploratory interviews, and even though there are subject trajectories prepared in advance, it still allows researcher to dig deeper for further discovery (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). This tool was chosen under the premise that it is more likely to have participants disclose and express themselves in openly-designed contexts rather than in questionnaires (Flick, 2006). A semi-structured interview style has been chosen over a structured interview as it allowed me to have the flexibility of bringing forward new questions based on what the participants would have said with a balanced component of core pre-identified questions, following up on what interviews have said as well as probing further when necessary (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Lindlof & Taylor (2002) highlights the preparation required in advance with an interview guide consisting of questions to be asked. These questions can be found in **Appendix B** and these were the main questions identified to be discussed. Mason (2002) discusses that qualitative interviews feature as a form of internal conversational exchange and can be done as a large group, focus group or on a one-to-one basis. Initially, a focus group was considered because all parents had a common background; however, as these were going to be held in summer, due to planned holidays and work commitments, a common date or time was not established. Doing one-to-one interviews provided the flexibility of accommodating parents whilst enabling me to carry out such research.

Creswell (2013) mentions that a traditional manner of doing interviews is face-to-face. Gray et al. (2020) determine that these interviews might take place even with video conferencing, over the phone, and other Internet platforms. They further add that Zoom is one of the video conferencing tools that can be used to conduct interviews. It was used in the present research because it is a free-to-use programme and only had to be downloaded by the researcher (Gray et al., 2020). In the present research, parents were given the option to meet face to face or use Zoom for the meetings; however, for convenience purposes, they all chose the latter. There are other possible reasons why Zoom was chosen and these include avoiding travelling (Winiarska, 2017). Usually, participants enjoy that they can be interviewed in a more convenient manner as well as flexible around their commitments (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013). This, however, does not impact the quality of the interview as various studies have shown that when face-to-face is compared with online video conferencing, the quality is the same, and rapport between participants and interviewer is built up faster (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013).

These interviews had a more thematic-centred or narrative approach to them and with set starting points. In the piloting stage, for instance, the parents of the boy I was interviewing mentioned the aspect of homework, which seemed very relevant to the literacy journey. Thus, this was added to the questions identified to ensure that the context and experiences that are relevant are highlighted. As per Mason (2002), there are reasons why I chose semi-structured interviews over other tools. Initially, the choice of this method is related to my ontological position in this research. My approach and philosophy used in this study are humanistic (Plummer, 2001), which is one of the reasons. In addition, I vehemently believe that the interview is a social situation whereby experiences and perspectives are meaningful aspects of the real social context of these participants. This also links to my epistemological position as a researcher, as it allows me to generate narratives whilst analysing the discourses and language used. My choice of semi-structured interviews also has to do with reflexivity within this research. The intention of these parental interviews was to provide what Ruslin et al. (2022) state as giving “additional dimension to the research” (p. 25) and eliciting the experiences of the students even through various perspectives and lenses. The narratives elicited in these parent interviews are not considered factual but interpretative and particular to the group of parents. This is in line with the original aim to do case study research where the idea was not to have data on the whole population of parents of children with intellectual disability but only the particular group under study (Drever, 2003).

Another important aspect related to the conduction of interviews involves the spontaneous open interview discussion carried out with the LSEs of the students. This aspect evolved as students started getting tense and less engaged in class when revision for the exam was initiated. The LSEs showed their wish to discuss this and give their feedback on the matter, and following a lesson, I had the opportunity to record a small discussion in the form of an interview with them in a class. There were no pre-set questions, but as Rubin & Rubin (2012) said, the formulation of questions happens as the interview progresses. Even though these discussions were informal, as Prior (2018) discusses, they are still essentially part of the research process and a product.

### 3.12.2 Conducting the interviews.

Drever (2003) discuss that the approach taken by the researcher in a semi-structured interview needs to be taken into consideration. Even though it is a laborious process, however, preparing questions is a major milestone in conducting these interviews. Following the schedule of questions identified helped, and these questions acted as a guide in order for me to focus on more in-depth issues mentioned by the parents. This allowed me to feel more at ease with parents, and during the interview, I had the time to introduce myself and the intention of the research. I also discussed the intention to provide a platform for their children to give them a voice. This approach is referred to as being 'minimalist' during the duration of the interview (Drever, 2003). According to Willig (2008), parents may also have challenging views and develop particular statements which can make data richer. This also applies to interviewing educators and SMT who were given the possibility to develop their opinions on the matter.

As an interviewer, I had to use particular skills in order for the semi-structured interviews to be successful. Using probes and prompting timely and in an appropriate manner was important to establish and maintain a good interpersonal rapport between the parent and myself. Particular care was taken when probing due to the risk of talking excessively or leading the participant to particular answers. My experience in working with parents of children with disability equipped me with the sensitivity and appropriate language to use when addressing the participants and their children, as well as verbal communication skills, knowledge of the area under investigation and attitudes (Heremanns, 2004). Thus, I was capable of adapting conversation styles and communication skills to steer the discussion and keep participants focused on the matter. The questions asked served as a springboard for discussion, and this was done flexibly and not necessarily adhering strictly to the preset questions at all times. Besides this, parents, LSEs, and SMT were provided with the opportunity to ask questions and even discuss personal worries, which in the majority of the cases involved post-secondary education options and educational opportunities.

Yet, another tool of importance to explore the literacy experiences involved are in class observations.



### 3.13 Class observations

Class observations have an important role when a student with disabilities is part of the research, as these provide evidence to support practice and policy (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Ahlgrim-Delzell & Rivera (2015) as well as Ruppert (2015), discuss that observational studies in the classroom focusing on literacy, especially reading is quite scarce. Such observations, together with the experiences gained through student interviews, intervention programs to support literacy development could be possible.

The use of multiple methods allowed me, as a researcher, to draw on information coming from various contexts, including classroom observations (Hollomotz, 2017). Lewis & Porter (2007) identifies the importance of capturing the voices of all students with intellectual disability and not only those which are easily done. Class observations were used, as an indirect method, to learn more about the students' views. Brostrum (2012) identifies the need to interpret with caution the voices of the students as these reflect their opinions and feelings. An 'attentive gaze' was adopted as opposed to a 'disciplinary gaze' when listening to students to understand rather than control (Veck, 2009). This ensures that passivity is not encouraged, as the purpose of the research is to give students the power to affect change rather than leaving them powerless.

According to Dessemontet et al. (2021), class observations have a fundamental role when this needs to inform educational practices related to special education. It allows the researcher to better understand what literacy practices are being utilised in this naturalistic context for these students with intellectual disability. Research such as Walker & Stevens (2017) have used class observations to identify the type and quality of teaching in reading for students with intellectual disability. However, research in the area is limited as it mostly includes a very small number of subjects and is mostly done in the USA, leaving data in other national and European contexts limited (Ahlgrim-Delzell & Rivera, 2015; Dessemontet et al., 2021).

In this study, I was interested in describing aspects going on in the class in relation to inclusion, engagement and literacy practices. Thus, it was never the intention to quantitatively rate the quality of literacy teaching or the percentages of engagement shown during the lesson. Instead, dimensions from other observation tools were used to systematically support the collection of rich descriptions on each of these indicators when evident in the classroom. At

particular times, photos were even taken in the classroom, indicating the teaching material used, visuals and texts provided. Discussions with the LSEs in the classroom during certain activities supported me in complementing and substantiating the context for the data observed (Smith et al., 2008). At a particular point, when examinations were getting closer and a more detailed account of the happenings in the class needed more exploration, 10-15 minute interviews were held with the LSEs, and they were questioned about their experience in relation to the examinations within the classroom. In the next section, I shall discuss the kind of observations carried out and the checklist used to support observations and aspects considered pivotal to observe.

### 3.13.1 An overt observer in Naturalistic observation

The kind of observations chosen are naturalistic, i.e. students are in their natural environment, which is the school. This technique deals with observing spontaneous behaviours going on in the class, especially during literacy lessons. As a researcher, I recorded what I was seeing in relation to inclusion markers, engagement and literacy skills. This has yielded a large amount of data, and observational field notes will be analysed throughout the next chapter. My presence within the class was an overt one. All students and educators in the class were aware of my presence, and I often mingled with them and moved closer to them during informal activities. I chose particularly to be an overt observer as my presence in the class was intended to serve as familiarisation with each other in preparation for the student interviews so they feel comfortable enough disclosing their experiences.

### 3.13.2 The Observation checklist

As already discussed, the observation checklist used in this research was not intended to serve as a quantitative tool, but it involved a list of statements to assist me when I was doing observations in the classrooms and evaluating the behaviours of students. It also allowed me to identify the relationship between educators together with students in relation to literacy learning. Another useful aspect of the observation checklist identified was to assist me in identifying any skills gaps educators might have in relation to teaching literacy to students with intellectual disability. Its intention is also to provide guidance on teaching strategies to look for, classroom setting as well as the student learning environment. The observation checklist was effectively used by factoring the relevant areas related to the study, including inclusion

markers that are evident in the class, resources used, class structure, the interaction between teacher and students, as well as content being covered. The observation checklist was amended and used to suit the needs of the research, always citing the authors of the original checklist. Besides marking with yes or no, I have also backed my observations with detailed general observations highlighting any relevant aspects worth exploring. I have also included various field notes along the journey of data collection, which will all be analysed in the next chapter. In the first part of the checklist, I included a list of characteristics that could be relevant to each student that I was observing. It includes aspects of Social and Emotional Functioning, Cognitive Functioning and Communication Functioning which are all related to literacy learning and have an effect on engagement within the class. This profile is in a ticking format, as it was easier to mark during the observation sessions. This information is presented for every participant in **Appendix C**, and it is backed by school reports and individual educational plans. The checklist in all targets three important notions that have been prioritised during observations, and these include classroom engagement, inclusion markers which are essential to creating an atmosphere conducive to learning as well as literacy instruction markers. These will be discussed in further detail in points (a), (b) and (c) hereunder.

a) Inclusion markers

An inclusive environment and inclusive teaching are the initial aspects that were observed in the classroom. Social and emotional markers, intellectual markers, physical markers and structural markers have been identified as four essential aspects to consider when observing inclusion in the class.

i) *Social and emotional markers* identifying the evidence of strategies to ensure that students feel safe is one of the aspects observed within the literacy lessons. Another aspect fundamental to inclusive learning is the aspect of a growth mindset which is at the core of the philosophy of UDL, together with a motivating stance to learn and self-regulation (Meyer et al., 2014). Regarding students with intellectual disabilities Griful-Freixenet et al. (2021) discuss that educators with a growth mindset believe that learners' intellectual abilities can develop through support and persisting dedication. Other important aspects include misbehaviour and how these are dealt with in a consistent manner. Learning in an inclusive classroom also means ensuring that the voices of students are heard as often as teacher's voice whereby

learners are engaged in discussion rather than quiet and listening to the teacher. Such an ambience should transpire moments of students' joys and enthusiasm in the teacher's facilitation of learning.

ii) *Intellectual markers* involve a considerable range of essentials to create an inclusive learning environment. These can be related to lesson objectives being clear and relevant to students. Strategies to elicit participation in the classroom from all students and can be done verbally, visually or through writing. Discussions with peers are also essential intellectual markers within a classroom. It provides them with opportunities to respond to peer thinking and solve problems collaboratively. This aspect also includes the presence of differentiation measures even in the special classes as the CCP, as diverse needs are also present in these. Agran et al. (2014) discusses that when educators support students in class, participation can enable better access to curricular material, new peer relations are established, and expectations are raised. Carter et al. (2015) further adds that peer support arrangement can promote inclusion, and learners with intellectual disability can experience new opportunities to develop communication and social skills, lower the reliance on their LSE and show more active participation whilst developing a sense of belonging (Carter et al., 2015).

iii) *The physical markers* in terms of space and design of an inclusive class were another aspect that was noticed in the classroom. The educator's role is to manage the classroom seating, and this should be done by taking into consideration the students' own characteristics (Gremmen et al., 2016). Furthermore, according to van den Berg & Stoltz (2018), the seating arrangement will ultimately improve on-task behaviours whilst observing the class social dynamic could improve the social experience of being in the class. I particularly noticed the physical arrangement of desks and seating within the class, including the presence or lack of flexible seating options such as bean bags. The arrangement of desks in groups was noted to check if students have the opportunity to engage in cooperative learning tasks and discussion as well as have the chance to collaborate with each other. The educators' position in the class is also observed with regard to whether he/she moves around the class and facilitates learning. Classroom visuals and décor were noticed, and particular attention was given to visual supports and whether these supported understanding of the material being covered. These aspects can improve or hinder the learning process and might have an effect on the emotions of self-esteem, belonging and adaptability.

iv) *Structural markers* involve aspects that move away from a one size fits all classroom. These may include using multiple learning modalities and utilising brain breaks as well as movement breaks as part of the class routine.

#### b) Engagement markers

The engagement observation checklist was used as part of mixed method studies, and according to Kennedy & Deshler (2010) and Le Lant & Lawson (2019), it helps to explore behavioural patterns “particularly around identifying events and learning tasks that influence student engagement, thereby enhancing our understanding of student engagement” (Le Lant & Lawson, 2019 p.312).

The indicators identified in the tool by Le Lant & Lawson (2019) and used accordingly in the present study include behaviours such as connecting material and adding to what the student already knows, being able to self-correct and questioning skills, and progressing with a task in an accurate manner. Behaviours to be observed range from positive to negative in terms of selecting, elaborating, monitoring and problem-solving. Le Lant (2015) described the process of selecting and use of materials and identified whether the learner is able to choose the appropriate materials and elements for a task. Elaborating on material or transforming the material into new knowledge also incorporates verbal or nonverbal responses to indicate this. Furthermore, elaborating could be seen in students who add any information to that being presented during the teaching and learning of the task by extending on a concept or recall of previously mentioned vocabulary. (Le Lant, 2015). Monitoring is an element observable through relevant questioning for clarification purposes, self-correcting and recognising in case of errors. In problem-solving, the learner’s performance is scaled to accuracy in case a problematic scenario is presented, which will indicate retrieval and application of newly acquired knowledge (Le Lant, 2015).

Affective indicators utilised in this research, as identified in the tool by Le Lant & Lawson (2019) include the behaviours such as facial expressions, which show emotions as well as behaviours that indicate persistence. These range from sadness, crying, pouting, anger, frustration and tantrums, all indications that the student is not enjoying himself. On the other hand, students

can show momentary intense interest, smiling, laughing and interacting with the educator and peers to indicate positive behaviour engagement.

Regarding behavioural indicators used for the present study and as developed by Le Lant & Lawson (2019) indicate that negative behavioural indicators include refusal to do a task, not making eye contact with educators, and not complying with instructions. Positive behaviour engagement will show with the student being engaged in the task, performing it readily without interruptions and predominantly keeping eye contact with the educator and peers.

#### b) Literacy markers

I derived behaviours related to oral language, reading and writing skills as they are representative of literacy learning for students with intellectual disability. The tool used on which I based my observations was the 'Circle-Classroom Observation Tool' (University of Texas, 2016). It was originally designed in 2016, and its use it to capture teaching behaviours during single classroom observation visits. Even though the tool was designed to be used in primary and early years settings, however skills present in students with intellectual disability can often be of that particular cognitive age, and thus the detail in behaviours was appropriate to give information about the interactions going on in class. The tool has three sections, mainly oral language, reading and writing. The following are descriptions of what each section entails.

- i) *Oral Language* is the first part of the tool. It focuses on how language is used to build basic and advanced understanding, which can be observed by naming, labelling, describing, comparing and contrasting and inferencing. It also targets vocabulary building and language instruction, including defining and explaining vocabulary words, acting out and using graphic organisers to learn vocabulary and concepts. Eliciting language from students is another aspect of oral language use, and this involves basic questioning techniques and progresses to eliciting higher-level thinking questions as well as the use of downward scaffolds and upward scaffolds to build their oral language. Other important aspects related to the oral language used were the syntactical and grammatical skills whereby there is modelling to express ideas into more mature sentences and encouraging these speaking skills in larger group contexts.
- ii) *Reading* is the second aspect of this tool, and it provides important concepts which include skills related to before, during and after reading texts. Before reading a text involves aspects such as activating prior knowledge, introducing words or concepts to build background

knowledge to support text comprehension, asking for predictions and defining comprehension strategies which include making connections, summarising, and making inferences. During the reading, behaviours sought included using knowledge and basic level questioning and then moving on to higher order thinking questions, expanding on the student responses, acting out the storyline for understanding, making connections with life experiences and following up on predictions done. After the reading activity, behaviours observed could involve summarising text ideas, reviewing vocabulary from the text, and revisiting the purpose of the text.

iii) Writing expression is the third aspect of the tool, and this ranges from core concepts to approaches used in writing. It involves aspects such as correct letter formation, print directionality, punctuation and legibility of written work. It also discusses behaviours related to engaging students in writing activities on themes of interest, engaging in small or large group writing opportunities, and elicitation of ideas for writing during classroom tasks. It also targets aspects such as responding to literature with writing, establishing classroom routines that encourage writing, planning writing through oral discussion and use of graphic organisers such as mind maps, and editing and revising work as part of the writing process.

### 3.13.3 The process of class observation and the observer's role.

This data collection method is categorised as participatory because, as a researcher, I was immersed in the school contexts where my participants were whilst recording notes on what happened during the literacy sessions. The observations carried out in these secondary classrooms were mostly structured because I had specific variables to observe, which were mainly related to the students' engagement in the literacy lessons as well as the teaching and learning happening in relation to students with intellectual disability. In total, I carried out 21 observation visits during English and Maltese lessons, each of 40 minutes duration. Upon entering the classroom and observing lessons, I still tried to adopt a flexible approach to openly and freely observe what was going on, even if this did not tally with certain aspects and objectives that I wanted to study. The advantage of the method enabled me to have a record of happenings and phenomena to which I could refer later in my analysis. An uncontrolled observation was carried out as the observation checklist was utilised only to guide the researcher on the various aspects to be identified.

My role in the observations was to record dyadic interactions between educators and students with intellectual disability in the least obtrusive manner possible. Pole (2005) discuss that observers need to take a rigorous stance when collecting data in the classroom. The following is a list of characteristics that the researcher should adopt to ensure such a process:

- Keep full awareness of what I was observing and reacting to
- Noting any value judgements regarding what is happening in the classroom whilst keeping note of any value judgements
- exact reporting of what is happening, being objective and with minimal interpretations
- Data recorded is kept up to date and tracked with time and place etc.

Furthermore, as highlighted by Avigitidou (2001), data recorded should include a description of the class context and setting, any verbal and nonverbal interactions happening and the process related, which may involve a description of the initiation, continuation or termination of interaction by adult or student as well as timings of tasks or episodes. A description of the sequence of how things happened, personal reflection notes and subsequent analysis are suggestions done by Mulhall (2003) to ensure more trustworthiness and validity in the process. These approaches were all taken into account however, considering that the data collected was related to students with intellectual disability, behaviours were particularly recorded. These included posture of students and educators, any behaviours to indicate engagement or lack of it e.g. proximity, eye contact, facial expressions.

In the next section ethical considerations for carrying out research will be discussed.

### 3.14 Ethical considerations

Amongst researchers, a consensual notion is that research should listen to and represent the voices of disabled individuals, and this should be planned and executed with an ethical commitment keeping in mind the research implication (Mietola, Miettinen & Vehmas, 2017). Barton (2005) attests that more care should be taken to include even individuals who cannot communicate verbally. Past research on individuals with intellectual disability indicates that when the severity increases, the likelihood of these persons being involved in research decreases. Tuffrey et al. (2008) describe this situation as unethical to exclude individuals with severe and profound intellectual disability from research. Excluding such individuals from research due to cognitive difficulties and language disorders violates the non-maleficence



principle. This results in individuals with intellectual disability being excluded from accessible interventions, and aspects of their lived experiences remain unknown (McDonald & Kidney, 2012). I also share the view of ethics with Paju (2013) that as a researcher, I should be ethically sensitive and reflect critically throughout the process. Another important aspect of ethical consideration is the insider researcher position in this study. This position reflects complexities and responsibilities perpetuated in planning, data collection, and analysis. Whilst carrying out interviews, my persona was in a constant balance-seeking mechanism to be as neutral as possible however, at times, parents and educators shared pains and excitements to which I was at times unsure on how to react. As their stories unravelled, I decided to be an “engaged, empathic and compassionate listener” (Myers, 2019a p. 91). This was done as my intention was that of “giving voice to their depth and richness of individual experience and accomplishing socially relevant changes within the contexts examined” (Clark & Sharf, 2007, p.399). In fact, this notion often spiralled a reflection in my mind that it was a better decision to opt for interviews rather than focus groups as parents might not have been so comfortable sharing their disappointments and excitements in that fora, especially if they are sensitive to other parents who might not be going through the same experiences. These narratives presented an ethical dilemma in deciding which material is chosen for analysis purposes and which not (Clark & Sharf, 2007). Finally, the decision was based on which aspects may finally benefit the students with intellectual disability as they are prioritised in the study. Finally, in my approach, I agree with Myers (2019b), who discusses that at the crux of insider research, the voices of the vulnerable and smothered people need to be heard, and it is my responsibility to “sharpen the focus of the theoretical lens on what was said and to highlight the themes which emerged” (p.14)

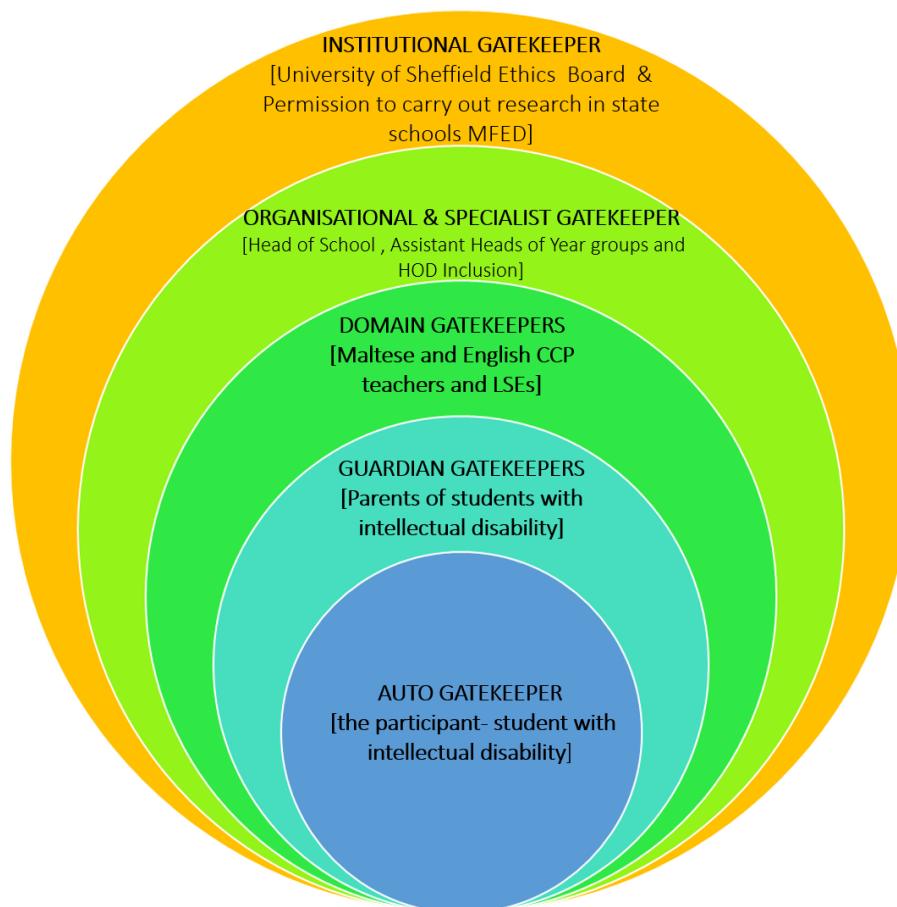
Ethical considerations were considered on various levels, including carrying out the research in a small state which has already been discussed, ethical approvals required, consent and assent from participants, preserving confidentiality and anonymity and ethical considerations in conducting and analysing interviews. Each of these notions will be discussed broadly.

### 3.14.1 Ethical approvals required

Bryman (2016) discuss that throughout the research process, it is fundamental to liaise with various strata of gatekeepers to negotiate authorisation. This involves external and internal agencies or boards.

The figure below indicates the strata of gatekeepers situated within this educational research (Kay, 2019)

*Figure 2 Strata of gatekeepers in the present research*



#### Institutional gatekeeper

According to Greig et al. (2013), gatekeeping at this level is done to identify if the research is officially sanctioned. In this process, the benefits of the study, potential risks and aspects related to the participants are considered. (Farrimond, 2013) The initial stages of the present research started with applying and obtaining various ethical approvals. The ethics form was

duly submitted to the University of Sheffield research ethics board and permission were granted on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2020 this can be found in **Appendix D**. This has certified that the procedures and documentation submitted will set out the practicalities of the educational research.

Following this, I applied to obtain permission to carry out research in state schools with the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability, and this was approved on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2021 (**Appendix E**). The gap of ten months resulted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in schools closing physically and resuming online teaching and learning. It was impossible for me to carry out research due to its nature of it, as class observations and face-to-face interviews with students were an essential part of the methodology.

#### Organisational gatekeeper and Specialist Gatekeeper

Organisational gatekeeper refers to entities responsible for regulating permission for undertaking study within the educational context (Homan, 2002). In the present research, it was important to follow GDPR guidelines and establish contact with the school through the gatekeeper, the Head of School. The necessary approvals were sent to the Head of School, and there was no objection from her end to visit the school and discuss it further (**Appendix F**). Gatekeepers are a salient part of the ethical process, and negotiation between them and researchers becomes more complex when it involves students who are vulnerable. This is done out of mutual priority, that of protecting the participants from harm. In conjunction with the Head of School, it was decided to send an information email **Appendix G** to inform assistant heads and inclusion co-ordinator accordingly. These stakeholders form part of the senior management team and have specific responsibilities within the school. As discussed by Edwards (2013), these stakeholders are consulted due to the specialised knowledge that they have. **Appendix H** includes an information sheet and consent form used for interviews with SMT.

#### Domain Gatekeepers

The Head of School contacted CCP Teachers and Learning Support educators through an information email whereby they were informed that I will be present in the classrooms doing

observations for a period of time of around three months. The aim and procedure of the research were provided to them, and any further information or queries could be addressed to me whenever the need arises. Educators supporting the CCP were provided with an opportunity to discuss any aspects in order to enhance literacy practices within the classroom. LSEs of Grade 10 participated in a voluntary interview, and a consent form was used and can be found in Appendix I together with the information originally sent to CCP classes.

#### Guardian Gatekeepers

Parents' consent was also sought early on in the process in order to guide my observations within the classrooms. Parents were contacted via phone by the relevant assistant heads of each year group, and I was able to explain the aims of the study to each and every parent. In agreement with the parents, the information sheet and consent forms were sent to the parents via their children, and if they wanted to participate, they had to return them the days that followed (Appendix J). All consent forms were returned the day after and duly signed. During the telephone conversations, parents willingly provided me with their contact details, e.g., email address, and these were kept safely saved for the eventual parent interviews. According to Farrimond (2013) discuss that the gatekeepers provide 'an ethical chain of command' (p.169). When positive relationships are established with gatekeepers, this is often a vital aspect of positive and successful results (Crowhurst, 2013). Throughout the data collection process, I had a very positive relationship with Head of School, assistant heads, Inclusion co-ordinator, teachers, parents, LSEs and students themselves. This has obviously made the journey more plain sailing, and all were willing to contribute as they could envisage the benefits of the research at hand.

#### Auto gatekeeper

This level of gatekeeping is the student participants themselves. The power difference between researcher and children is more evident, and as Danby & Farrell (2005) advocate, children should be viewed as their own gatekeepers and be competent to withhold or share experiences and finally decide whether or not they want to participate. However, in terms of guidelines, the children will not be able to participate unless the parent or caregiver gives her/his consent accordingly. This is mainly due to the age factor as well as the degree of intellectual disability. Considering the varying degrees of intellectual disability, some students

might be able to provide informed consent; however, in a minority of cases, someone else must provide that consent. In the present research, assent was required from the students, considering they have decisional capability. This particularly entailed that I had to ensure that students as participants were able to: a.) understand that he or she has a choice, b) understand relevant information, c) appreciate the situation of the study and its likely consequences, and d) rationally manipulate the information presented to him or her. These particular steps were necessary to gain a 'true' informed consent.

As a researcher, the plan consisted of various steps. Initially, I planned to gain consent directly from the participant. If the student lacked decision-making capability, I intended to note his or her observations in the study record. If the participant expresses resistance to the intent to get a parent's approval or does not assent to participate in the study, then he or she will be excluded from the study. When the children were given the adapted consent form, students were asked to indicate if they wanted to participate by pointing, colouring or indicating a smiley face versus a frowny face on the assistive switches. An alternative which was considered was to use a tick or a cross, depending on the symbolic level of understanding of students. These can be found in Appendix K

The use of video recording during the student interviews required consent from students and parents. Video recording of the interview was planned to be carried out in an area where students cannot be overheard. Students were to be accompanied by the Learning Support Educator who supports him/her in class, and first names were used to refer to each other. These video recordings were done to watch in further detail later, including interpretative analysis of gestures or nonverbal aspects that might have been missed during the interview due to participants possibly having language and executive functioning challenges. The notion of student consent is further discussed in the next section.

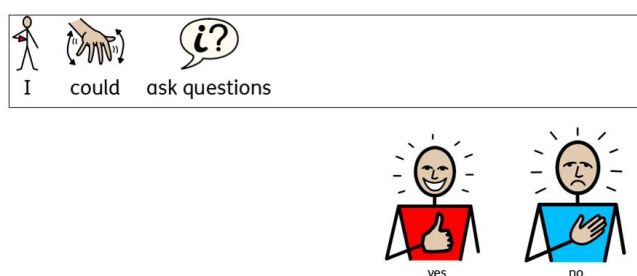
### 3.14.2 Consent process of student participants

Students with intellectual disability often have challenges related to language skills, and they often present with limited communication skills. Such participants are considered at a disadvantage in the informed consent procedure (Casella & Aliotta, 2014). They further add that such individuals “could be less able to verbally self-advocate, ask incisive and analytical questions, and express concerns about research activities” (Casella & Aliotta, 2014, p. 249).

In this regard, these students can be considered as vulnerable participants. Thus, added safeguarding measures are required during the informed consent process and to the forms per se to protect their rights. Freedman (2001) asserts that the researcher must balance the methods used to collect data with ethically sound procedures. Particular awareness was required in relation to students' competence, as the lack of communication ability might mask this competence. This is essential in relation to the self-determination required to participant voluntary or refuse to be part of a research. In this present study, some of the students had mild intellectual disability, and in those cases, they were able to determine and indicate their willingness to participate. Students who participated in this research all had their LSE close by in order to identify to what extent they understood the process and form. This process lengthened the procedure of obtaining assent; however, this was done to ensure that participants were protected with it.

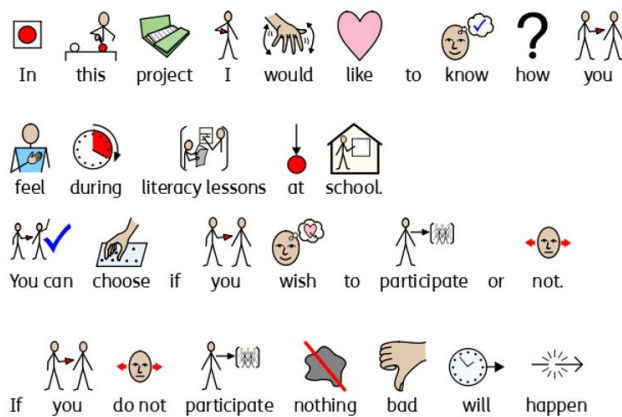
Another aspect I was aware of was the ability and willingness of participants to ask questions before the interview, during and even after. I explained to the LSEs that due to poor executive functions, the students might have difficulty planning questions, remembering them or the discussion as well as following through with the process of asking. In situations where students had Autism as a diagnosis together with intellectual disability, the LSEs were made aware that they could find it hard to initiate contact with me as a researcher, and thus, they might opt to ask questions about the research to themselves. LSEs were directed to keep in contact should such questions arise. The information on the possibility of asking questions was included in the consent form, and it was essential in order to broaden my perspectives and consider the informed consent process as ongoing rather than a one-time activity before the actual interview.

*Figure 3 Option to ask questions*



Yet another important step in the informed consent process is the issue of ensuring that there is no coercion. In my communication as the researcher, I had to ensure that the participants did not feel that they had to participate when approached, and I clearly explained that nothing would happen and that it was fine if they did not wish to participate. This was also evidently represented in the form, as can be seen hereunder.

Figure 4 The right not to participate



Through this, I tried to ensure that there is neither direct, implied nor perceived coercion carried out (Casella & Aliotta, 2014). One aspect that helped this was to do consenting activity and follow-up interviews outside of the classroom and in the absence of class teachers to create a contrasting physical boundary between research and learning in the classroom. According to Casella & Aliotta (2014), such a strategy can support potential subjects to agree to participate without the risk of coercion, even if this is unintentional.

The consent form is another aspect which required ethically sound formulation and presentation. Together with the information sheet, when planned and formulated, it was done without jargon, simple language and in the students' preferred language which was English. Reading level of form was kept easy in grammatically simple sentences and with static picture sequence (Casella & Aliotta, 2014), as can be observed in Figure 5 hereunder:

Figure 5 Easy sentence structure with pictures



The documents were also free from details which are unnecessary, and the use of active voice will help more than passive voice. Furthermore, all the time needed was taken to read and go over it and sometimes some sentences were repeated if participants looked puzzled. Following this procedure, students were given the opportunity to verbalise yes/no accordingly; however, these were presented as switches for them in case they felt more comfortable using them rather than verbalising. The below picture (figure 6) shows the switches utilised in this part, and these had pre-recorded 'yes' and 'no'.

Figure 6 Yes and No switches



Children with intellectual disability might find it challenging to dissent from the research, and signs of willingness to participate in tasks will be utilised as a sign of compliance or otherwise (Lewis, 2001). Thus, another measure to safeguard the rights of the participant is to allow them to stop anytime they want, especially if the experience becomes overwhelming. According to Bishton & Lindsay (2011), should the student show distress throughout the interview, he or she will have a right to withdraw from the study. The written consent forms clearly included



the students' right to refuse to answer questions, stop the interview at any time or withdraw from the research completely.

This aspect was included in both the information sheet provided to the student and the consent form. The participants were also provided with a symbol showing 'STOP' (Figure 7), which they could use or point to should they want to stop and have difficulty saying it.

*Figure 7 Stop Visual*



Taua et al. (2014) have identified various guidelines for the consenting procedure. All of these were adhered to when carrying out the consent process with students with intellectual disability. These include communicating in a slow manner and clear speech in a quiet place without interruptions. The slow pace of speech was maintained throughout the consent process, and this was carried out in the yard following the lessons in literacy. Even though students were in their break, the school had various schedules of how students enjoyed their break time. In their case, the CCP class had a designated area of the playground whereby students enjoyed hanging out. It was a relatively quiet area, and the majority of students in the class had their lunch there. They also discuss introducing concepts and questions periodically rather than all at one go. This was also practised even because it was evident from their performance in class that they needed more time to process things. Whilst carrying out observations in classrooms, I could also identify what kind of language and complexity is appropriate for each individual participant, e.g., with Nora, it was more possible to elaborate on the questions when compared to other students like Andrew, that had to process a question and rewording of the question was at times needed.

Emmison & Smith (2000) argue that explanation of a task should be carried out using visual images to enhance understanding but also as a sign of protection, respect and inclusive attitude. In agreement with this, Taua et al. (2014) suggest that a written representation of the details of the research is presented and ideally in colour together with a combination of pictures. This was done in the present study and can be viewed in Appendix K. Finally; they identify utilizing a support person as an important step to support the process and in the present research, the LSE was always present throughout the process.

### 3.15 Data analysis

Qualitative research is a fundamental inquiry paradigm, and data generated through it requires analytic methods which are methodical and rigorous in nature (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic Analysis is a method which provides this possibility. It is a system for the identification and analysis of patterns emerging from data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It specifically allows for the emergence of themes which are relevant to the phenomenon which is being investigated. (Daly et al., 1997). A theme will involve a pattern of an aspect or meaning that occurs in the data, often mentioned more than once and can often be observable, e.g., lack of engagement in lessons. When the thematic analysis is carried out rigorously, this generates findings which are trustworthy and can provide insight into the area under study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Starks & Trinidad (2007), whilst doing qualitative analysis, as a researcher, I am the analysis instrument, as I will need to make informed decisions on coding and contextualising data. Braun & Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is an appropriate analysis method when the experiences and perspectives of participants are being sought. Using thematic analysis will allow me to highlight any similar or different aspects identified and generate insights into the students' experience in literacy. According to Dean (2017), aspects of subjectiveness and positionality have been discussed extensively. Dean et al. (2018) explain this notion by saying that various researchers can interpret the same set of data in a different manner. This is further stated in Brown (2010), whereby subjectivity can result in "a different researcher, or the same researcher in a different frame of mind, might write a different report from the same data" (p.238). In accordance with this, Dean et al. (2018) discuss that different researchers might find value in different elements even if they are looking at the same data. It's what Alvesson & Skoldberg (2000) refers to as a repertoire of interpretations. They

continue to add that this might be due to the experiences of researchers, mindset, the breath of exploration and theoretical background, amongst others.

The themes generated will be eliciting the essence of the students' experiences. Nowell et al. (2017) discuss that it is essential to establish trustworthiness during the phases of Thematic Analysis. These phases are cyclic in nature and require the researcher to revert to the data generated and coding process frequently (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

Before explaining the process and how it was approached, I would like to describe the particulars of my chosen approach to thematic analysis. The theoretical framework presented in the beginning provide the underlying values of this research and these have explicitly my analysis owning it as my perspective and remaining sensitive to the context under study. This information is essential in order to highlight principles applied and also quality standards of the study.

In the analysis stage, the areas I shall focus on are "the social, cultural, and structural contexts that influence individual experiences" (Kiger & Varpio, 2020 p.2). Joffe (2011) further states that this type of analysis will yield a large quantity of data which will illustrate how social constructs related to literacy experiences develop. Applying the social model of disability as a lens will allow me to centre my analysis on the voice of the students who are marginalised in order to better their educational experiences.

During the process of thematic analysis, a theme was identified irrespective of the number of times this item showed up in the data. Some themes were considered central even though this does not reflect in the frequency of their occurrence (Nowell, 2017). The themes generated in this study are both latent and semantic in nature. This is because certain themes have explicit meaning and are easily recognisable as meanings, but others are latent, reflecting a much deeper analysis and ideologies in which I engaged profusely during the analytic process. In semantic coding aspects, I did not analyse beyond what was observed and what the participants said. In latent coding, I attempted to bring to light hidden meanings and underlying practice assumptions. Reading through and familiarising myself with the data has enabled me to expose latent meanings by keeping in mind that Braun & Clarke (2020) present codes as residing in the dataset expecting to be found. Thus, particular attention was taken to analyse the language used by participants, which takes the form of discourse analysis at times and the

possible deep meaning level that can transpire. I particularly intend to represent an analysis that Braun & Clarke (2020) refer to as the various “layers of conceptual thinking” (p.4).

In my present analysis, both semantic and latent coding have been used without any particular effort to prioritise one over the other. In accordance with Braun & Clarke (2006), as a researcher, I have to strive to identify those themes that can give the fundamental insights to answer the posed research questions and support the emergence of the student voices as much as possible.

One aspect I would like to specify is that throughout the analysis, I have used a reflexive approach to answer research questions posed initially and aim to answer these to obtain experiences, perceptions and views of individuals and representations of the phenomena under study. I am fully aware that reflexive analysis is not a neutral process, and my positionality influences this analysis. However, I strived to highlight and expose the students’ voices in the most authentic way possible. I chose the reflexive approach to analyse my data as I wanted to have an active role in producing knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2019), which is the coding system representing my interpretation of patterns across the data set. Braun & Clarke (2019) have described reflexive thematic analysis as being the researcher’s interpretation of the data and conducted jointly through the data set available, theoretical framework and assumptions, as well as analytical capabilities of the researcher. Thus during my analytical process, I have not attempted to ensure an accurate and reliable coding system or consult to have a harmonised process with an outsider researcher as the engagement with the data was a process in itself, having engaged personally with the students, educators and having participated in the class observations. Braun & Clarke (2020) have identified various core assumptions of reflex thematic analysis, and I will discuss these next in relation to my research journey:

- A) Aspect of subjectivity in this research is the tool I used in this analysis. Subjectivity is my ‘resource for research’ (Gough & Madill, 2012). Thus, the aspect of bias is unrelated in this context as the knowledge generated will be situated.
- B) Interpretation of data in this research is not objective, but it was my intention to be as strong as possible, insightful, deep and nuanced

- C) There has been a process of immersing myself in the data and, at other times, distancing myself from it and looking back at it with different eyes. This was essential in order to have time for reflection.
- D) Themes that emerged are outcomes of coding system, and they are produced through my analytic engagement systematically done with the data generated.

The analysis started with familiarisation with the data set. For this part, I have repeatedly and actively read through the data generated by interviews with students, LSEs, the Senior Management team, parents, and classroom observations carried out during the literacy lessons. I transcribed all interviews in the form of audio data for LSEs, parents and Senior Management Team. I also transcribed all interviews in the form of video data for students in order to capture all the nonverbals. Sample transcripts and field notes can be found in appendices as follows:

Appendix L: Transcripts of students

Appendix M: Transcripts of parents

Appendix N: Transcripts of SMT

Appendix O: Transcripts of LSEs

Appendix P: Observation Field Notes

During this lengthy and tiresome process, I had the time to listen attentively for the conversations, and this helped me a lot with the familiarisation. Besides the transcription, which was mostly done in the Maltese language, I have translated all the data to English, and yet this provided me with another opportunity to familiarise myself with it. The hectic process forced me to have a break and let the data rest for some days until I read through it after around seven days. Following this, I used a manual method of sorting conversations into various codes, which will be presented later in this chapter. These codes were later tied to both semantic and latent meanings in the theme generation. The coding process will also be presented to indicate the criteria of trustworthiness of my interpretation and analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). I have done this coding exercise for:

- Interviews with students

- Interviews with LSEs
- Interviews with Senior management Team
- Interviews with parents
- Observation field notes.

Conversations that have potential patterns were placed and collated by code in preparation for themes. Some semantic themes were more straightforward to extract, but others had to be “constructed by the researcher, through analyzing, combining, and even graphically mapping how codes related to one another.” (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, p.5). The codes generated are presented in Appendix R. Before analysing all of these findings, the considerable steps taken to ensure that the research was of good quality will be explored.

### 3.16 Crystallisation: Quality of the present research.

Throughout the past years, a constant notion of quality in qualitative research has troubled researchers in the quest to ensure that the studies carried out are of appropriate standard (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002). This consensus is hardly reached; however, Morse et al. (2002) discuss that aspects of reliability and validity are reached when various verifications are carried out throughout the research process. They further add that author is responsible for ensuring rigour in educational research. Sandelowski (1986) discuss that the aspect of trustworthiness transpires when the researcher publishes the practices of how the research was done and makes it auditable, which he refers to as ‘leaving a decision trail’. As per trustworthiness, Graneheim & Lundman (2004) divides these into credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Sandelowski (1993) questioned reliability assessments like re-checking with the participants or doing peer reviewing as it is like a forced consensus has to be reached, and researchers cannot expect that they will arrive at the same themes that emerged. One system used to support the validation, verification and assessing the trustworthiness of my results was through member checking. Transcripts of discussions with parents, LSEs and SMT were emailed, and feedback was requested on whether they agreed to what was discussed, whether there were any parts they were not happy with and would like to omit or if they wished to add anything else. Doyle (2007) discusses that this process provides a more transparent process for ‘negotiation’ to happen between researcher’s and participant’s generation of meaning (p.903). Whilst being a lengthy process, as individuals had to read them and feedback me back

by email, it provided them with the opportunity to confirm or make amendments to their initial responses (Stake, 1995).

### 3.17 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on providing a thorough discussion of the methodological choices, methods employed in various stages of the research, and the intricate ethical considerations that were fundamental to this study. Throughout the writing of this chapter, it was more evident how this research journey highlights and prioritises the students as the main participants and stakeholders. Nonetheless, significant others such as educators and parents of these children were still involved to gain a holistic picture of these experiences. As a final reflection on this chapter, I confess that even though details of interviews and class observations were prepared beforehand, the direction of the research was fluid. As a researcher, I felt at times transported by the real-life experience of these students, who at times had the best laughs within their classroom environment. Other times, frustrations were evidently leaving some of them in tears with the disabling processes around them. I chose to be swayed by the direction their experience was heading. Whatever is relevant to them became relevant to me. I didn't want my initial plan and my original idea of my dissertation to be a strait jacket for me but the experience of being there with them in class for a considerable number of hours transported me to experience a vast range of emotions, which at times were heartbreaking to witness. The participants' stories weren't only communicated verbally and non-verbally in the student interviews carried out, but their stories transpired in living literacy experiences with them in the classroom. Their reactions, enthusiasm, struggles, and contagious excitements were all narratives that escaped them, and I could possibly capture them whilst doing my hours of observation within the classroom. Observations are only one of the tools that enabled me to capture these lived experiences. Experiencing literacy with them in class facilitated and charted the way to student interviews, and disclosing their views and preferences on literacy seemed a natural extension to the experiences lived within the classrooms during the teaching and learning of literacy. The feeling of being trusted by the students themselves, feeling comfortable enough to express themselves with me, and contributing to the friendly atmosphere within the classrooms where teachers and Learning support educators work jointly together for the students was a highlight that I would carry with me throughout the writing journey and beyond that. For the researcher, this was not enough.

I wanted to know more. I wanted to go 'behind the scenes'. How does the school personnel contribute to these experiences? What is the construct of ability and disability that permeates through layers of teaching and learning? What is the role of the parents in all of this? I must admit, initially, I considered including educators and parents to complement the students' experiences and also because I envisaged challenges related to the participants' ability to express themselves; however, over time, this changed. Getting to know their parents and educators and discussing aspects related to inclusion and literacy became my responsibility.

It weighed on me for the simple reason that when I tell their stories, I want to tell them in full. My writing does not mirror my thoughts but the participants' collective voice characterised by the individual experience and emotions. I wanted to be a vehicle, a facilitator of their voice which, most often than not, is not given its due importance. Incredulous and sceptical glares were sometimes experienced when I explained my research intention, and that in itself confirmed the numerous times when students with intellectual disability could have been consulted. Still, instead, adults took decisions in their name and assumed incompetence.

Various themes of substantive importance emerged throughout this journey. Amongst these were the concept of voice in students with intellectual disability, the notion of engagement, and the way inclusion is conceived within a Secondary school, amongst others. In the next chapter, I will present the data generated and provide stakeholders' summary.





## CHAPTER 4: STAKEHOLDERS' SUMMARIES

### 4.1 Introduction

The present chapter intends to report important narratives from the various stakeholders who participated in this research and intends to support the eventual findings and discussion that follows in Chapter 5. These summaries reflect the qualitative data collected through various methods and the findings of the qualitative analysis from data generated from classroom observations, Semi-structured interviews with students with intellectual disability, LSEs, Parents and Senior Management Team. Vignettes will be utilised from interviews to highlight the main themes whilst substantiating these by field notes taken during the research journey, especially in classroom observations, with the sole intention of keeping the student voice at the forefront. Vignettes of conversation have two columns or three accordingly. The third column is only included when non-verbals or an interpretation of what happened is required to put the reader in the context of what happened. These annotations were possible as the student interviews were video recorded and were analysed in detail subsequently.

### 4.2 Analysis of Student Interviews

Student interviews were carried out with eight students with intellectual disability. One of the students was in Grade 9, five in Grade 10 and two in Grade 11. Half of the sample had mild intellectual disability, and the other half had moderate intellectual disability. Five of these students also had a diagnosis of autism together with an intellectual disability. During the student interview, certain aspects emerged, and these include their preferences in literacy in relation to the language (Maltese or English) and also the strand they prefer (reading or writing). They also named certain challenges that they find in literacy, including aspects they dislike or find hard during lessons and who support them during these challenges. Finally, they also mention the positive aspects of Literacy learning, including activities that they enjoy, topics or themes of interest as well as what they wish more in literacy lessons.

#### 4.2.1 Preferences in Language.

Students in Malta are bilingual, and both Maltese and English are languages spoken in households and at school. Five of the students prefer English to Maltese. It is of very common occurrence in Malta that students with Autism have an absolute preference for English as opposed to Maltese. Adolf, Shane and Simon all indicated a preference for Maltese and all of

them have Autism. Their respective LSEs who were presented in the interview looked surprised at their choice and assumed that the students were wrong; however, follow-up questions were done to check if the answer was confirmed or changed. This strategy was used in various instances as choosing from a set of options could be affected by the student’s memory, and the delay of time of presenting the options could interfere with other tasks, which can be cognitively demanding; thus, the last option will usually be the answer. The conversation includes a follow-up question carried out with Shane to check this.

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Which lessons do you prefer most, English or Maltese?</i>
<i>Shane</i>	<i>Maltese</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Ok, so you prefer more Maltese than English. Are you happy during the Maltese lesson or do you find it difficult? Do you enjoy it or you find it hard? [repeated question after 10 seconds]</i>
<i>Shane</i>	<i>Enjoy it</i>

Simon also confirms his choice for Maltese as the preferred language for two times and he answered in a very convincing voice that it is his favourite as shown in the next extract.

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Simon, what lessons do you prefer? English or Maltese?</i>	
<i>Simon</i>	<i>Maltese</i>	<i>Shouted halfway through my question</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>So do you prefer more the Maltese activities or the English activities?</i>	
<i>Simon</i>	<i>[4 sec pause] Maltese</i>	<i>Laid down on LSE and held her hand. Answered in a convinced voice.</i>
<i>Later on in the conversation..</i>		
<i>LSE</i>	<i>Simon, do you prefer Maltese or English?</i>	
<i>Simon</i>	<i>Maltese</i>	

On the other hand, Adolf chose Maltese, and the LSE was quite surprised as he usually prefers English, so I chose to ask him a paraphrased question about his preference, and he confirmed that English is his favourite, as in the below conversation.

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>This is what I would like to discuss with you, Adolf. I was with you in English and Maltese lessons. What do you prefer most? English or Maltese?</i>	<i>Student looking attentively at my questions with visuals</i>
<i>Adolf</i>	<i>Maltese</i>	<i>Said it in a convincing tone and pointing in the air with his pointer finger LSE looks at me with an unconvinced expression</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Are you usually happy to be in class during the English lesson?</i>	
<i>Adolf</i>	<i>Yes, I am happy</i>	
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>So, you feel happier in English than in Maltese?</i>	
<i>Adolf</i>	<i>Yes</i>	

A student, Nora, who seems to enjoy English much more than Maltese lessons absolutely, shows the degree to which she loves the subject by emphasising that it is her favourite even if asked about Maltese.

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>What can you tell me about the Maltese lessons? What do you like most?</i>	
<i>Nora</i>	<i>[3 sec pause] Like English</i>	<i>She looked perplexed and rubbing chin</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>So you still like English more and absolutely more than Maltese</i>	
<i>Nora</i>	<i>Yes, it's my favourite subject.</i>	

Ian is a student who shows a considerable dislike for Maltese, and this was evident in his engagement in class when observed during Maltese as opposed to English. Field Notes 1 and 4 give insight into this, and it is evident that teacher-student relationship and how the teacher interacts with the students is related to the engagement levels of the students themselves.

*"I am in the classroom waiting for the Maltese teacher to come in class and start the lesson. She enters the room, and I go to introduce myself and explain that I will be observing the classroom with a particular interest in Ian. She explains the difficulties related to Ian's behaviour in the lesson and discusses how he is not usually engaged. She warns me that he will be quiet and barely answer if the lesson of today does not interest him. She also explains that he participates only when he is engaged in a lesson."*[Field Note 1]

*“The lesson is around halfway and it is being observed that the tone used continuously is direct, strict and unfriendly and students in the class rarely engage with her and speak to her or make conversation. I notice that for the large part of the lesson, Ian is slouching forward on the table and his legs are continuously moving showing nervousness or agitation. Furthermore, unless he needs to write, he places his hands in pocket.” [Field Note 4]*

His engagement behaviour is different in the English lesson, and during observations, he is seen volunteering and lifting his hand and giving the answer to a comprehension task [Field Note 8] and *“There is good eye contact with teacher, it happens frequent during the comprehension task and he feels comfortable to give answers in front of his peers.”* [Field Note 9]

The students were further questioned about what strand of literacy they preferred, whether Reading or Writing, accordingly. Responses from the students were varied as Ian, Adolf and Andrew preferred reading, whilst Nora, Shane and Simon preferred writing. The other students did not give an answer to this question. In all the situations, students were given an option between reading and writing when they had moderate intellectual difficulties, such as in the example of Shane below.

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>What do you do in Maltese? Do you like reading or writing?</i>
<i>Shane</i>	<i>Writing</i>

Students who had mild intellectual disability were given three options to choose from, such as the example with Ian below.

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Which aspects do you prefer more? Let’s start with English - do you prefer reading, conversation, or writing?</i>
<i>Ian</i>	<i>Probably the reading.</i>

Once the students chose the strand they preferred, I probed further into what they preferred reading or what aspects of writing they enjoyed. With regards to those students who prefer reading, Ian showed his preference for reading a story for enjoyment rather than a comprehension task. Enjoyment in reading aloud in class was an aspect observed in the classroom as well. In Field Note 21, my observations indicate that *‘Then it was time to start reading and Nora volunteers to start as it is something she seems to enjoy. All of them are fluent*

readers in class.’ It was also interesting to observe that during the student interview, Nora referred to this reading experience, and I asked further about it, and she indicated the character she preferred. This provides insight into her capabilities of understanding the text she is reading, and the character she mentioned was part of the story.

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>I saw you doing on the London city, some songs.. Which topic do you prefer?</i>	
<i>Nora</i>	<i>The street of London.</i>	
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Ah, ok, it is the book that you just did. It was very interesting. Did you like a particular character?</i>	
<i>Nora</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Who was it?</i>	
<i>Nora</i>	<i>I like Jimmy.</i>	<i>Stammered on the ‘I’</i>

Ian also expressed his interest in reading and computer games and ICT after being given several options to choose from, as is evident in the conversation below.

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Is there a particular topic that you like reading about? Sports, fiction, games, anything that you like?</i>	
<i>Ian</i>	<i>I think about games</i>	<i>Looks confused and places his hands over his chin whilst thinking.</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>On the computer?</i>	
<i>Ian</i>	<i>[Nods yes] Yes, computer games</i>	
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Is there a lesson that you really enjoyed and it was good?</i>	
<i>Ian</i>	<i>The lesson I enjoy the most is ICT</i>	

With regards to writing preference, Shane identifies writing a story as being his favourite activity but also points to the LSE to indicate that he receives help from her end to do it. Simon, in a very convincing manner, expresses his preference for grammar exercises when given an option between grammar and compositions and writing of stories. Nora, on the other hand,

prefers writing in grammar activities, as indicated below, where I rephrased her answer in order to confirm that I understood the answer appropriately.

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>That's good writing. Very interesting. What do you prefer when writing? Grammar activities, when you have to write a story, or a summary of a book. Which one do you prefer?</i>	
<i>Nora</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Thinks for about 3 seconds</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Ok, so you prefer grammar exercises when they ask you to do a verb, a pronoun, a preposition etc?</i>	
<i>Nora</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>She signals yes with her head.</i>

When Adolf was provided with the option of writing versus sticking pictures, he chose the latter by verbalising it and even doing the action for it. On further probing on writing and his preferences, he indicated he prefers writing a story; however, he does this with the support of the LSE in class, as is evident in the exchange hereunder.

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Do you prefer writing or sticking pictures like today?</i>	
<i>Adolf</i>	<i>Sticking pictures</i>	<i>Did the action of sticking pictures</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>When you do a writing task, do you prefer it in a grammar activity or when you write a story?</i>	
<i>Adolf</i>	<i>When I write a story</i>	
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Do you usually talk about the story with Ms Y before?</i>	
<i>Adolf</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>[unrecognisable vocalisation while pointing at Ms Y]</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Do you write something about it? [following my question Ms Y asks whether they ever discuss the story]</i>	
<i>Adolf</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>he points at Ms Y and says Yes to indicate his choice</i>

This was also observed in the classroom during an English lesson whereby students were asked to do a writing task about themselves and write it in an email format. Field Note 41 reports that *‘Adolf starts working on the writing task where he has to formulate a sentence. He is writing an email, and he has to write a sentence about his age. LSE supports him in formulating sentence verbally and then writing it. The writing task is about themselves, so he is guided to write about his facial features.’*

#### 4.2.2 Challenges of Literacy

Students were invited to share their experiences on the aspects of literacy which they find hard. Ian, together with Nora and Adam, have referred to writing a story or essay writing as the hardest aspect of Literacy. Zaya, who does not like Maltese as a language, confesses that reading in Maltese is much harder for her. From their experiences, it transpired that writing planning is one of the limitations these students experience and one of the key processes required for written expression. Organising ideas and cognitive processing for planning seem to be the central component being affected in this group of students. This has been made explicit by Nora and Ian, respectively, who expressed the following:

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Is there something which you find very hard in English or in Maltese?</i>
<i>Nora</i>	<i>[Stammers on I] I think to think ideas.</i>

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Which parts are the hardest in Maltese?</i>
<i>Ian</i>	<i>The hardest is probably...[thinks for 4 sec] writing a story.</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>That’s a good point very good. Do you usually think about the ideas first? Or do you sit down and write the story? Do you plan it?</i>
<i>Ian</i>	<i>Yes, I plan the story</i>

Adam, who presents with more moderate difficulties, indicated that his difficulties are mainly in essay writing. When he was asked if he found something that is hard in English, he replied that it is Writing. A follow-up question asked was if it was during a grammar activity or whether it was during essay writing. He replied by making eye contact that it is ‘the composition’.



Following this answer, I probed further into which aspects were difficult, and the hereunder conversation followed whereby he confirmed the importance of having pictures to support his planning and thought formation on the given task.

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>When you are writing the compositions, what is the hardest, writing the composition or thinking of the ideas?</i>	
<i>Adam</i>	<i>Thinking of the ideas.</i>	<i>Chose the last answer again but confirmed as true by LSE</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Ok, so that seems to be difficult as well.</i>	
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Ok, maybe we can even ask Ms E – What do you do when this happens?</i>  <i>Do pictures help you?</i>	<i>LSE replies that she shows him pictures related to the topic.</i>
<i>Adam</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>So pictures help you, and you can think more about ideas on the topic.</i>	
<i>Adam</i>	<i>-----</i>	

Essay writing requires planning, and one of the strategies educators use to support students in planning involve wh- questions which are asked to elicit descriptive sentences. These questions usually serve the purpose to generate and brainstorm ideas before writing the sentences. Being able to understand and answer these questions involve skills on their own which might be challenging for a number of students with intellectual disability. It was noted on various occasions during observations that teachers in English and Maltese lessons are still supporting these students through grammatical exercises in order to learn the descriptive nature related to each wh- question. Field Note 22 provides such an example whereby the class finished the reading of a text from the book ‘Streets of London’, and the why-questions that followed were hard for them.

*‘There are sentences which are harder than others, and the teacher paraphrases these parts in order to help their understanding. To check understanding, she asks questions, e.g. what happened? The teacher starts a sentence, and the students continue it e.g. She was helped and now she was going to help \_\_\_\_\_. Teacher is probing with further questions, who, why etc. She asks them to describe a character. Nora explains that even though she was her friend but she was still being very mean.’ Field Note 22*

In Field Note 2 a similar observation was carried out in Ian's classroom whilst they were doing a Maltese lesson.

*'Teacher is trying to use higher-order thinking skills with Ian, and the question was What do you think will happen if he invites you? Ian is unable to answer it, so teacher gives him two options to choose from, and he answers' Field note 2.*

In the Grade 10 class, the students mostly have expressive difficulties due to Autism together with the intellectual disability, and the English teacher tackles wh- questions more explicitly. In Field Note 28, it is reported that the English teacher informs students that

*'They will be working on a blank sheet, and the column should have who/when/where. Students and supported by LSEs prepare these sheets and the teacher is going round to ensure that everyone has understood accordingly. The English teacher then explains that the link that has to be done need to be : Who- used with person; When- used with time; Where- used with place.'*

In Field Note 29, Andrew has difficulty placing the word school under the right category. The LSE used downward scaffolding to support him by starting the sentence and providing a verbal cue 'School is a p.....' Furthermore, the educator extended the activity to practising asking wh- questions and also answering them. This exercise is also important for developing verbal expression, learning how to ask questions, answer them and also in preparation for the writing process. In Field note 30, it is documented that a conversation will be held about what can be done during the day and during the night using the 'When'. Initially all students were paired with their respective LSE, and they took turns in asking and answering When questions followed by What questions as follows:

*'Zaya asks question – When do you go to school? Andrew asks When do you wear pyjamas? They have pictures to help them ask questions related to them. They continue to practice these conversations with these questions. The activity also includes 'what' questions, and Andrew is engaged in the activity, and LSEs asks, 'What did you put on the pizza? as this was a cooking activity which happened earlier in the day. Andrew mentions tomatoes. She continues with, 'When are you going to eat it?' He replies – in the morning. Simon's LSE asks, 'What do you do in the morning?' He says brush my teeth. He is encouraged to say a full sentence which he does – I brush my teeth in the morning. Adolf asks, 'What do you have for lunch?' He replies to his same question – Chicken pizza as he just cooked one in the previous lesson.'* Field note 30.

In one particular exchange, Andrew formulated the question, and answered it himself incorrectly; however, considering his enthusiasm for the topic, the teacher decided to expand on his personal interest in order to elicit more descriptive sentences from him, as evidenced hereunder.

*'Andrew asks the question – When do you go swimming? He answers Splash and Fun as he associates swimming with his favourite local water park. Considering it was one of his major interests, the teacher further probes with another question – What do you like about Splash and Fun? Slides, bouncy castle, rides? He answers back, blue slide and bouncy castle. When teachers see him engaged, she asks more questions – What do you eat at Splash and fun? Andrew answers Galletti (Water biscuits) without waiting for options to be given. The teacher asks him -Do you like to swim somewhere else? He says No Inspire (NGO) as he doesn't like to swim there.'* Field Note 31.

One other aspect which was of particular interest to me involves the support system that is in the class during Literacy lessons. The majority of the students referred to the LSE as the main source of support; however, they called her teacher instead. Shane and Zaya referred to the teacher and LSE as supporting them together. Ian referred to his Miss (LSE) and pointed towards her when asked who helps him most in literacy lessons. Simon indicates his teacher as the person who supports him most and points at Ms E, who is his LSE. The same reaction was obtained from Adam, who turned his head sideways to his LSE and said teacher. Adolf was asked the same question, and the following conversation happened, confirming the same answers as his friends.

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Who helps you when you are in class? Ms Y? the teacher? Or together?</i>	
<i>Adolf</i>	<i>The teacher</i>	<i>Points to his LSE, who is in front of him</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>And Ms Y does she help you?</i>	
<i>Adolf</i>	<i>-----</i>	<i>Extends his hand and makes a clear reference to LSE.</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Ah because she is the teacher. You are the teacher for him [addressing LSE]</i>	
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>So Ms Y helps you the most?</i>	
<i>Adolf</i>	<i>Ehe [yes]</i>	<i>He confirms it by pointing at her again</i>

Another interesting aspect which emerged from the two conversations is the peer support and cooperative learning that happens in the lessons sometimes. Ian replies in the positive when he is asked if he does activities with his peers, and he also affirms that he enjoys it. Nora also reports that sometimes peers help her in class. Cooperative learning was also observed in the classroom and encouraged by the teacher in Field Note 15, whereby they are spelling a word and choosing the letters required to form a word.

*'Adam has his turn, and Nora has a turn after him. During their turn and spelling of words, the teacher is praising their effort and encouraging them when they are unable to recall the next letter sound. Teacher also asks peers to help out when one of the students cannot recall a letter.'* [Field note 15]

Another teacher, the Maltese one, in another lesson, also gives Nora and Adam the opportunity to work in small groups of two each, and as reported in Field Note 18, *'Another word is given, and students indicate that it challenging and the teacher encourages peer support rather than supporting them himself.'* [Field Note 18]

Another aspect that was explored with students involved positive aspects of literacy learning, and their responses can be categorised into lessons that they enjoy, topics and themes of interest as well as what they wish more in literacy lessons, all of which will be analysed further in the coming section.

#### 4.2.3 Positive aspects of Literacy Learning

Students were questioned on which aspects of literacy they enjoyed. This notion was explored because positive emotions and fun aspects in learning are bound to positively influence our psychological well-being, and when students are in the classroom, an interaction occurs between educators and students. The positive interaction created has an impact on the engagement of students in the class and thus affects learning. In determining what students like it is possible for educators to notice when a learner is engaged by observing them being active throughout the learning experience, eager to participate, willing to expend effort and motivated throughout the tasks. Questions related to aspects of Literacy Learning also aim at listening to what else these students want during their literacy lessons. Ian identified word searches, games and videos as the aspects that make a lesson engaging. Wordsearches were also identified by Zaya as something she particularly enjoys. She also mentioned reading and videos on YouTube as an interesting part of a lesson. Simon furthermore mentions the use of

videos as something he particularly enjoys. He identifies a favourite activity he did in Maltese where a Maltese song was used during a lesson, as can be seen in the conversation hereunder

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>What topic did you like most in the Maltese? You did poems, videos, songs?</i>	
<i>Simon</i>	<i>Songs [shouting]</i>	<i>Holding my hand and looking in my eyes</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Do you like songs in Maltese, Simon?</i>	
<i>Simon</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>And do you sing with them, Simon?</i>	
<i>Simon</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
<i>LSE</i>	<i>We did 'Xemx' (a Maltese song)</i>	
<i>Simon</i>	<i>Xemx</i>	

Andrew has expressed his interest in relation to activities that he prefers. When asked whether he likes videos when doing activities, he replies that he likes games. On the other hand, Adolf refers to acting as something he enjoys in the classroom. The interview was held after a Maltese lesson whereby they were practising a poem through acting, and students, especially Adolf, were very much engaged in the lesson as noted in the Field note hereunder.

*'The teacher introduces a poem called 'Il-Farfett' – the butterfly and is explaining that they will read it and then act it out. The teacher gives a role each and Adolf has the part where he has to catch the butterfly. They are acting action words such as 'fly' 'catch' etc and they are enjoying it and ask teacher to do it again.'* [Field Note 24]

Role-playing is the technique used in this activity, and taking on the role of a particular setting improved the student's knowledge of the poem being tackled. This was particularly appropriate because it required them to understand certain action words which were complex for them. It served as an active learning activity, and students were able to communicate between them.

The same fun element was noted with Ian during one of his English lessons when the teacher informed them that she will be doing a song today and told them about the story of her brother who passed away in a motorcycle accident. The topic under discussion was road safety, and they were discussing safety aspects when they ride bicycles in the street. It was a topic that

intrigued them all because all of the class liked riding bicycles, and Ian, together with the other students, was engaged when a song was used as part of the English lesson.

*'Ian, like other students, is listening closely as the story interests him. He is with his head upwards, looking and making eye contact with the teacher. The song on a sheet that Ian has in front of him has missing slots, and a word bank is evident on the sheet. The song is [Jeans on David Dundas - Jeans On - YouTube](#). LSE asks him if he understands everything, and he ignores her and waits eagerly for the song to start. He finishes all the exercises correctly and independently.'* [Field Note 12]

Games were identified as another instance when students get engaged in the lesson and enjoy it. This was evident in the Grade 11 class when the Maltese teacher walked in with buzzers in the class, and the students gathered that the lesson would be in the form of a game, as can be seen in Field Notes 17 and 18 below

*'The second Maltese lesson is to be observed, and students are waiting for the teacher to arrive. They are already all excited, and they discuss the games that he might prepare for them. The teacher arrives carrying a box of buzzers, and their eye lit up. He explains that today's lesson will build up on the one done the day before with a particular focus on writing of words'. [Field Note 17]....*

*'The teacher gives them a buzzer, and he informs them that an explanation of an object is going to be given, and they have to guess the item. One of the words given is 'muntanja' (mountain), but they cannot guess it, so teacher uses gestures to support understanding'. [Field Note 18]*

During this activity, the buzzer game kept them engaged, and they still considered it as a fun activity even though the task was a bit challenging to them. Gamification, a strategy used to support engagement, was very effective in this classroom. Learning was more enjoyable and the activity itself challenged the students, introduced an element of healthy competition and encouraged teamwork, resulting in enhanced emotional engagement and attendance to the lesson.

*'The teacher gives them about three trials each to learn the game and then informs them that they have to group in twos as now the game will be done in small groups. Students are allowed to move around and choose their partners. He asks them to read words in Maltese, and then these need to be spelt with flashcards. The teacher asks Adam two short questions; however, he gets no answer from him. The teacher then changes his questions to yes/no answers, and Adam responds. Questions are also addressed to Nora, and she answers all his questions, e.g. How is the mountain? In the last turn, Nora loses the game together with her partner. She was sad to lose, and the teacher, together with LSE, explained that everyone is good at something and she will try hard for the next round.'* [Field Note 16]

This activity has provided the students with the opportunity to develop further skills related to verbal expression, delegating with peers as well as compromising and tackling defeat.

This group of students identified various interests and topics they prefer to read about. It was observed that educators tend to improvise extension activities when they realise that these students are interested in a particular topic. Ian is interested when the topic of discussion is computer games. Nora, on the other hand, enjoyed book reading *The street of London* whilst Zaya remembered the lesson they did on Carnival floats. Adam identified sport as his interest, whilst Adolf identified hobbies and riding the bike as their preferred topic of interest. The information provided in the student interview relates to their engagement towards particular topics. For instance, in Year 9 class, Ian was observed to be very engaged when Road safety was discussed, as all students, as previously mentioned, ride bicycles. Field Note 7 indicates this

*'Teacher introduces the lesson and informs that today's lesson is a continuation of the text read and now it's time to do comprehension of 'Rules of the road'. She explains that topic should interest them as all of the students ride bicycles.'*

On various occasions, such as Field Note 6 and 10 Ian is observed ignoring the fact that the LSE is talking to him and this seems to be a common occurrence in the class. However, when the LSE mentioned that she knows how to ride a bike and shared his interest, his reaction was completely different, as it is shown in Field Note 11

*'Ian is finalising exercise of rules and LSE is narrating that she used to drive the bicycle as well. Ian immediately turns to her and jokingly tells her that he wants to see a photo of her on the bike.'* [Fieldnote 11]

There are various other instances when the teacher expands on the interest of the students. One such observation is the following that happened with Adolf during the English lesson.

*'Teacher and LSE ask questions to Adolf. Teachers asks 'When do you watch movies/computer games?' He replies in the evening. She also asks him, 'When do you play with your tablet?' He replies in the afternoon. The teacher notices how engaged he is and how fast he answers the question and continues asking questions even if they are not in the pictures. The LSE asks him a question about the pizza making that happened earlier, and he answers by saying the steps he used to decorate the pizza. I was close by, and he wanted to show me photos of how he did it. He explains that first, he made dough, cut chicken and then did mushrooms.'* [Field Note 32]

In a Maltese lesson that followed, the teacher showed them an e-book on the interactive whiteboard and it was about two youngsters, Claire and Luca, who were describing what they like doing. They are given the option of writing about their hobby or what they like.

*'Shane writes his hobby 'football', and he is guided to write it and spell it in Maltese. Another story is read named 'Claire u Luca', and Shane read 'Luca iħobb isajjar. Luca qed isajjar pizza mal-mama.'* (Luca likes cooking, and he is cooking a pizza with his mum) He reads it well, and LSE asks him to explain the ingredients he used to make his pizza. Shane mentions green peppers. The other students got interested, and the teacher extended the writing activity to writing ingredients on the board. Andrew named tomatoes, and he got up from his seat and wrote it on the board.' [Field Note 34]

In Grade 11, as part of the London theme, students were doing on Madame Tussaud and this interested students a lot.

*'Adam is very much into it as from the pictures that the teacher is showing them; he recognises Prince, Queen, Donald Trump and Beyonce. Nora suggests that she sings, 'I was there'. The teacher realises how engaged they are when this topic is being discussed, and she finds more VIPs on the internet, and Nora enjoys naming them. Then it was time to start reading and Nora volunteers to start as it is something she seems to enjoy. All of them are fluent readers in class. The text was about Madame Tussaud, and teachers asked them with whom they wanted to take a photo if they went there. Nora chooses singers, and Adam chooses football players.'* [Field Note 21].

Considering that student engagement is related to academic success, these students are more likely to retain valuable knowledge if they feel that curricular experiences are entertaining, meaningful and interesting to them. The fact that this skilled teacher generated curiosity and interest shows that these students are learning.

During some of the student interviews, I asked them if there was something they wanted more of during their literacy lessons. Ian and Shane named reading and writing grammatical exercises, respectively. Nora and Adam both mentioned that they would like to talk more. This is evidenced in the conversation with Nora hereunder

<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Is there something you want to do more of in the lessons?</i>	
<i>Nora</i>	<i>I talk more</i>	<i>Expressed herself using her hands in a determined manner.</i>
<i>Researcher</i>	<i>Do you want to talk more, or you already talk enough?</i>	



Nora	<i>I talk more</i>	
Researcher	<i>Ok, you want to talk more during the lesson. But are you going to talk about the lesson?</i>	
Nora	<i>Yessss</i>	

In Nora and Adam’s classroom, certain aspects which encourage talking were noticed during the observations, and it is likely that the reason for their answers is due to the fact that they are involved verbally in the class. Their voices are heard as much as the teacher’s. Nora on one occasion, felt comfortable enough, and in fact, *‘She suggests to the teacher to change the rule of the game and time how much they take rather than setting a timer.’* [Fieldnote 16]. The environment in this class is also one that allows students to voice their opinion freely. In fact, *‘When Donald Trump was named, one student commented that he is racist as a politician.’* [Field Note 21].

Yet another positive observation in Grade 11 involved the students waiting eagerly for the English lesson to start.

*‘All seem to be looking forward to the lesson. Students have the freedom to sit where and next to where they want. The teacher comes in, and starts chatting informally with them on their Easter holidays. She is eliciting phrases from them, e.g. I watched movies, read English books etc. Nora and Adam feel at ease, and they uttered sentences about their holiday activity.’* [Field Note 19]

This example indicates that the teacher is creating an engaging classroom for the students and showing them that she cares about them. She maintains a positive social atmosphere in the class and this is beneficial as engagement of a student is influenced by the context and situation in the classroom.

#### 4.3 Analysis of LSEs Interviews

Interviews with five LSEs supporting students in Grade 10 were carried out following some lessons that I have observed. The observations took place in May, and in June, these students were to sit for their examinations. The atmosphere and behaviour of these students changed during the preparation for the exams, and the examination was an aspect that the LSEs

requested to discuss further as they were concerned about it. The LSEs started by explaining that the Grade 10 class was not the typical CCP class, but instead the majority of students all had Autism besides having an Intellectual Disability. Usually, students in the CCP have other aspects, such as learning difficulties, social and emotional challenges etc. The conversations during these interviews were related to two main areas: the curriculum and exams. Regarding the curriculum covered in the CCP class discussion led to codes related to the aspect of the general curriculum, the aspect of Compulsory exams as well as functional and hands-on skills. When discussing examination, various aspects were named, and these include the structure and features of exam papers, cognitive level of exam tasks, exam concessions and LSE support provided throughout the examinations. The information generated from this data set supported the observations experienced in the class during literacy lessons as well as disengagement issues observed in some lessons. The first aspect to be discussed is the curricular aspect.

#### 4.3.1 Curriculum Covered

LSEs, in general, discussed aspects related to the curriculum covered and how this related to functional skills and exams. Andrew's LSE explained that all the lessons they do in literacy are academic in nature. She further states that

*"I do believe that students in the CCP class this year need more self-help skills rather than academic skills. I know they are coming to school for the academics; however, they still need these functional skills...They don't have functional topics, i.e. none of the topics focuses on independent or social skills"* [Andrew's LSE]

Adolf's LSE discusses that even if sometimes they focus on hands-on activities and more practical tasks but then in the exams, they still have to do the same as other students. Even though not related to literacy, ICT is a subject mentioned by many, and Shane's LSE exposed the reality of these students who are in CCP as *"they have to do exams like their peers, and these are in higher tracks. It is too hard for them. Content is hard to grasp because they do not understand the underlying concepts."*

With regards to the curriculum covered in relation to examinations, Andrew's LSE identified that the syllabus is there and it has to be implemented by the teachers. She further explains that exams are based on the syllabus, so the teacher cannot possibly decide to do other things, and the syllabus has to be covered. LSEs were asked whether there is a possibility that students

are exempted from the exams, and Adolf's LSE mentioned that they are not exempted but have to sit for all of the exams. She explained it and compared it to a person *'like you are diabetic and still giving me sugar.'*

They also discuss the aspect of the exam results indicating that a percentage is based on the work done during the year and another percentage involves the annual mark of the exam.

#### 4.3.2 Literacy Examinations

The aspects which were discussed at length involves the examinations that the students will be sitting for in few weeks' time. Examinations, or summative assessments, are designed to provide information on what the student has learnt and what he or she is able to do. The LSEs interviewed all felt that the assessments are limiting the equitable participation of these students with intellectual disability. All LSEs and teachers have shown that the assessments taken are going to reinforce what the students cannot do and the process of showing what they know is not being fairly provided. The concept of fairness in these interviews highlights the fact that these students are treated like everyone else (those in CCP who do not have an intellectual disability) rather than according to their needs. LSEs perceive assessments as barriers that are preventing them from achieving their best. The aspects of these assessments were categorised into various themes, including structure and features of exam papers, cognitive level of tasks, oral examinations, during exam concessions as well as LSE support provision during exams.

The structure and features of examination papers should fairly represent the students' knowledge and skills they would have obtained during the scholastic year while mitigating any impact of the impairment or challenge caused by the intellectual disability. All the LSEs reported that the examination papers, in one way or another, fail to address the students' needs due to limitations in the structure and content of the paper. Andrew's LSE mentioned that one contributing factor is the number of pages in an exam paper and said:

*"There are usually a lot of pages. When my student sees ten pages in an exam, he panics and freaks out. He is used to doing forty minutes as maximum in the lesson, and he would have around 1 or 2 pages only"* [Andrew's LSE]

Furthermore, Simon's LSE, in her interview, discussed this same aspect and discussed that she would see the student turning pages and giving up when he counts the number of pages in the

exam paper. She further adds that when a student with an intellectual disability looks at a greater volume of work, it is common that he gives up. Andrew's LSE further adds that *"even a lot of writing tasks in one page affects him or a lot of exercises in one page."*

It is evidenced through these interviews that the reading load required in the literacy exam papers is creating use of processing skills, word recognition and background knowledge in making meaning from text, and this easily tires out the students with intellectual disability. Keeping the sheet clutter free is key as lots of text as well as busy sheets create distractions.

On another note, the colour of the paper for this cohort of students does not seem to affect them much; however, Simon's LSE asserts that the inclusion of visuals in the exam paper is fundamental as they are visual. Visual features may include pictures, tables, charts, illustrations etc, and their usefulness is highlighted in various aspects of the learning style and assessment process. The LSEs interviewed were mostly supporting students who have Autism besides intellectual disability; thus, the use of visuals to support text and comprehension is uncontested. The font used was also another aspect which was mentioned, both in terms of point size and print text. These have a direct effect on the legibility of reading a particular text. Adolf's LSE and Simon's LSE discussed that students in their class need a larger font as they cannot work with small fonts less than 14. Simon's LSE discuss a personal episode about the anxiety that small font in a sheet can create for these students

*"I had an experience with a student and when he saw the white paper with a lot of small print, he got very angry and had a tantrum, got frustrated and was going to cut the paper with scissors. Before the exam, I prepare a social story for them... I also showed them visuals of strategies for how to calm down, take deep breath so they will calm down and reduce the anxiety"* [Simon's LSE].

They also mentioned that the font type affects a lot, and Comic Sans was identified together with the Font used in Twinkl resources as being comfortable for the students to read. Adolf's LSE also discuss that

*"if it is stapled, it is not good for them as they need to see the paper with text next to each other, especially during the comprehension tasks... if they (papers) are behind, they don't. It will not occur to him to turn the page and find the answer"*.

Another aspect mentioned by Shane's LSE is that *"Comprehensions are on the same page, and that hinders them a lot. If it is done on a separate sheet, it will help them more so they could keep it next to them and be able to find the answers"* As per the LSEs interviews reading

comprehension tasks are critical in the way these are presented as they can affect various skills including, answering questions about the comprehension text as well as think about the question and remember it whilst they seek for the answers within the text if the questions are of recall in nature.

One aspect mentioned during the interviews was the space available on the exam paper to write the answer required. Simon's writing was observed to be quite large in size, and it is recorded in Field Note 36, where Simon's LSE explained that "*her student writes in large print and does not have enough space to write on the exam paper usually*" She further adds that extra sheets of paper are given for writing of compositions or essay writing only when questioned further in the interview.

Yet another notion which stands out is the Cognitive demand required to do tasks provided in the exams. The cognitive demand refers to the degree of effort required by the students to complete a task. Questioning techniques used in exam papers are often related to the level of cognitive demand. This involves giving the student a reasonable chance to express and show what they have learnt. Multiple choice questions geared at low cognitive demand can allow educators to better test the students' knowledge. Simon's LSE remarks that "*when there are open-ended questions and questions that have why or they have to give a reason, these are examples which will be very hard*" She further adds that, in her opinion, these kinds of questions and answer should be eliminated from the exam papers and it is adapted further. She suggests tasks such as underlining the correct answer and provision of a word bank, and when a question-and-answer format is given, the answer will be given from a choice of visuals. Zaya's LSE further adds that matching and one-word answers and fill-in-the-blanks are more preferred by these students. Andrew's LSE also points out the discrepancy in reading and understanding and how this is reflected in the teaching and learning activities during the class lessons and what happens in exams.

*"As a skill, it is useless for the student to be able to read and then cannot understand what he is reading. Especially when he reads a page, you ask him questions, and he is unable to answer you. Adaptations during lessons, as you could see in the observations, are helpful, especially when there are pictures to match with. However, in the exam, this does not feature."* [Andrew's LSE]

It is evident from the interview with Adolf's LSE that activities related to high cognitive demand when students have not practised a skill and require to do it in the exam, it requires increased mental effort. In this regard, she said that *"during the scholastic year, they do not write at length so they feel it difficult when they have to do it in exam."*

The Oral assessments were also a facet that concerned teachers and LSEs alike. Amongst these concerns are challenges that students with intellectual disability often encounter such as difficulties with processing and understanding new information, receptive and expressive skills as well as social skills. Cognitive skills such as working memory and vocabulary may impact the oral narrative abilities of these students. In Field Note 37, the teacher is

*"explaining about the oral language exam for the CCP class and describing that it will consist of doing an informal conversation, role play and picture interpretation and she is expressing her worry that this is too hard for the class in general as they all have verbal challenges. The teacher looks discouraged and expresses her frustration with the LSEs and students that she feels powerless in front of this situation"* [Field Note 37]

Adolf's LSE discusses that her student is mostly nonverbal, and he will not be able to show what he knows in the oral examination. Andrew's LSE discuss how he will probably answer with his limitations, and in picture interpretation parts, he would be able to answer as there will be visuals but

*"the attention also affects it because the student might not be attentive to what is being asked. For example, if he is not paying attention, he will retell the story of Jack and the Beanstalk, and Goldilocks because he knows these very well"* [Andrew's LSE]

She further discusses that it will be challenging to have a conversation with him as he tends to repeat a lot of what the communication partner is saying. Andrew's LSE was concerned because

*"if the examiner is not knowledgeable and patient, he would not understand why he is repeating and why he is not being understood. During the exams, this is different because if you tell him to say good morning, he will repeat the phrase. He also has limitations in ideas. He is okay when there is a choice; however, in the exam, they need to voice their ideas. He has difficulties expressing himself, so he will find it difficult, and if he doesn't answer, it is for this reason and not because he doesn't know them."*

Equal access to the examinations is usually achieved through accommodations provided to students during the exams. These adjustments allow the students with intellectual disability to be able to demonstrate their skills and knowledge without the need to lower the performance

criteria. These accommodations are used both in the cycle of teaching and learning as well as the assessment level. During interviews with LSEs on the matter, it was highlighted that whilst certain accommodations are still required in the teaching and learning process, however, these are not permissive during the examinations. Shane's LSE discusses that usually highlighting important information in a text is an accommodation used in the class during teaching and learning however, *"in the exam, this cannot be given to the students. It is a strategy that they find very helpful because it leads them to answers and the keywords in the text"*.

Paraphrasing a question is also another technique which is usually used during literacy lessons as it usually supports understanding. Adolf's LSE discussed that *"he would need someone to explain, read and elaborate, paraphrasing, using varied voices in reading and stressing certain words. These strategies cannot be used in the exams"*. She further confesses how she feels bad about not being able to support her student during the examinations. This is in light of the fact that LSEs do not usually support their own student but are assigned to different students. Knowing a student's characteristics has an impact during examinations; for instance, Shane is described as taking a long time to warm up to a new person, so he will likely feel shy to request help during the exam. Simon's LSE further discussed that her student sometimes blocks during the exam, and when confused, he might even work incorrectly in an exam even when there is a word bank as

*"he starts putting the first answer in the first question without finding the right place and continues to do so till the end of the task. It is like during that moment, he doesn't have any capacity to think and reason"* [Simon's LSE]

She further adds that it is important for a new LSE supporting Simon to know that *"Simon doesn't know what he has to do when there is no space left in the line. I need to tell him that he has to start a new line; otherwise, he keeps on writing word on word."* [Simon's LSE]

Zaya's LSE also discussed that another accommodation was used instead of a reader on request as provided to all of the other students. This was the reading pen, and it was provided during the teaching and learning in order to practice with it. This pen was being used by Zaya in all subjects except in Maltese due to the language not being available on the reader pen. She also mentions the shortcomings of this tool *"if this is not moved appropriately on the text, words are not read clearly. It also reads without punctuation and makes it very difficult for*

*understanding*” and further adds that the process is complex when sentences in a comprehension or poem need to be read and understood.

The next set of interviews to be analysed are the Head of School of the Secondary and the Head of Department Inclusion, which collectively is referred to as the Senior Management Team (SMT)

#### 4.4 Analysis of SMT Interviews

Various pertinent issues and beliefs were discussed with both the Head of School and the Head of Department Inclusion. The discussion revolved around the literacy experiences of these students in the CCP class, the school procedures relating to examinations, and the accountability of educators in relation to ensuring that teaching and learning are appropriate for the cognitive level of these students, amongst others. In the initial stages of the research, the intention was to have participants who presented with severe intellectual disability. However, as stated previously, these students had already moved to a Resource Centre to receive their educational entitlement. This notion was discussed further with the Senior Management Team in order to understand more the processes, situated beliefs and practices within this Secondary School and how these impact such decisions. Codes generated in these conversations can be grouped under various categories. The CCP class profile of Grade 10 was discussed, and this aspect was further elaborated on what the LSEs had discussed in their interviews. The concept of Mainstream education entitlement vis-à-vis Resource Centre schooling was also dealt with in depth. Literacy learning was another important notion that was discussed profusely, focusing on aspects of lesson adaptations by LSEs, the role of teachers in CCP classes as well as Curriculum covered in CCP. Considering that exams were a topic amply mentioned and discussed in classrooms, especially in Grade 10, I decided to tackle it as well during the interviews with the SMT.

##### 4.4.1 The CCP Grade 10 class

According to the Head of School, the Grade 10 CCP class has an unusual setup as all students in this class are all at a level below the CCP, and teachers are aware of this. She further states that *“The CCP curriculum is already a low level when compared with the rest [of the tracks], but then the Learning Support Educator needs to lower the level further. It does not happen often; however, in the year 10 class of this year, the students were below the level of the CCP”* [HOS].



She further explains that the CCP class usually caters for *“students who have behavioural challenges and they might have academic difficulties not because they are not intellectually capable but sometimes problems such as ADHD hinder their focus and study skills”* [HOS].

#### 4.4.2 Literacy Learning

In relation to literacy learning, various aspects were conferred and this provided strong insight into the teacher’s role in teaching CCP classes as well as the curriculum covered in the CCP. Another facet discussed in relation to literacy learning involves adaptations done by LSEs as part of their role in supporting these students with intellectual disability.

The Head of School was asked regarding the willingness of these teachers to teach CCP classes. She was specifically questioned about whether she finds any resistance from teachers to teach literacy to students with intellectual disability. She replied in the affirmative and explained that she doesn’t allow this kind of resistance from teachers as she tries to be socially just with all of the teachers and ensure that one year or another, all of them will have a turn in teaching these students and this also ensures a cohort of teachers who are practised in teaching students with intellectual disability. She further states that

*“There are teachers who particularly ask not to be given these classes; however, I was always fair and told them that one year or another they will teach in such a class. It is unfair that the same teachers teach the best kids”* [HOS].

The Head of School further recounts that teachers willing to teach CCP classes are in the minority and often shift responsibility to the LSEs in such cases.

*“I had teachers during the IEP discussing that they are willing to support the students who have intellectual disability, but these could be counted on one hand. Most of them say that they belong to the LSE and even refuse to attend the IEP. This is not accepted from my end, and it is a sin to allow this.”* [HOS].

On this aspect of shifting of responsibility, the HOD Inclusion, who has been supporting the school for a number of years, highlighted that *“at the end, all students are to be supported by teachers, but if they don’t do adaptations themselves, they have to ensure that LSEs are doing them”* [HOD Inc]

When questioned about the possible reasons for this, she explained that it could be because they are not knowledgeable enough, but *“it could also be because they do not want to prepare*

*adaptations and different material as teaching the CCP class involves more material than teaching track 3” [HOS]*

In conjunction with this information, the HOD Inc was asked whether the teacher knew the students before starting to prepare material, considering they usually had ready-made booklets on which they do their literacy work. She responded that it is highly dependent on the teacher. Some teachers try their very best to support students in the CCP class, but others also use a one size fits all and do not care less. The HOD Inc further stated that *“I went to see a lesson during exam times, and the teacher was doing a past exam paper. It is useless that you mean well, as the exam paper was still hard” [HOD Inc]*

In relation to adaptations carried out by LSEs, the conversation was solely tackled with the HOD Inc as this falls directly within her remit when supporting students and the educators in the process. Initially, she was questioned on her opinion on the LSE adaptations in CCP classrooms, and the conversation started with *“It is going to depend on the character of the LSE” [HOD Inc]*. She expanded on this notion by explaining that some LSEs work wonders with certain students and then some LSEs actually hinder these students’ development. From her regular observations in classrooms, the HOD Inc stated that *“even though there are good LSEs however, I don’t observe many adaptations”*. She also develops the argument further and explicates that *“it is very dragging for LSEs to make adaptations. I am not saying that it is easy to do because to do it, you need to have the teachers’ material before, and this has to be sent from all teachers involved. In reality, I rarely see adaptations in classes”*. [HOD Inc]

Meanwhile, further in the conversation, the HOD Inc also asserts that *“students all have different levels. The norm is to follow the teacher’s lessons. I am extremely happy with these LSEs and they do outstanding work however no adaptations.”* This is observed multiple times in the class, especially in Grade 10. Whilst I was doing observations, LSEs always used the resources provided by the teacher, and there was never an instance when the LSEs had adapted work prepared for the students. In fact, in Field Note 33, I observed that *“One student asks the LSEs what lesson they will have today before the teacher arrives but no one is aware of what will be covered during the lesson.”* Thus, this is a confirmation that the LSEs are unaware of the lesson being covered next and thus, adaptations are definitely not carried out. The HOD Inc confirms this by recounting that LSEs follow the teacher, and they get to know what is going to happen in the class during that time, and even if the teacher is going to use a

song, they will hear it with the students for the very first time. The HOD Inc admits that she was an LSE herself, and she understands them as they were not always provided with work prepared by the teacher to adapt beforehand and thus, it is acceptable that improvisation happens at that point. The HOD Inc also affirms that she doesn't know whether she should insist on having LSEs doing adaptations, and the reason brought forward is the examinations. She finds it useless to have adaptations throughout teaching and learning when adapted papers are not permitted in the exams. She insists that the departmental exigencies are to have LSEs making adaptations as part of their job, but on the other hand, *"if they do exams on what the teacher is supposed to be teaching, it is useless doing adaptations"* However, at the end, she confirms that as an LSE it is easier to follow what the teacher is doing and then make instant adaptations.

With regards to the curriculum covered in the CCP classes, both the Head of School and HOD Inclusion discussed that a functional aspect of literacy is not usually taught in CCP classes. The HOD Inclusion explains that she feels that it is 200% relevant to tackle literacy in a functional aspect

*"As this will prepare them for their life. They need these experiences; however, teachers keep in mind the examinations. They have to finish the syllabus, so they have to do it that way. Hands-on require more time and more preparation, and it yields better results; however, in my opinion, the chalk-and-talk method is faster"* [HOD Inc]

The Head of School further supports this when she explains that a functional aspect of the curriculum is not done in CCP but in Prince's Trust lessons. She further informs me that for the following scholastic year, literacy lessons were reduced, and instead Prince's trust lessons have increased in order to increase the functional curriculum. In relation to relevant content that is learnt in the subject the Head of School declares that certain topics might be useless for students with intellectual disability and the Prince's trust is a breath of fresh air for them as they do hands on activities rather than sitting down all day doing academic subjects.

#### 4.4.3 Exams

The concept of exams was confronted by both the Head of School and the Head of Department Inclusion. Both members of the Senior Management Team were placed in the context of the educators' concerns on examination formats and opinions, and the reason for this was sought. They both confirmed that the exams for CCP are compulsory in that particular secondary

school, and students cannot be exempted from them, including literacy examinations. As the main justification, the Head of School mentioned the school leaving certificate as the ultimate goal

*“If these students are not supported to sit for exams, there is a big problem which is the school leaving certificate as this does not cater for their needs. Basically, if they do not sit for the exam, their certificate will be practically empty”* [HOS]

She further elaborates that it feels like a disservice if these students are not allowed to do their exams. This is especially so because the school leaving certificate will not show the subjects that the student would have studied throughout the secondary years. The HOD Inclusion agrees with the Head of School and states that *“I always believed that in this way (students sitting for exams) we stretched the students to their maximum”* [HOD Inc], and in her opinion, this is how the school is trying to get the best out of students. The HOD Inclusion also highlights that in this particular school, the management always emphasised that exams would be done. She further confirms in the affirmative the fact that non-verbal students have to sit for orals and students who are unable to write have to sit for written exams. I further remarked that this is imposed on students even if the school is setting them up for failure, and this was confirmed that exams are done like all the others. Another important remark was that *“in the primary, we used to have adapted assessments prepared by the teacher and LSE”* and she further states that in the secondary level, *“if an exam paper is not issued by the Department, it cannot be considered as an official exam mark”* [HOD Inc]. With regards to the format of the exam paper they both confirm that the exam paper is issued by the Department of Examinations and the school receives the exam paper on the same day of the exam without any soft copy version that could possibly be adapted.

After the HOD Inc declares that having them sit for an exam is a good practice as students develop their potential to the limit, she voices her frustration about these exams

*“They [Department of Exams] know it is hard for them, but that’s what they had in the exam. There is something going wrong. Exam papers are done at the Department of Examinations. Do they know that these papers are done for students in the CCP? Do they know about students with autism when designing the paper?”* [HOD Inc]

Finally, the exams are still being considered as a means to an end as the HOD Inclusion discusses that *“It will still get us to the exams. Students with intellectual disability might gain skills, but still, adaptations are not done, and hands-on experiences are not given.”* She further

concludes by saying that the mainstream is not catering for their needs and is justified as adaptations take time and effort, and so does differentiation.

The Head of School foresees a possible alternative to examinations, and it is anticipated that the learning outcomes framework will start being implemented in Grade 10 and higher and a different format for issuing a school leaving certificate will be implemented. According to the Head of School, if there is a system whereby teachers can write comments on what the students have learnt and there is a learning outcomes system with ticking, this will not create the need for students with intellectual disability to sit for exams.

#### 4.4.4 Mainstream Education and Resource Centre schooling.

A major part of the discussion with the Senior Management Team revolved around whether the Secondary Mainstream school is the appropriate educational place for students with intellectual disability. This also stemmed from the fact that students with severe intellectual disability, originally planned to be participants in this research, had already moved to a Resource Centre before Grade 9. Discussions regarding this matter uncovered various beliefs and thoughts that perpetuate from the management level to other levels, directly affecting parents and students alike.

The conversation with the Head of School was initiated by discussing the CCP in the context of a mainstream school as it is a special class within an inclusive secondary school. She explained that this class is usually reserved for those students who, at the end of Year 8, are showing that basic skills in literacy are not achieved and are decided based on the teacher's input and evidence of low marks in exams. In relation to students with intellectual disabilities, she particularly mentions that

*"Sometimes we have students who are more basic than this, and the CCP is not even appropriate for them. Some students are below the CCP level. These students struggle more and more, and even teachers struggle with them. In the same class, a teacher would have students who are at the level of CCP and students who are below this level. In this case, literacy learning is very poor, especially for those students with autism who have verbal challenges"*  
[HOS]

This description happens to fit perfectly the description that SMT has provided regarding the profile of students in Year 10. The dialogue progressed to the eventual question of what happened to students who were diagnosed as severe intellectual disability and why these were

not in the mainstream secondary school. The Head of School elucidated that these students are the ones who are performing below the CCP level and *“they had other needs; however the school cannot cater for these needs”* [HOS]. According to the Head of School, parents in this case have decided to have their children attend a resource centre, but the option to stay in the mainstream school was there. Practically, it was explained that even if advised by the Education Department, the National School Support Services would communicate with the parents and suggest that other options are available for their child. She mentions a case when *“they [parents] used to insist that we should support her walking; however, we didn’t have the personnel to do it. In the second year, they realised that moving to Helen Keller [resource centre] was a better option for her”* [HOS]. On this topic, the Head of Department Inclusion commented that *“Sometimes there are students that when I see them in class, I think that they are suffering because they cannot move and do long hours seated. In that case, I feel that resource centres are more appropriate for them.”* She also remarked that this conflicts with her role and said:

*“it is difficult as Head of Inclusion, and I can’t exclude these students; however, for their well-being, it would be better. At the end of the day, they are still being educated in the Resource Centre, and they are still following a curriculum”* [HOD Inc]

Departmental procedures related to the educational placement of students with intellectual disability were also a topic of discussion and SMT members explained the procedures. The HOD Inclusion explained that in January, the Education Department requested the names of students who might benefit from Resource Centre services. Once this is provided by the school, depending on the availability of the Resource Centre, it will be decided if they will benefit. She further expands on this and says that

*“Parents never know that we identified their child. Once selected, we talk to the parents, the Head, Assistant Head and myself. We tell them that they got selected for a particular programme and that we would need an immediate confirmation about it”* [HOD Inc]

The role of the parents in this possible shift from mainstream to resource centres has been delved into through some questions I posed during the interviews with both Head of School and the Head of Department Inclusion. The Head of School immediately starts the statement with, *“the school suggests, but it doesn’t force the parents”*. She also explained that she is careful about which parents to approach as some of them are still in a lot of pain due to their child’s disability and would be hurt by the suggestion. In relation to the Grade 10 class, she highlighted that if the school feels that as a group, they can be handled by the school, all of

them remain there. The HOD Inclusion clarified that she never had a situation where parents asked for their child to be transferred to a Resource Centre. She also elaborated that parents often request to have services of speech therapy, Occupational therapy and Physiotherapy within the context of the mainstream. According to the HOD Inc, *"You cannot have both things...You can't afford to have 2 LSEs to do physio or to walk a child"*. The Head of School asserted that the resource centre is always presented as an option, but they are usually very resistant to taking their children there, sometimes persisting even after the end of secondary schooling. At times parents *"wouldn't even want the name to be mentioned [resource centre].....for me, a parent who is in denial and not recognising the reality is doing a disservice to his child"* [HOS]

#### 4.5 Analysis of Parents Interviews

In this last part of the findings of the interviews carried out with the parents of the students with intellectual disability will be analysed. Their perceptions and experiences are fundamental as they have a crucial role in the support and promotion of inclusion and literacy practices. Their attitudes, perceptions and experiences are the aspects that shape their actions with their children. The data generated in these interviews was immense and this will be categorised into three main sections, parent-school collaboration, experiences and perceptions. In parent-school collaboration both aspects of literacy academic skills and functional skills are brought into the discussion. With regards to experiences related to literacy aspects include inclusion and literacy, IEPs, Use of computer and ICT in literacy learning, Homework and exams. Perceptions will also be explored in relation to fluency and preference of English and Maltese Language as well as perceptions of how their children learn literacy. The findings in these interviews will provide a deeper insight on the experiences of this group of students in the literacy learning journey.

##### 4.5.1 Parent-School collaboration

Collaboration between the school and parents of students with intellectual disability is essential to foster opportunities for learning to continue at home. Parents interviewed were all motivated to support their children at home both on academic content relation to literacy and also from a functional skills point of view. One of the major faults named by all parents which hinder greatly this collaboration is the lack of material such as booklets, notes etc that

children have available at home, making it hard for the parents to continue the literacy academic revision. On the other hand, the parents greatly support their children with intellectual disability to develop functional skills related to literacy and give them opportunities at home to develop these further.

Nora's parent declares that worksheets and workbooks, if sent at home would be of great use as she will be able to know what her daughter is learning and could do revision. However, she still tries to take on whatever feedback the teacher and LSE sends and continue working on the concepts she does at school. Asked whether she feels that the school has provided Nora with enough literacy skills instruction she answered

*"I cannot conclude whether what she learned at school is enough because whatever was going on in the class it was being revised here. We always worked collaboratively with the school and we were like a chain so I really do not know if what she learned at school is enough."* [Nora's parent]

Simon's parent reported that she is unsure what they do but sometimes LSE mentions the topics they cover but as she is not in class, she wouldn't know what they actually do. She referred to some adapted comprehension tasks that he does at school but the revision at home is based on comprehension tasks and grammatical exercises in Maltese.

Andrew's parent expressed concerns about the fact that the school home collaboration is limited and attributes it to lack of homework

*"With regards to what they are covering in terms of syllabus I wouldn't know what they are learning even because my child doesn't get any homework at home. All I get to know is that he is doing his work at school and any information I get is through emails I receive at the end of the week for instance during English he didn't feel like working or only worked for a little part."* [Andrew's parent]

Andrew's parent also indicated that he never had any access to past papers so he never used them to revise at home but instead tries to go over the textbooks used in school.

Ian's parent welcomes the opportunity to have notes on topics covered at school. She expressed that

*"Having examples of how to do certain exercises or tasks or a particular sum is important to have as a reference because sometimes I find it difficult as they use different methods at school nowadays. Sometimes I even use Google and search for certain examples. At times I don't know*



*how they cover certain things and how they learned it so I need some notes. Having them on a copybook or a booklet can be helpful” [Ian’s parent]*

Further on in the conversation Ian’s parent also explains that having a good LSE who sends detailed email on what was done daily is of great support as well. For her the LSE is the point of reference and not the teacher, even though she has access to communicate with her through MSTeams. The same experience was shared by Adolf’s parents who also relies solely on the LSE to send her links and provides her with information on what was covered in literacy. Zaya’s parents kept the same link from school to home and the LSE was their source of information on what is being covered at school however they also report that Zaya is more verbal and she explains to them what was done.

Shane’s parent on the other hand, prefers asking Shane what they have covered even though she admits that she compares what Shane tells her with the LSE’s version. She argues that during online learning, it gave her more opportunity to collaborate with the school as she could understand what activities are being held, the level at which Shane is understanding and how best to help him accordingly.

The aspect of learning literacy in a functional manner is an approach used in certain secondary schools including this local one. This concept was discussed in the interviews with parents as it was mentioned by educators on multiple times. The importance of learning independent skills and employability skills is undeniable with students with intellectual disability thus this was further explored with them. Parents in general attributed these skills to outings, and opportunities that were given in different subjects. It was noted that, in accordance with my observations in class, a functional approach to literacy is not something practiced in class. Topics chosen by teachers do tend to have relevance to students but not particularly instructing them skills that they will require later on for independent living or supported employment.

Simon’s parent discuss hands on experiences are extremely important for her son but *“in this school they never experienced it that they practice life skills. I don’t think that there is enough time to do these activities in the school.”* She mentions skills like writing an email and learning how to send and read emails which are aspects she practices at home with Simon but it was never done at school.

Andrew's parent emphasises that his son needs to experience things to learn and regarding functional skills he says that

*"They are needed and as far as I know they only did lessons on using money and recognising coins. I was told to support him in recognising 2 Euro, 1 Euro etc however there were no lessons related to life skills in general. My child is still behind in these areas."* [Andrew's parent]

Zaya's parents and Nora's parents both discussed that they take the lead and support their daughters in life skills at home. These involve learning how to ride a bus and doing house chores for Zaya. Shane's parent explains that he needs a lot of support in practical aspects and uses the family restaurant to expose him to various life skills as well. She observed that whilst they were doing online lessons, educators tried their utmost to foster independent skills in these children.

Adolf's parent, regards independence as one of her top priorities for Adolf and gives him opportunities on everyday basis to practice independent skills. She also agreed with LSE to have Adolf using the tuck shop at school in order to practice requesting things, and use of money to buy.

The school home collaboration practices that were discussed forms part of a wider range of experiences that these parents have experienced in relation to literacy learning. These will be dealt with thoroughly in the next section

#### 4.5.2 Experiences of parents

In the quest to understand the experience of parents in their children's literacy, various questions were asked that could possibly constitute a positive or negative experience. These experiences vary and the assignment of an LSE and the commitment of the LSEs given seem to be fundamental to determine how the experience is especially in relation to literacy and inclusion in general. Adolf's parent shared her experience in relation to LSEs and overall, it was always positive and even in that present year however due to certain episodes she elaborated on later on she said that *"We hear a lot about inclusion but in reality, we don't always practice it and we always remain stuck in the same place. There has been a lot of improvement however we're still quite behind with regards to inclusion"* [Adolf's parent] In relation to the CCP class in general she commented that *"I do believe in inclusion but I am aware that this is segregation"* [Adolf's parent]

Ian's parent shared her experience in a parent's day which affected her and dampened her experience of inclusion. Speaking to Ian's form teacher, who also happened to be the Maltese teacher, she was provided with a very negative description of Ian highlighting all the challenges and needs he has in class and then continues to say that

*"I simply asked him whether he had looked at my child's reports. I asked him whether he is aware what conditions my child had. He was stunned at that point and he answered No- in fact he never checked his reports" [Ian's parent].*

She was concerned as her son had just started secondary schooling and his main teacher does not know anything about him yet and she emphasised that educators need to understand their condition rather than labelling them as otherwise they will struggle in lessons especially Maltese.

The phenomena that parents feel that educators and SMT are not knowledgeable on conditions was felt even by other parents. Andrew's father spoke about this episode as well when asked about his experience in the school. He feels that even though he always felt supported in school but in relation to certain behaviours the SMT

*"Tell us to inform him, prepare him but this hurts because it is as if they do not know that my child has a condition. It is beyond my control. Sometimes I do tell him which things he can do and what he cannot do especially at school and I do prepare him however I am not with him in class so I don't have control over him because I don't know what he is experiencing in his own mind. Sometimes they talk to us about the child as if he doesn't have a condition" [Andrew's parent].*

Such a situation makes this parent doubtful whether educators and SMT are trained enough to understand these students with intellectual disability.

A similar experience was narrated by Adolf's parent when she was discussing inclusion and IEP in relation to literacy. She recounts that after every IEP in the secondary school she ends up in tears as she feels that educators and SMT are not understanding and empathising with the challenges to teaching skills to a child with intellectual disability. She explains it in the following manner.

*"One thing that I am tired of and I'm already preparing myself for next year is the discussion on independence. No one more than me is willing to take this child in the middle of a road and be sure that he can be independent and can go anywhere he wants without my help. However, I am really sorry and disappointed because I experience that certain people do not understand me and hurt me." [Adolf's parent]*

She further discusses that socialisation and independence were always given priority before literacy and she still does. Whilst she gives him opportunities when it is safe for him to go on his own, she is reluctant to risk his safety in other independent tasks.

The involvement of the parents in the IEP process is core to the learning and mastery of skills with children with intellectual disability. Questions related to the IEP design and the importance given to the literacy and language development goal were particularly questioned. The experiences vary but the school support especially from SMT seems to be unwavering. Ian's parent discussed that whenever they needed to discuss something they were always available immediately or by emails later on in the day. Goals related to literacy were always discussed and if any disagreements happen communicating with the educators has always helped. Shane's parent discuss that she had the opportunity to discuss learning goals with the school as much as required and teachers contacted her directly when an aspect needed to be clarified. Zaya's parents were more proactive and approached the IEP meeting with goals that they would like school to work on and said that *"we used to ask them to focus on certain targets so we always had the skills covered"* [Zaya's parent] The same positive experience is reported by Nora's parents and they always felt understood by SMT. Finally, Simon's parent felt that the IEP meeting is sometimes rushed and goals which needed to be prioritised were discussed whilst the others were not due to lack of time available.

Parents of students with intellectual disability expressed their views and experiences on three more aspects which are interlinked. These include literacy homework, exams and use of ICT and computer in Literacy learning. Information that emerged from the parent interviews show that students in the CCP class are not given homework. This situation was particularly appealing for some students however in the majority of cases, parents preferred that they have some homework on regular basis.

Simon's parent remarks that he is used to having homework tasks as that was the system in the primary and he always does extra work given to him at home so homework will be a continuation on what goes on in class. Nora's parent discuss that she prefers if they had homework as this allows them to know what goes on in class and through it, they can help her more at home even to prepare for examinations. She said that *"sometimes I can understand the topic she is doing at school but then at times I would find a topic difficult and it is difficult*

*to support her in that topic if I don't have the material."* [Nora's parent] She further states that unfinished schoolwork is sometimes brought home and that gives her a glimpse of what is being done in class. The only information she gets involves email from LSEs who informs her about the topics that they would have covered. This creates challenges to support the students and prepare them for exams as sometimes parents reported not knowing what to study with their children. Andrew's parent feels that it would make sense to have homework when he comes back from school. He discusses that school educators never wanted to give him homework. He recounts that:

*"In September, before this past scholastic year started, I had informed the assistant head that I would like that he is given homework as he used to be given in Year 6 [primary]. He used to have revision of what he did in class. He used to come home, do the homework on his own and even though I used to stay with him, he used to know his homework on his own. It wasn't a lot of homework but at least 15 to 30 minutes were enough. I had informed them that I wish he gets homework but for one reason or another he was never given any. I feel that this homework can help him and after school he will not just come home and play because nowadays when it is time for exams, he doesn't want to study after school"* [Andrew's LSE]

Shane's parent also mentioned that she requested LSE to start giving him homework as he was used to doing it after school but none was ever given to him.

Adolf's parent accentuates that a student with intellectual disability especially if they have autism, like Adolf, is dependent on routine and she argues that we all should be aware that certain routines, once learnt would be of benefit to them. Adolf complains when extra work is provided by his mother but he was always willing to do the homework as provided by the school. In her opinion, through the homework she could be informed what they are actually doing in class in terms of topics and be able to help him for exams later on in the scholastic year.

Zaya's and Ian's parent on the other hand finds it positive that they don't have tasks for home especially for Ian as he used to be frustrated doing his homework on daily basis.

Homework has been discussed profusely in terms of preparation for examinations at the end of scholastic year. Summative assessments were critically discussed by all stakeholders and the same happened when parents were questioned about them. One particular observation is that parents were more pro exams than educators and management team and as one of the SMT members said, this could be because whilst parents preferred mainstream schools it is

accepted and expected that they sit for exams as well. The reactions and experiences of parents were sought with questions specifically on exams and this information sheds more light on the way the students are experiencing literacy examinations. Adolf's parent reacts to the question in a mixed manner as Adolf seems to be scoring quite well in these exams however, she also vents her frustration as exams are not adapted to their level and the process is unfair on the students. Even though as a parent she spoke up with the school educators and SMT confirmed that exams will not be adapted. With regards to the process of gearing up for exams she explains that *"he still struggles, in reality he struggles a lot. These examinations are not always related to what he covered in class"* [Adolf's parent]. She was also particularly concerned for the literacy exams as the priority is given to both Maltese and English followed by ICT as these subjects are the basis for preparedness towards eventual employment or further education at post-secondary institution.

Shane's parent specifically states that exams are too hard for his level and as he is shy, having a new LSE with him *"does not give him peace of mind as he does not feel comfortable talking or asking her things"* [Shane's parent].

Zaya's parent on the other hand remarked that she is often tense, at times even left the examination room in a panic attack but she usually does very well and passed from all of them. Nora's mother mentions that usually exams involve a period of stress however the fact that only annual examinations are done, Nora only gets a short time when she is tense and she did fine. Andrew's parent remarks that probably Andrew still doesn't get the concept of what an exam is and it is like a normal school day. Simon's parent spoke about the experience of exams for them and the fact that he sits for exams is something new for Simon so going through this experience for the second time is an achievement in itself. However, she also narrates that *"He is usually very stressed and has headaches. When he comes back from exams he wants to sleep at home. I think tension and stress tires him out"* [Simon's parent]. Ian's parent remarked that the process of studying for the exam is more challenging in terms of staying concentrated and retaining information covered and revision ends up happening before the actual exam. Ian's results were not very good but an improvement from the previous year was noted.

A highly debated notion throughout the interviews was that of the use of computer and ICT in literacy learning. Devices, software and use of word processors in general are common tools

used by students with intellectual disability in order to access literacy, express their ideas as well as used for assessment purposes. The experience of parents and students in the secondary school alike is a bit different to this reality and this aspect was discussed vociferously by parents.

Simon's parent narrated how Simon has been using the computer since very young and through it he learnt more languages including Spanish. In fact,

*"He can even use it to do videos, find music appropriate for videos, include photos etc....In the primary he had a laptop and he used it in school however in the secondary school they are not allowing it. He used to feel much better typing rather than writing. He even used it to type his needs e.g. I want to go to the bathroom. He used flashcards, communication board however we tried stopping those in order to encourage more speaking...Not even a tablet was allowed at school. So he was practically left without any possibility to use Microsoft word and type his work" [Simon's parent].*

Simon's parent also discusses that for them it is fundamental that he has ICT skills as jobs nowadays are based on knowledge of these skills and he even learnt how to send emails and they practice sending them between themselves.

Ian's parent remarks that she could see Ian's ability during online lessons as doing tasks on paper is usually challenging but

*"There was a time when Ian used to do essay writing through typing the sentences on the computer. He used to add pictures according to the topic. He used to print them and place them on a scrapbook and he used to write the essay. Then we used to correct it, type it neatly and finalise it but the most important thing is that he uses the computer. If Ian is given the opportunity to type instead of write he will do much better in school....He seems to be able to think more when he types and writing involves more work for him." [Ian's parent]*

Zaya's parent narrated that Zaya used to be very fluent in the computer and used it extensively however in the CCP class this is not used anymore and she stopped using it altogether. They also mention that the reading pen is a technological tool important for her as this encourages independence in the task.

Andrew's parent informed me that computers were never utilised for examination purposes in the secondary school. He further states that

*"Exams and lessons were always done using writing but never a computer. His handwriting is not good and nice to look at. Sometimes he writes above the line and sometimes below. That is why typing is the most efficient system for him. It will help him a lot in school and during the exams. He is also very creative on the computer as he can download adverts and manages to merge these videos together. It was my wish that the school would incorporate the use of*

*computer throughout his studies and he is very creative and he can progress well in it.”*  
[Andrew’s parent]

He further discusses that the use of the computer is his strength and he loves using the keyboard. It also transpired that Andrew can use the Maltese keyboard correctly, is able to spell perfectly in Maltese and uses all the symbols in Maltese as appropriate. Unfortunately, the parent asked the Head of school to have Andrew using a computer and he was informed that there are none available.

#### 4.5.3 Perceptions of parents

Parental perceptions on inclusion and literacy experiences have a direct effect on the potential of learning in their children with intellectual disability. Parents tend to be those stakeholders who understand how best their child can learn and insights on the matter can greatly impact teaching and learning. Students with intellectual disability voiced out their preferences in the learning of English and Maltese in this secondary school and this was also an aspect discussed with the parents interviewed.

Parents have identified that children often have a preferred language, and usually it is considered as the main language of focus with the other language usually considered as a language that is disliked to use in verbal communication and also to learn literacy through. Simon’s parent mentioned that Maltese has always been more difficult to learn than English and even if he speaks in English, answering and understanding questions e.g., what, who, why seem to still be challenging. Simon’s parent also discusses that even though they have been trying to push for more learning in Maltese, the important aspect is that he communicates and he does so through English. Nora’s parent, in agreement with Nora’s preference mentioned English as the favourite subject with Maltese being more challenging to write. The same experience was reported by Zaya and her parents where even though they entice her to read Maltese with ensuring that a lot of Maltese books are bought but the preference for English is absolute. Andrew’s parent discusses how Maltese on the other hand, is his son’s favourite subject and can even speak it well to communicate. He explained that considering his interest in the subject, he even practices creative writing with him on the computer and link it to family experiences when Andrew is usually very excited to participate in them and explained that



*“We are soon going to a hotel and we do a story about what things we need to take with us in the luggage. For example, he will write sentences around seven sentences for example about what things we need to take with us in the luggage such as clothes. When I do creative writing with him, he never diverts from the topic we are discussing and like that we build up a small story” [Andrew’s parent]*

Ian’s parent had quite a lot of experiences to share regarding her son’s language preference. In accordance with my observations on his engagement in English, far superior than in Maltese, Ian dislikes the Maltese language and lessons and this was even confirmed by himself in the interview. His parent supported these observations by confirming that he struggles a lot in the language learning and has a hard time besides not enjoying them. She explains that consequently, subjects such as social studies and history, which are taught in Maltese are also being challenging to learn. She also mentions that certain detail in Maltese grammar is useless and states that

*“Sometimes I do question why he needs to learn certain subjects and topics such as joined pronouns and proverbs and in his case I’d rather have him learning basic things rather than useless material. I would rather he works hard on learning independent skills, how to survive in the employment roles, how to respect others etc and further life skills” [Ian’s parent]*

She also highlights that she doesn’t keep her expectations high for Ian in subjects which are taught in Maltese such as religion, social studies and history because what he needs are basic skills. One aspect that Ian’s parent was particularly dissatisfied with is the fact that all of a sudden, this year he had to leave all of his peers and join the CCP class. After having made friends during the first two years of secondary schooling, results in his exams were not high enough and thus it was decided that in Year 9 he will attend CCP class. She explained that as a family they didn’t know what CCP is and it was very difficult to support Ian in making new friends. Over and above when he started the CCP class he was informed that he cannot possibly choose Media which is a subject that he is particularly keen on and was highly motivated to learn. Having ICT as a subject and the fact that no homework is given in CCP classes eased this transition considerably.

A number of parents mentioned their child’s interest in Italian when literacy was discussed as this was a subject introduced to them when they started secondary schooling. Students who start attending CCP classes are then denied the possibility to continue learning the foreign language. On this aspect, Adolf’s parent explained that

*“At that time [previous year] I was guided that because his first language is still presenting with some difficulties and he is not 100% in Maltese and English another language should not be added which at that time made sense to me but it is one of my biggest disappointments nowadays” [Adolf’s parent].*

This is because Adolf showed continuous interest in the subject. The same was report by Andrew’s parent who explained that he still shows great interest in Italian and sometimes he comes up to him and asks for certain words to be translated to Italian.

Parental perceptions of how their children learn literacy were explored in another part of the interview. Nora’s parent mentioned repetition as the key strategy to use with them as they often tend to forget easily. Revision at home is also important for her and reading regularly and writing paragraphs is usually done at home to ensure that literacy skills keep developing. Simon’s parent also mentioned that revision is done at home as it is important for him. In these instances, someone has to accompany Simon as on his own he will not work. She even mentions that at home she revises creative writing where he has to formulate five to six sentences and when he gets frustrated at trying to express himself, sometimes it is helpful for him to start the sentence for him and then he will build the rest of it. Zaya’s parent remarked that they are happy that she is placed in a CCP class as Zaya tends to get discouraged when in a class with high achievers. Her parent particularly mentions the discrepancy that Zaya presents with reading which is very fluent but spelling is still challenging.

Ian’s parent voiced her perception of the learning in quite some detail and emphasised the importance of visuals for them to learn. She indicates that

*“Even though learning through play is not used because of their age, however the lessons should not be boring and listening all the time makes it very boring and they get annoyed. Being interactive is the best kind of lesson.” [Ian’s parent]*

She also makes reference to outings and educational visits which have practically been avoided due to COVID and how such activities engage more her child in learning. In relation to the Maltese lessons, which Ian finds challenging she mentioned an episode to indicate the importance of translating words to the first language to support understanding.

*“It all started with the word ‘staffa’ [step in English] which is a word hardly used in the language and he didn’t know what it is. The teacher kept insisting but he didn’t know it. If a difficult Maltese word was used e.g. brama [jellyfish], telling him the English version of it might have helped him to understand the word. These aspects were affecting him in school and got him*

*frustrated but then I explained this to the teacher and our common good was for the child.”*  
[Ian’s parent]

Andrew’s parent also mentioned the frustration of having educators not knowing how to deal with his son’s tantrums. If something during the lesson bothers Andrew he can’t learn so for this parent the fact that educators can deal with his tantrums was essential. He narrated how he had to discuss with the Assistant Head to guide them on what is best to do when they see a tantrum building up. He also told me that Andrew’s main challenges are still to communicate with peers and socialise so activities which require communicating with others are important to his development. He also mentions that the use of videos and using the interactive white board will ensure that he is understanding what is being taught in lessons.

Shane’s parent also discussed at length the way Shane learns. She refers to Shane’s challenges especially related to communicating with other people, and processing of information through a conversation. She explained that through their family restaurant she tries to give Shane various opportunities to overcome the shyness and approach customers. She praises the school as the majority of skills he gained was from the education he received. She also highlights his kinaesthetic learning style as

*“Even though he struggles with expressing himself but then whatever is shown to him, he is able to do with his hands. Practice is everything with him. Unless he is shown how to do things in practice he doesn’t learn”* [Shane’s parent].

She also refers to online learning during COVID as an opportunity to learn more about Shane’s learning preferences. She could observe the struggle in comprehension and creative writing tasks but when the right kind of questions are used with Shane, he will be able to answer correctly. The fact that his reading was fluent seemed to be a benefit to his learning but his understanding is still at a word level or short phrase level. Understanding a full sentence is still difficult at times. Shane’s mother narrated that sometimes she wants to have Shane conversing with her. A lot of talking confuses Shane and does not process what he is being told. Sometimes the parent has to use simpler language for him to understand.

Adolf’s parent also described at length what works with learning especially in the literacy subject. The experience of online learning also provided her with insight on how Adolf learns and, in his case, PowerPoints help a lot as he is a visual learner. This experience has helped her as previously she was never aware of what they are learning at school. She also agrees with

Zaya's parent that having Adolf in CCP class creates less stress for him as he used to being in a class with all the students having higher abilities than his was not ideal. Something else that she identifies as a possibility is to have them choosing options as well as one never knows the inclination of these students. They might be interested in Biology or Home Economics and if they are engaged in such subjects, they could be the basis of their future employment. She also voiced her concern that skills learnt in school do not prepare him for later employment and she considers this as being realistic in life and knowing the abilities of these kids. She was particularly disappointed at the ICT subject which is a vehicle for other lifelong learning opportunities as the content of this subject is too difficult and technical rather than providing them with skills they need for life and future employment.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to extract the meaningful narratives of students with intellectual disability coupled with observations within the classroom and experiences of parents, LSEs and SMT. The meanings generated form the basis of major and minor themes that have emerged in the process. The chapter intended to highlight significant key aspects of the literacy learning of students with intellectual disability in a CCP class as voiced by the students themselves. The findings presented generally elaborate on the parents' experiences and perceptions of literacy learning. Feedback from educators and the senior management team has enriched the data collected and shed light on the intricate aspects of supporting such students during their literacy studies. Observations in the classrooms have allowed me to reflect on various challenges and realities that these participants encounter in the real context, which will allow for future improvements in the teaching and learning of literacy. These main findings as well as themes will be discussed in the next chapter together with comparison and linking to the literature on the matter.



## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

*“A voice that whispers through the cracks and fissures with its siren call is this unconventional voice worthy of our hearing” (Mazzei, 2009 p.50)*

### 5.1 Introduction

The quote is the spirit that will sustain the findings and discussion chapter. It will entail a culmination of aspects covered in the previous chapters and will aim at exploring the themes that emerged from the analysis of findings carried out as well as comparing it to the literature available on the area under research whilst highlighting the main findings of this research which relies on making meaning from the experiences as told by the students. I will start by restating the research questions to align again with the intention of the study, summarise key findings and indicate what themes have emerged from these. Finally, I will compare with the existing research and how these contribute to the field of research. The intention of the study is to explore the literacy experiences of a group of students with intellectual disability who are currently attending a CCP for literacy lessons, amongst other subjects. The main focus is to provide a platform for listening to these students' voices and exploring their lived experiences in learning English and Maltese literacy. The methods employed and the research style was intended to amplify these voices rather than silencing or disregard them. To complement their voices, parents, school management, and educators were also involved in the study and carrying out observations also served as an opportunity to understand their realities even further. The dearth of research on listening to the voices of students with intellectual disability was felt throughout the study, and this is more so in relation to literacy and the involvement of parents in these educational experiences. Thus, it is envisaged that through this research, a knowledge gap is addressed, and the findings could possibly contribute to this notion of listening to students with disability to inform policy and practice. The main research questions sought to address the experiences of learning literacy for these students, the perceptions and experiences of parents regarding learning literacy in the secondary CCP class, engagement during literacy learning as well as possible approaches to further support teaching and learning for students with intellectual disability in the secondary.

Essentially findings from analysing the narratives of all stakeholders concluded to the generation of four themes which will be dealt with next. The findings indicate that the student

voices have emerged and they indicated various aspects on their experiences. Before delving into the discussion of the themes that emerged, I would like to outline how this will be progressing. In this chapter, the themes uncovered will be discussed, and these will be explored in relation to the literature available on the area. The sequence of the themes and how they will be discussed will have a story-like feature that will uncover as I proceed through the discussion. Their relevance to the research questions will be an aspect discussed in the conclusion chapter. The themes outlined next were generated from the analysis of the data and are both latent and semantic in nature. Some meaning generated was easily recognisable and quite explicit; however, there were deeper layers that needed to be discussed, which were hidden, such as practice assumptions and other aspects which have a direct effect on the experiences that these students lived.

There are four themes identified, and these will be discussed in the order that they are named. The first theme is entitled "*I talk more*"; "*Stop! Go away*" - *The manifestations of student voices* with subthemes identified, including the students' experiences in Literacy Learning and processes in eliciting the voices of students with intellectual disability. The second theme is named Parental *perceptions and experiences on Literacy Learning*, with subthemes discussing the accessibility of information and subjects, the role of educators in literacy learning and the inclusion experience. The third theme is *Ableism and disabling practices*, with subthemes discussed being the notion of ableism in literacy Learning and systemic practices that disable students. The fourth and final theme is the *Universal Design of Learning and Assessment*, with subthemes discussed, are Presentation, Response and Engagement in Learning and Assessment procedures, respectively.

## 5.2 Theme 1 – "*I talk more*"; "*Stop! Go away*" - *The manifestations of student voices*.

Mazzei (2009), in his inspirational article "An impossibly full voice" states that "The voice which I have been seeking to capture and tame as clear, pure, and articulable is now only present to me as slippery, shifting, knowable, unknowable, certain, uncertain, audible, inaudible, and certainly unstable" (p.45). As I approach this theme, I realise my naivety at the beginning of this research and appreciate the culminating journey. This aspect of the research is messy and nuanced, with a lot of unangling. Sometimes processing of data happens at unexpected times. During the period whereby I was analysing the data on student voices, I happened to be doing an early intervention session with a boy, and the topic was prepositions. A song I was using to

introduce the concept was music to my thoughts. Singing to the song of *We are going for a bear hunt*, I was acting '*We can't go over it*', '*We can't go under it*' – '*We have to go through it!*'. That's what this theme feels like for me – I had to go through it! The more I reflect on the data, the more I convince myself how voice happens everywhere, in the students' spoken words, such as the context of the interviews, but it also happens in the spaces where these students are. The student interviews are just a formal context. In reality, the students have been voicing their experiences for much longer than this. There are a lot of missed meanings, most of them unspoken. The more I think about this, the greater the uncertainty on how to make sense of the voices entrusted to me. Eliciting and handling a voice and opinion trusted to me is puzzling, and once a researcher goes through it as a process, only then can one realise the powerful stance of it all. Some of the voices in the students who participated in this study are silent, and even though we cannot hear them but they still speak, one which, according to Mazzei (2008), "requires a different attentiveness and listening in our research settings.....and also include the voices spoken in the cracks, the sighs and the expressions" (p.46 & p.49).

This research is all about the voices of the students with intellectual disability, and in the first theme, I wanted to explore this manifestation in the context of secondary schooling, whereby these students are having literacy experiences. This theme incorporates aspects related to eliciting student voice and the complexities of the process. It also considers the challenges in enabling students to provide an opinion and also communicate it. It became evident throughout the research that barriers can involve the student's comprehension of the activity or question posed, the student's personality, choice-making skills, as well as their emotional status during that time. In this theme, I wanted to keep powerful quotes from the students as guidance to the main subthemes. Nora, at a point during the interview, said, "I talk more!" in reply to what more she wanted to do in her literacy lessons and thus the first subtheme will reflect what students voiced verbally and non-verbally through interviews and through their engagement behaviours in class. Another powerful voice was that of Simon, who, after three minutes into his interview, uttered, "Stop, Go Away!". This strongly indicates that when listening to student voices and trying to elicit them through interviewing, the process must reflect sensitivity, awareness of disability, determining the right level of questions, listening to the silences, interpreting behaviours and most of all, respecting the children themselves and



the consent process. All of these processes will be evidenced in the second subtheme accordingly.

### 5.2.1 The students' experiences in Literacy Learning

The emergence of voices of students with intellectual disability has been on the agenda of many countries, including Malta. The ultimate aim of this research is to have this voice exerting influence on teaching and learning processes and decisions taken on the children regarding their educational placements. From the outset, it was evident that, locally, this transformative potential of students is somewhat not recognised yet. As I mentioned in the preamble, when approaching school administration and explaining my research, I was met with incredulous stares at this approach, and they assumed that I needed access to the educators rather than to the students indicating that seeking the experience of students is not sought or practised. I regard the voices of the students can also be heard even if they are not being interviewed. By experiencing teaching and learning with them in the class, an educator can listen with ears and eyes to what they enjoy, what is challenging for them and how differentiation should be geared in the class to suit their particular interests and needs. This considerable degree of differentiation is what probably leads to exclusion due to a culture of elitism among educators. This was expressed by the Head of School as educators approached her with an unwillingness to work with such students and expressed their preference to always teach the high achievers. The inclusion sentiment might be present for some, but the lack of knowledge on intellectual disability and increased workload might be the contributing factors. This notion is still concerning as it is known that learning is not a place but a relationship between educators and students, and engagement is driven by a positive relationship created between these parties (Pritchard, 2017). Engagement and being connected fuels the engagement process, and it is essential for literacy learning to happen. Richardson (2015) further states that the classroom is not a place but an attitude, and this is relevant to this situation as the teacher's attitudes towards teaching students with intellectual disability will affect them in various ways and can shape or hinder their literacy experiences.

If I had to discuss the literacy experience that these students have, I would tend to agree with Ruppert's (2015) report, which features in terms of the setting being used, the theme used

during literacy instruction, material and literacy task itself. The students were in self-contained room within a mainstream school. All of the three classrooms where I observed sessions were typical classrooms with student seating indicating individual work. These desks were all facing an interactive whiteboard. The walls of these classes were considerably bare, without any visuals, picture schedules or any other print materials. The class size was considerably smaller than general education classrooms, and the ratio of LSEs to students, especially in Grade 10 and 11, were one to one. One lesson was observed outdoors in an area with benches and interviews were held in the school ground in an area where these CCP classes had their break time. Their break time did not involve meeting other students from the general classroom, so the students' interaction was limited to their CCP classmates. Even though the lessons observed do not represent the entire literacy curriculum, on thoroughly analysing the observational data, it can be deduced that students work on worksheets or workbooks for 60% of the activities, 27 % involve pictures, videos and use of media, and the remaining 13% include speaking activities. AAC devices, tablets and laptops were never utilised as tools in communication or literacy learning in class. In accordance with Ruppar (2015), it was also noted that activities carried out in class rarely targeted purposeful and meaningful communication and expressing themselves through writing was only observed with Adolf through the practice of a past paper in terms of writing sentences about oneself. During the time spent with these students in the CCP classes, it was observed that the use of workbooks and worksheets were the main literacy materials used. Ruppar (2015) observed a similar scenario, and he states that "activities were usually contrived rather than natural, and the few skills targeted seemed to bear little relevance to the everyday purposes of literacy" (p.242). This aspect resonates profusely with what these students are experiencing, and this fact is confirmed even by parents and SMT alike that literacy in the CCP class is not equipping these students with the everyday life skills required. The present study yielded quite similar experiences to those in Ruppar (2013) in terms of the kind of literacy activities carried out. In seven of the lessons observed, students were doing comprehension tasks (e.g. Fieldnote 3, 7, 20, 41) and other activities involving vocabulary, mainly targeting the understanding aspect of language rather than the expressive abilities and communication. This imbalance in literacy activities is not reflective of approaches discussed in the literature, such as Browder et al. (2009), which emphasise that students with intellectual disability should have a balanced literacy curriculum which includes writing and speaking. Ruppar (2015) further asserts that "literacy programs that heavily

emphasize a few discrete skills are unlikely to result in students' integration of literacy concepts and skills for everyday purposes." (p.242). Klingner et al. (2010) point out that when comprehension tasks are carried out, it was observed that literal questioning is used frequently, which often geared towards a low level of questioning. Furthermore, high-level questioning was forced to be limited to giving choices, thus limiting the students' ability to express themselves. This was a common scenario with the students in the present study as questions provided in the comprehension tasks were geared at the low level of questioning and involved recall questions. This happens clearly in Field Note 3 during a comprehension task with Ian:

*"Teacher is trying to use higher-order thinking skills with Ian, and the question was 'What do you think will happen if he invites you?' Ian is unable to answer it, so teacher gives him two options to choose from, and he answers."*

Kubiak (2017) states that when listening to the voices of the students, affords educators to give particular consideration to what really matters to these students and the way they learn best. According to Flutter (2007), it has further power to "unlock the shackles of habit that so often bind teachers to their familiar routines of practice and thought" (p.352). Students in this research have identified their preferences and what supports literacy learning. Multisensory teaching techniques are identified by the students, including you-tube videos, songs, word searches and role-playing as it supports more understanding of vocabulary. They further mention hands-on activities, reading aloud and the use of games during lessons. These tools are all reflective of the common visual and kinaesthetic learning style of students with intellectual disability. The study by Shogren et al. (2015) also agrees with the students' preference as they also reported hands-on as the kind of activities they enjoy. The combination of the auditory input also provides a confirmation that, in line with Erickson, learning requires the use of methods that involve all the senses (Van Scoter et al., 2001). The students' responses in this study further confirm the literature on the area which discusses that multisensory learning is a highly effective learner engagement strategy. According to Smith et al. (2018), it was concluded that through MRI technology, it was confirmed that multisensory approaches create the largest brain activity and create the strongest literacy skills suggesting that literacy, especially reading and writing, is a whole brain skill and this should feature in literacy instruction with students with intellectual disability. In various observational field notes such

as number 12, 13 and 21, when multisensory activities were carried out during English and Maltese lessons, a higher level of task engagement was observed in the students. In such activities, I could observe that the students are engaged on multiple levels. The use of videos or visuals allowed them to gather information about the activity or topic under discussion. It was also evident that on various occasions, e.g., road safety activity and song related to it, one could observe that students had the opportunity to link knowledge they had on riding bikes in the street to the topic of road safety. A kinaesthetic task carried out, as documented in Field Note 15, allowed the student to learn through a problem-solving activity. In line with the study by Kubiak (2017), the students in this study have identified audio and visual stimuli such as PowerPoints as valuable to their learning. One aspect identified by Shogren et al. (2015) is that students with disability highlighted the use of technology such as tablets and laptops to access learning, and they mentioned this, especially in relation to writing tools. Even though students with intellectual disability did not mention these in the interviews, the parents emphasised that their children can do work at home on computers and that it helps them in all literacy activities. The void of technology not being mentioned by students could also be attributed to the lack of specific questions related to this subject.

An important element in the study by Kubiak (2017) is that students have valued the aspect of dialogue and discussion as in the present research, and this is clearly echoed by Adam's and Nora's expression that they want to talk more in lessons. In accordance with Matther & Goldstein (2005), teachers can develop expressive skills for students with intellectual disability by generating interactive open discussions in the class and inquisitive questioning techniques. Ikwen (2013) further discuss that when students talk freely about aspects happening around them and what is going on in their everyday life, it contributes vastly to the development of expressive skills and supports the process of forming thoughts. This was evidenced in class (Field Note 19), whereby the English teacher generated a conversation with students on the activities they did during the Easter activities. The engagement throughout this discussion was positively noted together with the students' willingness to share their experiences.

Furthermore, in resonance with Kubiak (2017), students in the present research have "valued opportunities for learning and peer collaboration in a safe and supportive learning climate" (p.46). Nora, in her interview, mentions that she gets support from her peers in class. This aspect was not particularly mentioned in other student interviews; however, on the few

occasions it was evidenced in the classroom observations, the engagement of the students was extremely high. It featured on numerous occasions in Nora's and Adam's class with the Maltese teacher. In these lessons [field notes 15 and 16], working collaboratively with peers was done to solve a problem task in Maltese spelling. It is observed that classroom discussion moves from peer to peer, and the teacher allows them to respond to peer thinking instead of between teacher and student only. It was also observed that the level of focus on the activity when working collaboratively has also been quite high. In secondary schooling, friendships and peer interaction are essential, evidenced in Shogren et al. (2015) whereby students with intellectual disability reported the importance of friendships in the secondary school. The participants of this study also had autism together with intellectual disability, and the difficulty in building up interactions could be a contributing factor in the Secondary, and as opposed to what was observed, more opportunities should be provided to such students to collaborate further in class. Shogren et al. (2015) also reports on this and indicates that students with intellectual disability have identified the importance of having school educators support further social interactions in the class. In class 10, where four out of five students had autism, peer interaction was observed to be very limited even because each student had individualised support of an LSE with him. In observational field note 30, during an English lesson, the teacher was instructing the proper use of questioning and answering wh- questions, and she guided students to initially start with having adults as conversation partners and eventually move on to peer-to-peer conversations. This activity provided a structured context whereby students could practice conversational skills with their peers.

Furthermore, positive aspects observed include a healthy competitive atmosphere fostered in the classroom where students can learn how to deal with defeat and success. This links with the assertions of Abdolghaderi et al. (2021), who explains how peer groups can provide the right ambience for encouragement and safe exploration. In fact, this aspect of encouragement was evident in this class [Field Note 18], whereby students were encouraged to seek support from each other rather than from the teacher himself. They further add that when students in a group are provided with positive feedback together with opportunities for peer interactions which encourages praise will greatly improve skills in students with intellectual disability (Abdolghaderi et al.,2021). In Field Note 18 it is further noted that success is celebrated and a growth mindset is applied by the teacher as he was more interested in the

process rather than getting the answer right. This notion is also in accordance with research by Kubiak (2017), which indicate that students with intellectual disability value activities where instead of memorising and recalling facts, a thinking process is conceived. In relation to field note 18, a greater engagement in the task was observed even though the activity at hand was described as being challenging to the students because it was Maltese and spelling, which were not Nora's and Adam's favourite subject and strand of learning. In relation to this, Shogren et al. (2017) also report that in their study, students with disability reported that they appreciate and engage more when teachers provide a challenge for them and make their brain stretch a little more and look forward to rising to challenges provided. One important observation in this Maltese lesson, resonating with findings in Shogren et al. (2017), involves the teacher using buzzers and a game format to the lesson to target a language and a context in which students are struggling but yet the engagement was positive because they were engaging in preferred activities for learning.

Students in the study by Kubiak (2017) particularly value the aspect of a safe learning atmosphere and this was evidenced when Nora lost the game together with her partner and educators in class supported her to express emotions in order to process the feelings. She further indicates that she feels safe and in a supported class as she even suggests to the teacher to change the rule of the game and time how much they take rather than setting a timer. Another student in this class also feels comfortable voicing his opinion of Donald Trump being a racist as a politician. In some classes, where students are given ample opportunity to make their voices heard as much as the teacher, it is possible to have what Kubiak (2017) describes as "a potential to build more reciprocal relationships in the classroom...one that equally values both students' voices and teachers' voices" (p.46).

Students in the present study also expressed their views on the support that they receive during literacy lessons. These students indicated that their main source of support in class comes from the LSE, and they refer to her as the teacher. There was no evidence of co-teaching arrangements in the literacy lessons, and the teacher was always mainly giving the lesson and the respective LSE supporting the student. However, one aspect that was observed in the Grade 10 class was that the LSEs were, at times, moving around and supporting other students when required. The cohort of LSEs in this grade knew or had the experience of working with all the students in the class. A beneficial aspect to this was identified in the LSE interviews as

support during exam can be varied, but they will still know every student and thus be able to support them further.

The present study highlighted a strength in literacy instruction which was identified as flawed in research carried out by Ruppap (2015). This involves the topics of literacy targeted in the literacy activities. Ruppap (2015) discuss that topics identified by educators fail to target the interests and personal experiences of students with intellectual disability. The opposite was observed in the CCP classes. On numerous occasions, the engagement level of the students was high due to the topics chosen. In the interviews, students expressed their favourite topics in the lessons, including sports, bicycles, cultural aspects such as Carnival, Famous people, cooking etc. It was further observed that literacy tasks identified often involved topics which were appropriate and interesting for their age. Teachers were also particularly enthused to extend their lessons' intentions and modify activities when they observed that a particular topic interested them greatly. This can be clearly observed in Field Note 34 as the teacher modified the activity and used the topic of hobbies and cooking when Shane and Andrew were more verbal and participated more willingly in the discussion. The same was observed in Field note 21 when famous people were mentioned in relation to Madam Tussaud, and Nora and Adam indicated high engagement as these famous people were singers and footballers that they follow in their everyday life. Copeland et al. (2021) discuss that when teaching literacy to individuals with intellectual disability their motivation has to be prioritised as this will engage them more whilst enhancing learning of literacy skills. They discuss that students might also have intrinsic motivators for learning to read, which can include social reasons, e.g., to socialise with friends and peers as well as for entertainment purposes. An example of this is when Ian mentions that he likes reading to access computer games. An important realisation identified by Copeland et al. (2021), which is relevant to the students in this study, is that literacy tasks are not merely there to be completed but students utilise these skills and knowledge gained to involve themselves in aspects they enjoy and to actively participate in their community. Thus, allowing a certain degree of choice-making will allow these students to voice out their inclinations and ambitions, and the educators should create the foundations for these skills through lessons designed with the students themselves. This learner-driven approach versus teacher-driven approach will be further dealt with later on in the chapter

Finally, it was evident that students with mild and moderate intellectual disability were able to clearly express what works for them, and the mentioned methods are all recognised as part of the universal design for learning and best practices to ensure that these can be provided with the best teaching in their learning environment. In the upcoming sub-theme, the discussion will revolve around the technicalities and processes of eliciting the voices of these students as this was a core aspect in this research and shed light on how more studies can be replicated with such students to obtain their views on a multitude of aspects related to their life.

### 5.2.2 Processes in eliciting the voices of students with intellectual disability

The perception of individuals with intellectual disability continues to evolve, leading to an ever-increasing impetus to explore the best ways in which the experiences of these individuals are sought. The global effort to gain insights into their experiences has often led to solely getting these from reliable others such as parents and educators. Bennett et al. (2017) capture this feeling when they discuss that “Perhaps it is our need to interpret or to fill in what we see as blanks, to lay our schema atop what we perceive as awkward silences or lack of functional vocabulary that leads us to doubt that the student voices alone are enough” (p.62). One aspect I appreciate more through this present research is that even though the student voices may appear as a different form of communicative attempt but the essence ought to be respected and sought even more than before. It is for this reason that listening to the voices of the students regarding their literacy experiences deserves a discussion on the processes related to the elicitation of the perceptions, the consent process and the role of the researcher in all of this. What has been convincing is that an art of listening is required with these students. According to Bennett et al. (2017), listening to their voices as they experience school life and learning can provide us with a window to their lived situations, thoughts and wishes as they progress in their secondary schooling. The quest is for students with intellectual disability to have an audience who are willing to listen to verbal conversations, yes or no or simply a nod or vocalisation to express their thoughts even if they are not verbal. This multitude of forms of expressions should act as a basis to support policies such as UNCRC Article 2 (1989) which states that it cannot be assumed that some children are unable to share their views and be involved in decision-making. Bloom et al. (2020) discusses that “it confers the promise that standard methods of communication are not a prerequisite for attaining the views of the child. Instead, it places the onus on the organisation to ensure that they are equipped to provide the



necessary support to meet the needs of individuals in order that they are afforded the same opportunities as typically developing children” (p.309). This approach supports the social model of disability whereby the deficit notion is not located within the student but the educators and researchers to overcome. Whilst the benefits of listening to students' voices is uncontested, the challenges to elicit them are varied. For the sake of the students in this study, this ought to be recognised, accepted and mitigated. An aspect that I have observed during the period of my data collection is that such a barrier could be the lack of opportunity and experiences for students and educators to develop the skills of how to elicit the views of students. This was evidenced through the questioning techniques used, which were always kept at a very basic level, and the expression of these students was not prioritised throughout the teaching and learning. This aspect will be dealt with in further detail as this section progresses. Perceived incapability is also another factor which tends to affect the involvement of students with intellectual disability. It is reported by Bloom et al. (2020) that when educators do not have a clear profile of the students' communicative needs, this can hinder eliciting conversation and views of students.

Data generated from the student interviews indicate that students' communication and cognitive challenges might have hindered responding to questions with authenticity. Griego et al. (2019) discussed that individuals with intellectual disability manifest more suggestibility and moments of false memory due to decreased memory performance and limited attention span. This was observed with the students in the present study when they chose the language, they prefer most learning at school. Both Shane and Simon chose the Maltese language as their preferred; however, both parents and LSEs indicated the opposite. Both interviews happened after the Maltese lesson, so this could have been a contributing factor. In the study by Hollomotz (2017), it is discussed that students with intellectual disability might not be able to concentrate for lengthy periods. To mitigate the memory aspect, the interviews were carried out following a literacy lesson; thus, students were more expressive as the experience was very close to the interview, time-wise. On average, interviews were kept at around 3 minutes of length. With some students, who were more verbal, like Ian and Nora, the conversation was longer as they were more at ease answering questions. Another aspect is the tendency for acquiescence, and according to Morrison et al. (2019), the likelihood is related to lower IQs. This was confirmed in this study when Shane was being interviewed, and he always chose the

last-mentioned option. This happens both in Shane's interview and also with Adam. During Adam's interview, the LSE asked me to stop the recording as she noticed that he was choosing the last answer. I explained that this is a possible occurrence in interviews with students with intellectual disability. However, the questions will be modified in order to confirm his responses. This concept is also referred to by Hollomotz (2017) as 'yeah saying', and this was very evident in Shane's interview as he uses this affirmative response frequently. This could be due to questions being too long or a higher complexity than he can possibly manage i.e. using the word yes to disguise a lack of understanding of an instruction or question. This was further confirmed in Shane's situation as his mother in the interview said that "Sometimes I ask him to join me so we can make a conversation but either he doesn't feel like it, but at times it is as if a lot of talking confuses him and does not process what I am saying" (Shane's parent). In fact, she further states that using simpler language and paraphrasing usually helps her to create a conversation.

The present study also agrees with Rapley & Antaki (1996) that individuals with intellectual disability can also be anti-acquiescence as students with moderate intellectual disability in this study were also able to respond to questions, e.g. when Andrew is questioned about whether there is an activity that he enjoys and given an option of videos or activities, he answers 'games'. This continues to confirm that challenges encountered by students with intellectual disability should not hinder seeking their views.

One important aspect relevant to this study is the discussion of immediate echolalia observed in students with Intellectual disability and Autism. During interviews, some students were echolalic speakers; in some instances, these were used interactively and non-interactively. When asked if he confirms that he likes acting, Adolf repeated the word acting rather than using yes or no. In Simon's interview, echolalia was an outcome of frustration that the student felt during the time that we were conversing. He repeated sentences that he uses to keep himself calm during activities and whilst non-interactive in nature, but they have a self-regulatory function. This aspect of echolalia has repercussions on their literacy experiences because educators and researchers need to be aware of this when eliciting experiences. In addition, this characteristic effect oral examinations in English and Maltese and these students with intellectual disability are impacted, and LSEs mention this during their interviews. Simon's LSE recounts how on his way in for the oral examination if someone guides him to 'say good

morning,' he will readily repeat the same exact phrase instead of just greeting the examiner. Andrew's LSE was also concerned about this as he tends to use echolalia when someone is trying to elicit more expressive abilities and recounts that Andrew might be confused about what is asked of him and he starts recounting Goldilocks as he tends to repeat it and knows it by rote.

Depth of questioning was another factor that affected the elicitation of their experiences. Discussion can include communicating preferences, opinions, etc, and questions had to be changed at times and a simpler question be asked. With students who had mild intellectual disability, their capability to answer questions, e.g. what and which questions, was more straightforward. When given a choice of two or three items, they were able to choose immediately. However, on asking them to explain or give an example, students tended to have a long pause to think, but no answer was provided. This happened with Ian, Nora, Zaya and Adolf. This silence was evident when the questions asked were open-ended. Time was still provided to counteract possible longer processing time which is evident with individuals with intellectual disability (Corby, Taggart & Cousins, 2015). The non-verbals communicated their difficulty in answering these questions, such as looking confused in Nora's case, blank stares as in Zaya's interview, and shouting gestures indicating getting angry at himself for not being able to answer as in Adam's situation. In these instances, being sensitive to the student's behaviours (Antaki, 2013) was key, and formulating questions in a manner that has simple vocabulary and to the point to support understanding. Whilst the students eventually chose from the options, however, the aspect of using a concrete frame of reference was essential. Questions asked included visuals in order to support understanding of it, but the presentation of this might not have been enough. Hollomotz (2017) discuss that in his study, participants "seemed to find it hard to think of words and concepts when unsupported, but the inclusion of pictures facilitated communication" (p.159). This use of pictures to support expressive skills of students was limited in the present research and will be discussed in further detail in the limitations section in the conclusion. In agreement with Hollomotz (2017), the 'why' questions were not posed in student interviews as they proved to be too difficult to answer conceptually.

Unresponsiveness could also be attributed to an unwillingness to participate at that particular time. Silence in this situation should not be attributed to the students' inability to answer. During the experience of carrying out student interviews, the impression I got together with

the LSEs present was that some students needed prompts and rephrasing of questions in order to tell their views. In Simon's interview, the unwillingness to participate further in the interview was expressed pretty strongly when he clearly uttered 'Stop! Go Away' and obviously consent was respected, and the interview was brought to an end. Students who were participants in the study indicated, even through lesson observations, that they were indisputably less articulate, and this situation created the need to use close-ended questions. The less the student was verbal or willing to provide his experience, the more close-ended questioning increased. In the majority of instances, multiple choice questions were provided and sometimes yes/no questions were used to break down the complexity of a question. In some situations, yes/no clarification was used to "avoid a questioning error that could have given rise to recency" (Hollomotz, 2017, p.163). This occurred in the interview with Andrew when his preference of language was questioned and in Adam's interview when the discussion revolved around using pictures to do creative writing tasks.

Finally, Hollomotz (2017) discuss how even though all strategies are employed for eliciting narratives from students with intellectual disability it is possible that some information provided is not understood as information on the context is not provided in detail. In such situations, having a close person to cross-check with is fundamental. During the interviews with students, LSEs were presented and this was done when certain phrases or words uttered by students were not in context. Considering that LSEs are present with them on **one-to-one** basis, they could interpret the meaning. In Simon's interview, when asked about the preferred way of learning, he answered 'big small', but LSE informed me that they do not do them in school and thus the question was paraphrased and repeated again. Through a significant person who knows the child well, it is possible to have more essence and context in the words expressed by the students. This strategy is called triangulation, and the intention of this study involved listening to the students' voices but also through the relevant stakeholders such as parents. This will be dealt with in the next section which will discuss the students' experiences through the parents' sharing of experiences.

### 5.3 Theme 2 – Parental perceptions and experiences on Literacy Learning

In the process of eliciting students' narratives and experiences in literacy learning, involving their parents is a natural process as they usually know them best in terms of how they learn and in the way school experiences impact them in their everyday life. Twomey & Shevlin (2017)

discuss that listening to the voices of the parents is an important component in learning about their perceptions and experiences of the children's needs. Twomey (2020) further reports that "parents who were once adept at ordinary parenting may experience an objectification of their role as a parent of a disabled child which may be cultivated through interventions with professionals and schools, policy and legislation" (p.10). In order to mitigate a feeling of disempowerment, placing narratives of parents are placed at the forefront due to their importance in eliciting their children's experience in educational matters. In the study by Munsell & O'Malley (2019), parents have expressed that many times they are the voice of their children with disability, and this "upholds the premise that children with disabilities often need an additional voice to their own so they are heard and understood" (p.273). The experiences of parents who participated in this study mainly reported positive experiences for their children in literacy learning. However, they also mentioned several instances where they felt that the school was unreceptive to their child's condition. These experiences will be discussed in three subthemes which mainly involve accessibility of information and subject choice, the role of educators in literacy learning and the inclusion experience of these parents.

### 5.3.1 Accessibility of information and subjects

One major aspect mentioned by various parents includes the lack of access to information on what is being taught in literacy. LSEs often inform parents on how their child is doing, but when trying to support them at home, they find great difficulty due to a lack of information about what is being covered in class in terms of topics, books, workbooks or other experiences. In a study carried out by Resch et al. (2010), one major theme identified is the lack of access of information, especially when the children are non-verbal or minimally verbal. This is an overarching area that concerns the parents in my study as their children cannot be supported fully at home due to a lack of material available and knowledge. A study by Paseka & Schwab (2020) discusses that usually, educators and parent partnership is not built on building collaborative relationships between them but aims to give brief information on the child at school. In fact, Ummah et al. (2022), in accordance with the sentiment of parents in the present study, established that parents of students with intellectual disability face limited information regarding educational attainment and "the lack of assistance in providing support for the children for learning at home activities" (p.608-609). This aspect is also identified in Tryfon et al. (2019), whereby parental perspectives were sought on inclusive education for children with

intellectual disability. They refer to this notion as limited cooperative skills that educators might have and schools lacking in nurturing inclusion practices (La Rocuque et al., 2011).

When the parent of Andrew requested that he is given regular homework to continue supporting him at home and this was denied, he felt rejected by the school management and fighting for this access is something that is part of the educational journey of Andrew in the CCP class. On the other hand, Resch et al. (2010) report that when parents receive the information they require, they feel relief and report a positive experience. This was reported by Nora's mother and Zaya's mother and keeping a strong link and very frequent and detailed communication with LSE has helped obtain this information on topics being covered in literacy. In the present study, the notion of lack of communication and coordination between home and school was also mentioned through Simon's interview, where the parent feels that she is not sure what is being done in the literacy lessons and relies on what the LSE reports back to her. This indicates that on various occasions, liaison between school and parents is lacking and this directly affects the experience of students themselves as it mainly affects how much parents can support their children at home to practise literacy skills. In accordance with Wakeman et al. (2020), parents of Zaya and Nora have mentioned the importance of reading and how that skill is encouraged greatly at home. In the study by Wakeman et al. (2020), parents have attributed the importance of reading skills to bettered life outcomes. Walker et al. (2022) also has the same conclusions from their study and further emphasised that "engaging their children in home literacy activities was not a straightforward task and felt that working together with teachers, through sharing techniques and insights and a greater breadth of topics and contexts, could help to overcome some of the challenges" (p.11). The interviews with the parents also yielded information on how parents prefer to have books that their children use at school, and it was mentioned that these are usually left in the locker at school, and this is in agreement with Walker et al. (2022) which also found out that when supporting students with disability, parents are convinced that providing consistency across school and home will support the generalisation of learning from one setting to the other, especially in intellectual disability and autism. When parent-school partnerships are strong, teachers can learn about the children's learning style and abilities from the parents, and the parents support their children in making sense of literacy learning (Lilley, 2019).

Together with this, parents in this study have attributed ICT skills and the use of technology as fundamental and related to literacy skills. This was echoed strongly by Simon's, Ian's, and Andrew's parents because they can engage more with literacy through ICT. All parents have highlighted the importance of the use of functional skills as an approach to literacy. Parents attributed these skills to activities and events outside of the school and learning skills in the community. Simon's parent mentioned particularly hands-on activities which seem to be the best way Shane can learn as well. Andrew's parent also emphasised that when Andrew experience things, he can learn. However, a common echo was that although topics chosen by educators are relevant to their children, they do not support independent living skills or supported employment. This notion of learning functional literacy is in line with research from Wakeman et al. (2021), which also reports that parents have prioritised this over other things.

Teaching and learning during the pandemic were also aspects discussed in the parent interviews. A study carried out by Amorim et al. (2022) found that parents reported that the challenges of remote learning were not effective and felt very frustrated at their inability to support their children. In the present study, parents overall reported a positive experience that they look back on with many advantages. Shane's mother reports that she enjoyed lessons herself and was able to gauge how Shane learns best during literacy tasks. Various parents reported that it was good that they were online as they could have access to what was being covered in terms of topics and material. Furthermore, they could observe the impact of tools such as PowerPoint and how using media can support the learning of their children.

Throughout the interviews with parents, it was evident that parents indicated enthusiasm and motivation to support their children in literacy experiences and furthermore, voiced their great wish to partner more with schools and teachers in order for them to support their children in literacy and language development. Educators have been identified as an important loop in the chain for literacy learning, and this will be discussed in the next sub-theme.

### 5.3.2 Role of educators in literacy learning

Parents have particularly identified the impact that words and actions from educators have on them, especially when these are negative and lack understanding of the child's strengths and needs. Ian's mother discussed that a Maltese teacher did not know what condition Ian has and gave a lot of negative comments on his weaknesses during a parent's day. Andrew's parent

feels that some aspects of behaviour control when Andrew is at school is completely beyond his control, and understanding that it is part of the condition can ease this situation. This makes him doubtful of the fact that educators and SMT may not be trained enough to understand his child and other children with intellectual disability or Autism. This sentiment is echoed by parents in the study by Munsell & O'Malley (2019), whereby it was felt that educators do not really understand how to work with a child with disability. Comparatively, in a study by Koch (2020), teachers have reported that their words and actions are very powerful when communicating with parents of children with disability. It is also reported that particular care must be taken in the way parents are addressed and information shared. The tone used and attitude are important as well. Another important revelation in the study by Koch (2020) is the need for teachers to be knowledgeable and educate themselves on the conditions of students they are teaching. Furthermore, this study identifies the importance of getting to know the individual child rather than the condition only and learn about the uniqueness and how the condition is impacting that particular student in the class. In my study, Ian's parent mentioned the importance of teachers reading the reports of her child. Parallel to this, and equally important, Koch (2020) mentioned that "teachers must also read their students' IEPs, something that parents recalled that not all of their children's teachers did" (p.17). Related to this concept, the concept of sensitivity is further discussed by Munsell & O'Malley (2019) who reports that parents of children with invisible disabilities (such as Autism) tend to experience more negative happenings when there are certain behaviours and would just assume that they are not interested or being spoilt. All of these factors contribute to the overall experience of secondary schooling and whether this is deemed as inclusive or not.

### 5.3.3 The inclusion experience

With regards to the inclusion experience within the school, parents have reported an overall positive feeling of inclusivity within the school, especially in relation to the support received from the Senior Management Team. Adolf's parent challenged the concept of inclusion when she discusses that even though inclusion is being mentioned, there is still a long way to go and that having their children in CCP is actually segregation. Other parents, such as Zaya's and Ian's parents, eventually felt that the CCP class was the best option for their children even though they are excluded from the rest of their mainstream peers. Ian's parent even recounted the hard time Ian had when he had to leave all of his peers and join the CCP class and had to be



excluded from the Media subject that he was so keen on due to literacy skills which were not yet up to standard. Adolf's parents further discuss that for inclusion's sake; she would prefer to have students in CCP choosing option subjects such as biology, home economics etc, as these children might be more inclined to learn literacy when done through a subject they like. This was in agreement with Ian's mother, who also discussed this concept in relation to ICT and Media, which are the strengths in Ian.

With regards to the literacy experiences and IEP, the questions asked involved eliciting any positive or negative occurrences whilst their children were in CCP. Five parents out of seven reported very positive aspects related to the IEP process. It would be remiss from my end not to report these as these include support from educators and HOD Inclusion during meetings, goals discussed and implemented, and prioritising language development and literacy skills. Zoya's mother even discussed how she discussed her priorities for literacy and language development during the IEP, and the school supports her in implementing and teaching these goals. The overall experiences of parents in the present study, especially Zoya's mum's confession, contrasts with parents in Munsell & O'Malley (2019) who report that "there is more autonomy on the part of the school and less inclusion of parents in the decision-making processes" (p.277). Two experiences of Simon's mother and Adolf's mother, dampened this overall positive experience due to two aspects that affected them considerably. Simon's parent reported that she feels that IEP is rushed lately, and she does not find enough time to discuss language and literacy skills which are fundamental for Simon. Adolf's parent reported that there is an aspect of the IEP meeting that she dreads every year. She feels that whoever is present in the IEP does not understand Adolf's condition and challenges in achieving independence in certain skills. She confesses that "When the IEP finishes, I start crying". She reportedly feels under pressure to teach Adolf independent skills whilst she is trying her best, but they are skills that take time, and the intellectual disability and Autism impact it.

Another interesting notion that transpired from the interviews is that parents in this study have reported high expectations and believe in their children more than educators do. This was evident in the confidence of their children in sitting for examinations. This finding resonates with the study by Al Otaiba et al. (2009), which reveals that parents' expectations for literacy development and their belief in their abilities are higher than outsiders such as educators. This confirms the notion of 'local understanding', indicating that parents have the deepest

knowledge, which is interactive and often disregarded by other people around them (Kliewer & Biklen, 2001).

Finally, as discussed by Ummah et al. (2021), the perspectives of stakeholders educating students with intellectual disability truly affect students' experiences and to what extent they are accepted within a school. This is often a reflection of societal perspectives towards this group of people.

#### 5.4 Theme 3 – Ableism and disabling practices

“Students with intellectual disabilities are not different from their peers, we just make them so” (Bennett et al., 2017, p.74)

This theme is one of the latent themes identified from the analysis of the dataset. Questions on ableism were not asked. However, dynamics of power and privilege leaked from every corner whenever data was being collected, both from the interviews carried out with parents, educators and SMT as well as through observations of literacy lessons in the classroom. There were a number of occasions where the stakeholders who have the power to make rules in school or dictate practices don't see how these do not work for students with intellectual disability. Ableism is discrimination against these students with intellectual disability. These take the form of situated beliefs, preconceived ideas, and internalised assumptions that students with intellectual disability are incapable of learning or voicing their thoughts. Besides the ones mentioned, ableism can take the form of negative attitudes and practices, stereotypes as well as stigmas. When a school does not address ableism directly gives way to the perpetuation of it across various levels. This phenomenon is of extreme relevance to the students in this study as ableism affects the well-being of the students, which ultimately causes barriers to accessing learning whilst interfering with the academic journey. A detailed look at ableism and situated beliefs in literacy learning will be discussed first, and this will be followed by a discussion on barriers which are hindering literacy learning in CCP classrooms.

##### 5.4.1 Ableism and situated beliefs in learning

As described by Goodley (2014), ableism influences all aspects of our life, and it is the world view that individuals all have skills which are at a norm level. One of these examples is evident

in literacy and the ability to read and write. Gappmayer (2021) discusses that “people tend to categorize persons who do not have the skills ...in the category dis/ability” (p.105) Another term used widely and sometimes interchangeably is Disablism which is “a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being” (Thomas, 2007, p. 73). Disablism involves the practices that result in an unequal and different treatment due to their disability which can be presumed or actual (Campbell, 2009) and such practices are oppressive and leads to exclusion of these individuals on an everyday basis (Gaskin, 2015).

Students with intellectual disability are often exposed to inequity, and self-stigma is often internalised by these individuals and result in frustration and powerlessness (Zeilinger et al., 2020). Using the social model of disability ensures that equality for individuals with Intellectual disability is achieved. Various examples of ableism will be tackled next to identify how these can have a direct impact on the students who participated in this study. The first one involves the students who are grouped according to ability in this secondary school. Students in the CCP are practically identified as the lowest band, and even though they attend a mainstream school but they are segregated during their literacy learning and leisure time. This is confirmed by the Head of School when she explains that :

*“We reserve the CCP for those students who, at the end of Year 8, clearly show that their basic skills in literacy are not acquired. This is confirmed by the teachers' feedback and the exam marks. The CCP class is ideal for students who are struggling. Usually, they would be struggling across the board. Their literacy level might be of Year 4 primary level. Sometimes we have students who is more basic than this, and the CCP is not even appropriate for them. Some students are below the CCP level. These students struggle more, and even teachers struggle with them. In the same class, a teacher would have students who are at the level of CCP and students who are below this level. In this case, literacy learning is very poor, especially for those students with autism who have verbal challenges.”* (HOS).

Institutional ableism is evident when students after Year 8 are isolated from their peers, and these are placed together in the CCP class, without any choice on the matter. Furthermore, it explains that when students are below the level of the CCP, literacy learning is very poor even though literacy is determined as a curricular priority for students with intellectual disability

especially if they are severe (Agran, 2011). In another part of the interview with the Head of School and also the HOD Inclusion, they both confirmed that students in Year 10 all have a level that is below the CCP level, and with this reasoning, literacy learning is of poor quality in this class. When students with intellectual disability are taught comprehensive literacy instruction, this should support their development in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Thus, the argument should not be whether the Year 10 students are below the CCP level but if the teaching and learning going in the class is being carried out according to various guidelines established as best practices. Furthermore, segregating these students from other classes moves in the opposing direction of what research reveals. Ruppert (2017) determines that students in special education classes had a smaller growth in expressive skills and literacy skills when compared to mainstream general classes. Thus students, when segregated in this manner, are being oppressed and denied the opportunity to have their literacy improved through research-based inclusive techniques such as shared story reading and time delay (Ruppert et al., 2017). Nieminen (2022) states that disablism is often manifested through disabled students being segregated. Furthermore, the Head of School uses language which indicates ableism even in the terms used when she describes, *“There are also students who have behavioural challenges. These would have academic difficulties not because they are not intellectually capable, but sometimes problems such as ADHD hinders their focus and study skills.”*. The implied meaning in this phrase is that a literacy programme is appropriate for students with ADHD, and their characteristics of lack of focus and study skills allow them to participate in literacy programmes, but those who are incapable intellectually are different. Ableism is perpetuated in this context as it is assumed by the school management that one disability might not require accommodation and the one necessitates them or that one disability can be handled more than the other, or that competencies are established with the condition. In reality, this indicates a lack of knowledge of the various conditions as they all necessitate accommodations, but these can vary across disabilities.

When school management was queried about the possible presence of students with severe intellectual disability in the CCP class, they mentioned that in that situation, “the teacher is aware that he has students below CCP and most of the times these students have a full-time LSE, and they need to adapt the CCP curriculum” (HOS). This expression indicates a disabling practice as it is evident that the more the severity of the intellectual disability, the less the

teacher is involved, and responsibility is shifted to the LSE to teach the student and adapt the curriculum. Thus, students with intellectual disability might not be given equitable literacy learning experiences because of the degree of severity. This is due to the fact that LSEs in Malta do not have a pedagogy training course like teachers, and some of them have very basic training in supporting students with disabilities.

It is also evident that the CCP is disabling certain students and is not serving who it is teaching, what it is teaching and how it is teaching it. The literacy curriculum being taught is validated only for a degree of diverse students. It seems that those who are in the margins of the margins are being left unserved by this curriculum. The content of what is being taught is unreachable for the moderate to severe students as the learning strategies to be developed are more basic than those targeted, and how these are taught often excludes students with more complex needs. As a solution or possible compensation for this complexity, the school feels that transferring the child to a special school, locally known as Resource Centres is the way to solve it. According to Baglieri & Lalvani (2020), the acceptance of segregated schools for individuals who are different than normal is also ableism.

The Head of School particularly states that when students are below the CCP, “the school cannot cater for these needs” (HOS). She recounted an experience of a parent who still insisted on keeping her daughter with severe intellectual disability in the mainstream school and said, “they could have stayed in our school...in Year 9 they did not remain at school and one of the parents decided to start at Helen Keller school....for example, they used to insist that we should support her walking however we didn’t have the personnel to do it.” (HOS). In the same situation, the HOD Inc recounts that *“Sometimes, there are students that when I see them in class, I think that they are suffering because they cannot move, and do long hours seated. In that case, I feel resource centres are more appropriate for them. Obviously, it is difficult as Head of Inclusion I can’t exclude these students; however, for their well-being, it would be better. At the end of the day, they are still being educated in the Resource Centre, and they are still following a curriculum. They might need physiotherapy every day, and the LSE is not certified to do it, so if repositioning is required Resource Centres are better.” [HOD Inc]*

According to Dolmage (2017), ableism is also manifested in assumptions about the well-being of students and perceptions of individuals who do not meet the society's standards. This last

quotation of the HOD Inc is laden with presumptions, and assumptions as stakeholders in management assume that the student was suffering and that it is best for her to move on to a Resource Centre. This was done instead of accommodating the student with environmental adjustments or having an extra aide for gross motor practice. From the descriptions given by school management, students are never consulted on the decision-making on which school to learn in, integrating students with severe intellectual disability in mainstream education is not prioritised and employing concepts of universal design is absent from these situations. Unfortunately, this example confirms that “ableism thrives on the beliefs of the inherent superiority of some and the inferiority of others on the basis of group traits.” (Baglieri & Lalvani, 2020, p. 2).

One form of ableism is education discrimination whereby schools or educators within a school do not provide accommodations to students with intellectual disability, e.g., not making adaptations and failing to understand a disability. Unfortunately, the lack of adaptations was confirmed to be a major issue in these secondary classes. Through observations and confirmed through interviews, it was evident that adaptations and accommodations were not used, and a size fit all was used for the whole class. For instance, if a comprehension task is done, all the students and LSE will do it the same, and no one will have a differentiated worksheet. The HOD Inclusion elaborates on this and says that “it is very dragging for LSEs to make adaptations. I am not saying that it is easy to do because to do it, you need to have the teachers’ material before, and this has to be sent from all teachers involved. In reality, I rarely see adaptations in classes.” Furthermore, in the conversation, she further states that there are teachers in the CCP class who give their all but others who do not care less. The fact that teachers don’t differentiate to make them inclusive of all the abilities in the class is another form of ableism. At the end of the interview, the HOD Inclusion further discuss that even though the LSE, as per the job description are, required to make adaptations but these are still not done. No hands-on experiences are being given to the students and this is mainly because adaptations take time, as does differentiated teaching. Thus, the mainstream does not serve these students who have an intellectual disability. As is evident, the real problem is that teaching methods are not inclusive of these students' learning styles and intelligences. It is very unfortunate to witness that this secondary school is hindering the students that, ironically, is required to help achieve

and learn more skills. The social model of disability applied in this research relates to these observations and reflects how these practices are actually disabling people (Nieminen, 2022)

In another aspect of the SMT interviews and discussion with LSEs, it transpired that the school management has decided that all students in CCP have to sit for annual exams in a compulsory manner. This kind of achievement is more crucial as a practice rather than celebrating each student's strengths. For instance, the strengths that Ian, Andrew and Simon have in video editing through the use of computers are not recognised by the school but achievement depends on a summative assessment which is a disabling practice in itself. This is still practised profusely in the school even though “disabled students have largely reported that exams create barriers for their learning and inclusion” (Nieminen, 2022, p. 4). On the same note, school rules such as the compulsory sitting for examinations were not adjusted to accommodate the individual needs of the students in Grade 10 even though these were described as being students who are below the level of the CCP. As described by the HOS, if adjustments are made, the mark will not be able to be compared with the rest of the students, even those who are not disabled. Instead, the HOD Inc states that *“I always believed that in this way we stretched the students to their maximum not to end up a Laisse affaire issue. Definitely we didn’t make adaptations to the 100%, but we try to push students to their limits. We are trying to get the best out of students.”* This confession is a further example of ableism whereby the student is considered as resilient and able to cope as a justification to the lack of provision of additional support or accommodations used for testing purposes. Unfortunately, ableism continues to perpetuate when parents in this study report that their children are not allowed to use a laptop instead of handwriting, and this is done in light of the fact that such resources are not available when these students have personal laptops and all LSEs in Malta are equipped with a laptop each. When alternative systems of recording information are denied, the disabling effect is huge, as parents of Andrew, Ian, Simon and Shane greatly highlighted. Whilst interviewing Simon’s mother, she expressed that lately, it was decided to remove the communication book in order for Simon to use more verbal expression and fade this support. She also discusses how in previous school years, Simon used to type when he wanted to go to the bathroom, and once all of these are removed, access to basic things is hindered. In the blog, *We need to talk about Ableism in education.* (2022, April 7) it is discussed that ableism is also evidenced in negative perceptions of the use of AAC resources, especially when these students need to request basic needs verbally

#### 5.4.2 Barriers to Literacy Learning

Whilst inclusion is mainly concerned with the removal of barriers to learning, unfortunately, students with intellectual disability still tend to face various barriers in their literacy learning experience and overall inclusion (Ahmad, 2018). Provisions mentioned in policies and legislation sometimes feel that they are preached but not practised, and as the data generated in the interviews show, the effort implemented and accountability to ensure that these are happening are lacking. Barriers are created due to this lack of effort, knowledge and accountability, and this places the students with intellectual disability in a position where they have to overcome these on a daily basis in the classroom. The barriers discussed in this section will include those barriers related to the skills of educators and attitudinal barriers. Lack of communication between school and parents has already been discussed in depth, representing communication barriers.

*“I had teachers during the IEP discussing that they are willing to support the students who have intellectual disabilities but these could be counted on one hand. Most of them say that they belong to the LSE and even refuse to attend the IEP” (HOD Inclusion)*

This quote relates to the teachers’ unwillingness to support students with intellectual disability in the secondary school where the present study was carried out. When combined with the Head of School’s assertion that she often gets teachers clearly communicating that they want to teach the high achievers and not the students with intellectual disability, it gives rise to several questions about the reason behind all this. In a study by Cameron & Cook (2013), whilst analysing the teachers’ goals and expectations of students with mild and severe disability it was concluded that “given the assumption among many participants that students with severe disabilities were not the responsibility of general education, it is not surprising that teachers also professed a lack of knowledge with respect to these students” (p. 26). Together with this, a lack of confidence in teaching these students was mentioned by the SMT coupled with the degree of differentiation the teaching involves. The lack of skills to teach such students, is vastly reported in the literature. Hauerwas & Mahon (2018) discuss that in their study, all participants mentioned that no coursework at a university level prepared them for the education of



students with intellectual disability. These teachers further discussed that whilst they were taught that they had to differentiate, no one ever taught them how. These teachers also mention the importance of knowledge in specified teaching techniques, tools and approaches used in order to support these students whilst have certain character traits such as patience, braveness and creativity were also mentioned (Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018). This aspect could also be related to self-efficacy beliefs. The Head of School discussed this aspect in the spirit of social justice, to have all teachers practice teaching students with intellectual disability. Whilst the technique used of having a rotation system might be a technique to achieve fairness, however, with practice comes self-efficacy beliefs. Subban et al. (2021) discusses that as educators gain experience, their belief to able to differentiate teaching for students with disabilities increases. It is also worth noting that in the local context, only general teachers are available to teach in mainstream and resource centres. Copeland et al. (2021) also argue that when educators have a narrow view of literacy, this can further create a barrier to their learning, especially when integration with communication systems is not utilised in literacy learning.

Attitudinal barriers are aspects observed in the school context during literacy learning of students with intellectual disability. This happens when educators are unable to understand how disability affects the lives of the students. This can lead to assuming falsely and presuming incompetence as well as what they want. This affects the lower quality literacy instruction that students can receive and might affect them in pursuing careers. Equipping educators with knowledge of disabilities is essential and the parents in this study have highlighted the importance of teachers reading their children's reports and getting to know them and understanding them. This will promote full participation in the school life. One important aspect of ensuring participation in school life and curriculum, students with an intellectual disability need to be taught in an environment which follows the concept of Universal Design for Learning. This theme emerged strongly in the data set and will be discussed in detail hereunder, shedding light on literacy learning and literacy assessment through the aspects of the presentation of material, response methods and engagement levels.

#### 5.5 Theme 4: Universal Design for Learning and Assessment

The fourth theme is encompassed under the term Universal Design for Learning and Assessment because the analysis of the data set exposed important aspects which all related

to the principles of UDL. The framework of UDL is generally applied with the intention of improving access to general education and fostering participation whilst supporting learning needs. My study was based in mainstream school, but the CCP classes are special education based. The classrooms following the CCP still have students who have different abilities and needs and have varied preferences. Differentiation teaching and learning is still applicable in these classrooms as students might have ADHD, Autism, Intellectual disability, as well as behavioural challenges. All of these conditions might give rise to literacy challenges, and the CCP might be the programme that these students are learning literacy. As discussed by Coyne et al. (2012), “a potentially promising approach to enabling more students with significant intellectual disabilities to gain access to research-based, balanced literacy approaches is through the integration of UDL and technology to create more supportive and accessible learning environments” (p.163). Furthermore, UDL has the intention to reduce potential barriers that students encounter whilst learning literacy. Rapp (2014) describes UDL as a strategy to eliminate barriers in instruction as well as assessments. Rao & Meo (2016) explains how the framework of UDL can scaffold and provides (a) Representation – multiple ways to access knowledge, (b) Action and Expression – multiple ways to navigate the learning environment and express what they know and (c) Engagement – way of becoming and remaining engaged in the learning. Each of these will consequently be dealt with in terms of learning and assessment.

#### 5.5.1 Representation in Learning and Assessment of Literacy

According to CAST (2022) representation encompasses aspects such as displaying of information which can offer malleability to increase clarity, and it encourages the use of digital material as the characteristics of these can be adjusted much better than print material. Depending on the learner’s needs, information can be displayed differently in terms of size of text, visuals used, font, and colour for information or emphasis.

During the observation period in the classroom, I observed a mixture of approaches being used with students. In some occasions, teachers approached the planning and execution of a lesson using the UDL principles i.e.; they were “proactive in addressing the varied needs and abilities of all children in a class” (Haley-Mize & Reeves, 2013). In other situations, the lesson was planned in a way that created a challenge for these students with intellectual disability, so

accommodations and modifications were required. According to Lieber et al. (2008), using adaptations and making modifications is time-consuming for the educator and LSE and will benefit the individual student, whilst when the teacher uses UDL, it can potentially reach a larger number of students. Furthermore, it plans for the success of the student rather than the failure (Stanford & Reeves, 2009)

One example of the use of UDL and representation used appropriately is in Field Note 24 when the Maltese teacher in Grade 10 introduced a poem on the interactive whiteboard, and role-playing acting was carried out. The poem was read, provided on the whiteboard visually, and used kinaesthetic means to learn the concepts in the poem. The engagement of the students was very high in this activity as they were involved physically and could move around and do the actions named in the poem. Besides this, the students were provided with a worksheet containing eight questions that had to be answered related to the poem. As noted in the field note, the question sheet had enlarged print and considerable space for written answers. Through this example, the Maltese teacher provided options for perception and comprehension as creative expression were included to support understanding of concepts in the poem. Furthermore, groups of students were used to act these together, and heterogenous groups were identified. The text was revisited and read a number of times, and the teacher also guided LSEs to read the questions a number of times in order to support understanding. Students at one point encountered two words (paragraph and line in Maltese), and they didn't know the meaning of it, and the teacher explained these visually by marking the respective structure on the whiteboard. Thus, visuals were used to illustrate these poetic structures. UDL was also evident in a reading book covered with Year 11. Every student in the class had a copy of the book, and they had turns reading it. The teacher explained the landmarks mentioned in London by showing them pictures and supplying them with background knowledge, as students were unaware of what these were. CAST (2022) suggests that comprehension is enhanced when information is presented in a way that activates knowledge or supplies background knowledge on the topic. Using photos and showing videos of landmarks supported understanding of this storybook as students could be related to something they had already viewed.

Guiding information processing is another aspect of representation supported by the principles of UDL, and a way to achieve this is through scaffolds and providing organisational methods

and approaches to process concepts (CAST, 2018). Field Notes 28 and 29 show how a lesson in Grade 10 was carried out targeting who, when and where, and it was done through the use of pictures and a table for sorting these. Through this organisational tool, students had to place various concepts according to person, place or time. One strategy observed during this activity is the scaffolding done by educators to support the students in understanding the task. As discussed earlier, students in Years 9, 10 and 11 mainly followed activities done by the teachers and adaptation of work was not evident. However, as observed on multiple occasions, LSEs scaffolded very often throughout the literacy activities. According to Coyne et al. (2012), “scaffolding is a balance between obtaining and maintaining a child’s engagement, simplifying the task when needed, providing confidence for risk-taking, marking relevant information and demonstrating potential solutions” (p.164). This is mainly observed and done by LSEs as they are the persons who know the student’s learning needs and strengths and know the degree to which they can challenge students. Scaffolding was used mainly when the student was unable to answer the initial question asked by an adult. Some examples were in Field Note 29 when Andrew needed support sorting the picture of the school, and the LSE had to use a sentence starter, e.g., school is a p..... and providing a verbal cue. In Field Note 45, Adolf was shown a park scene with families doing various activities, and he could not understand and reply to questions such as ‘What is happening?’ and LSE applied downward scaffolding and changed questions, e.g. Are there animals? What is the girl doing? And he was able to reply to these and keep a conversation going as well. As per discussed in Zucker et al. (2020), when the student does not provide an answer, a downward scaffold is used in order to match the need. Instances of upward scaffolding were not encountered during the observation period in the classroom. This might indicate that level of students finds higher-order questioning hard or educators did not try to stretch reasoning enough beyond the student’s capacity. Cabell et al. (2013) discuss that for effective teaching, the scaffolding techniques used have to be at the right level that matches the student’s current level of comprehension.

Yet another aspect of representation is highlighting critical features that can make information even more accessible through prompts or explicit cues. This will support the students to attend to aspects that mostly matter over those which matter least (CAST, 2018). For instance, in Field Note 2 the students are going to have turns in reading, and Ian has difficulty following text; thus, LSE marks some sentences with a highlighter in order for him not to be confused

and lose place during reading. In Field Note 41, Shane is supported through text highlighting when working on a grammar task. He was guided to match the same keyword (Saturday) to locate his answer from the text.

In the activities observed, media was used to a certain extent. The use of PowerPoints, videos and songs were all positive examples of this. However, the use of digital literacy is limited in all aspects. For instance, when the use of an e-book was carried out, it was only shown on the whiteboard. Students did not have the facility to use e-books themselves and navigate through them. Various research supports the notion of using digital literacy means as embedded supports, such as interactive vocabulary and reading strategies with a progress monitoring system (Proctor & et al., 2007).

Lieberman (2017) asserts that for educators to embrace UDL, one has to ensure that lessons provide varied possibilities and resources instruction is done to mitigate the learning needs of students whilst designing assessments that aim at facilitating the strengths of the students themselves. The assessments carried out at the end of the year were a source of discussion in class as LSEs and even teachers were sometimes concerned about how information displayed on these exam papers. The SMT explained during their interviews that the examination paper is issued by the Department of Examinations and when this arrives at the school it is handed to the school. A soft copy of the exam paper is not provided, and there is no time to carry out changes in the content or structure of the exam paper. There were numerous aspects to indicate that Universal design is not supported during the examination endeavour.

Adolf's LSE mentions the amount of material which is crowded in the exam paper discourages students as well as the lack of visuals to support comprehension. Shane's LSE is more concerned that the oral examination is not supported with visuals and is not conducive for students who are minimally verbal, such as Shane. She further discusses that the presentation of the exercise creates challenges for the students, especially when this does not incorporate multiple choice, fill in the blanks or working with a word bank. Open-ended activities and exercises tend to be very challenging for the students who participated in this study. Another aspect was that paraphrasing and supporting questioning with downward scaffolds are not permitted in examination, which puts these students at a disadvantage as questioning style in exams is often hard for them. Simon's LSE also suggests that they can do answers with visuals

instead of writing. Simon's LSE also discusses how small font and the font itself can hinder reading and understanding of the texts in the exam paper, and this is something that affects Simon a lot.

It is evident that multiple means of representation are not practised in summative examinations that these students with intellectual disability have to sit for. In order to mitigate these aspects, having exam papers and tasks in multiple formats, e.g., visual and verbal, can help, as well as ensuring accessibility and the use of computers to have text-to-speech facilities (Kennette & Wilson, 2019). Al Hazmi & Ahmad (2018), in their journal on UDL and intellectual disability accentuate that in order to assimilate UDL in schools, the use and integration of information technology is core, and for this to happen, educators should gain knowledge on how to use tools and "adapt the various techniques through which the students with intellectual disability can be taught" (Al Hazmi & Ahmad, p.70). As in the situation of this secondary school, Watson & Tinsley (2013) suggests that the school readily invests resources for IT to be used by teachers and LSEs during the lessons. Finally, this will boost the confidence of the students with intellectual disability and have great access to information and a better standard of living (Al Hazmi & Ahmad, 2018). Another chain in the support provided through UDL is the action and expression, which will be discussed next.

#### 5.5.2 Action and Expression in Learning and Assessment of Literacy

As per CAST (2022) guidelines, action and expression is a significant component as it supports ways students are seen navigating the learning environment whilst expressing their competencies and what they have learnt. Students that have different abilities and impairments need a multitude of actions and expressions to have optimal learning; thus, options need to be provided to them. In this subtheme, the intention is to discuss to what extent UDL was used to support actions and expressions with the students with intellectual disability in the CCP class. Overall, this area created the most barriers for the students, as echoed by students, educators and parents alike.

Students referred to modes of expression in literacy as being the challenging part of literacy. Nora and Adam mention essay writing as the biggest challenge. Writing planning and, for some students, the act of writing itself complicates this process of expressing themselves in a creative writing piece. When student interviews were analysed, organising ideas and cognitive

processing for planning seemed to be the most affected. Thinking of ideas and doing the 'composition' task was deemed the hardest part. Adam also expressed that having pictures to support his planning and thought formation helped considerably. In all observations carried out, there was only one instance when Adolf was doing a creative task, and it was part of a past paper activity. In this task (Field Note 41), he had to write about himself to a friend in the form of an email and needed considerable help to do it. Pennington (2016) discusses that "writing requires the near-simultaneous amalgam of skills that must correspond closely to a given context" (p 50.) In this case, Adolf was required to have the idea of basic writing convention, enough vocabulary to describe, and also know what this friend might have wanted to read in such an email. Pennington (2016) confirms that the alignment of these skills is the hardest for students with moderate to severe intellectual disability. In this situation, pictures and graphical support systems such as mindmaps were not used. LSE guided him with questions in order to formulate sentences verbally first and then supported him in writing them.

One positive teaching practice observed involved a lesson in English in which students had difficulty understanding and responding to Wh questions. This skill could be a strategy to essay writing, and the English teacher in Grade 10 worked directly on these to develop further verbal expression, learning how to ask and answer questions as well in preparation for the creative writing process. Kent-Walsh et al. (2008) remind educators that the development of communication skills is often delayed in students with intellectual disability; thus, "since writing is a topography or form of communication, teachers must ensure that writing tasks correspond with the learners' current level of functional communication" (Pennington, 2016 p.50). It was evident from the observations that besides having challenges with putting thoughts to words and words to print, students had laborious handwriting. This is an aspect that LSEs mentioned in their interviews, e.g. Andrew gets disengaged when doing past papers, and there is a high volume of writing to do. Simon's LSE also discusses that when a test activity is done in the class, Simon tends to turn the pages, and if he sees too much reading and writing, he gets discouraged and gives up. She also describes how Simon was moved to writing with a ballpen instead of a pencil, and the letters written are still very big, taking a lot of space she even expresses her worry as in class, she has to guide him when the line finishes. Simon's LSE has to instruct him to start a new line as otherwise keeps writing words on each other. In line with Pennington (2016), these students find challenges in acquiring manual handwriting

abilities and thus, requiring assistive technology will provide them with more access to them. This was confirmed positively by parents who have expressed that their children are able to write sentences about a topic using Microsoft Word as a tool. Andrew's father explained how he links sentence writing on a regular basis to family activities planned, e.g. going for a holiday or to a hotel. This supports Harris et al. (2006) who states that motivation is essential to developing written expression and using topics that motivate the student is highly recommendable. Simon's parents also expressed the strength that Simon has in writing sentences by typing them, and they both expressed that the process is much easier through typing as compared to writing. This is linked to the lack of manual handwriting skills that these students would have. Joseph & Konrad (2009) also mentions that usually, such students with intellectual disability would not have been expected to write repertoires. Thus, practice and exposure in this regard would be limited. With regards to expression and communication, CAST (2022) highlights that this can be done through various media as students are all different, and some might have aspects with expressing thoughts verbally, and others might have difficulty putting ideas in writing. Pennington (2016) asserts that whatever method is used, the instructions provided should be explicit, increase in complexity gradually, and teaching should happen through various contexts so it creates possibilities for generalisation.

With regard to summative assessments, similar issues to the learning aspect were identified. The examinations were discussed with LSEs, and Adolf's LSE explained how the structure and content of the exam paper are hard for the students and how these are compulsory. She believes that this creates a barrier and students are being placed in a situation that is not beneficial to them. In fact, she compares it in this manner "This is like you are diabetic and still giving me sugar." (Adolf's LSE) Students are expected to write in the exam in the same manner that they do during the teaching and learning in the class. They are not even allowed to use a laptop or PC during exams and thus, the same challenges apply in these contexts. These include handwriting which is not appropriate in size, spacing between words missing, too much writing load as well as requiring prompts to start a new line with the print reaches the edge. LSEs, including Andrew's and Shane's LSE, discuss how comprehension tasks are presented back to front, and the student is not able to follow the text and find answer from it as they have to turn the page all the time. Thus, responses drawn from the text are much harder to process, remember and write down. According to Erickson & Koppenhaver (2021), using AT and simply



using a word processor and keyboard is the solution for better learning and even in assessments. They further add that for certain students with intellectual disability, if they have good verbal expression, using speech-to-text and text-to-speech software can facilitate understanding and writing. LSEs have mentioned the possibility of having word banks or picture banks during examinations; however, Erickson & Koppenhaver (2021) warn against these as they “dramatically restrict opportunities for students to compose a text that reflects their thoughts and ideas” (p.193)

At the outset, it is evident that these summative assessments are creating barriers and negative feelings for these students with intellectual disability. However, parents, whilst being positive about these exams and have seen improvements from one year to the other, also reported negative effects of exams, including anxiety, tension, headaches and panic attacks in their children. This goes completely in the opposite direction to sustaining the importance of being engaged in teaching and learning as being the best environment that foster learning in students with intellectual disability. The next subtheme will explore the important concept of engagement for these students.

### 5.5.3 Engagement in Learning and Assessment of Literacy

Engagement for students with intellectual disability is an essential component of learning. For these, student engagement is strongly correlated to positive learning experiences and academic outcomes (LeLant & Lawson, 2019). In UDL, engagement is the third link to the chain of support for students with intellectual disability. Studies such as Kurth et al. (2017) found that students with intellectual disability, and complex language needs showed the least engagement during literacy tasks. Whilst in this study, engagement in literacy was not compared to another subject, however, engagement was noticeable in the vast majority of the sessions. Students in Grade 11 were provided with the opportunity to collaborate together during a Maltese lesson. As per their choices in the student interview, both Nora and Adam identified Maltese as their least favourite language, but working collaboratively has boosted the interest in the activity being facilitated by the teacher. As per Tracey & Morrow (2017), engagement refers to the frequency with which students are able to sustain attention throughout a literacy task. The fact that students in Grade 11 were fully engaged throughout is a positive aspect. This observation is in accordance with Hudson (2016), which says that

when students are provided with opportunities to collaborate during a literacy task, they become more engaged.

Research carried out by Lightner & Wilkinson (2016) on engagement reflects aspects observed in the classrooms in the present study. They discuss that activities in the classroom should amplify engagement levels to consequently also develop receptive and expressive language skills, especially in students with Intellectual disability. Recruiting interest is one of the guidelines mentioned in the UDL by CAST (2022). The notion of knowing what interests the students is a powerful tool for educators as lessons can be geared toward these aspects. The students in this study mentioned various aspects that interest them, including videos, songs, word searches, role-playing, and topics related to their interests, e.g. bike riding, competitive games, teamwork, sports, current affairs, singers and actors, and cooking. When students were engaged, this was indicated through their increased frequency of eye contact posture, which indicates interest and time spent on the task. They also showed visible pleasure by smiling, laughing and persisting focus on the task. Task engagement was also observed in such situations, and students were able to finalise a task and at times, even did it without waiting for help. This happened to Ian when he had a task with the song, which he enjoyed and was happy to do it independently without waiting for help.

Optimising value, authenticity and relevance to the student's lives is yet another factor supporting class engagement (CAST, 2018). When a theme is current and personalised to the learner's life, engagement is more noticed in the classroom. Being socially relevant and age-appropriate is also key. In Field Note 38, the Maltese teacher was covering a text about 'childhood summer'. To support comprehension with students, she linked it to the students' summer and asked them what they did throughout the summer. This piqued their interest, and they increased their engagement throughout the lesson. This observation echoes a suggestion by Friend (2017), who identifies various elements that should characterise the tasks, including pertinence to the student's life and choice within the task. Furthermore, in accordance with Guthrie (1996), making learning personalised together with integrating literacy with student's prior knowledge of the topic under discussion will increase engagement.

Minimising threats and distractions are related to engagement within a classroom, and by creating a safe environment, students can focus their attention on aspects that matter (CAST,

2018). In Grade 11, a lesson involving a healthy competition during Maltese literacy saw Nora needing support as she was troubled due to losing in a game. In the same class, Nora felt safe enough to show her emotions and even suggested change of rules in a game. Another important aspect of this engagement thread is the involvement of all participants in the class discussion. In Field Note 19, the teacher initiates a conversation with the students on their easter holidays. Through her discussions, she supports verbal language development and attempts to elicit language from all students, not only those with stronger expressive skills.

Engagement during examinations was not observed; however, the period leading to the exams was characterised by working on past papers. The students in Grade 10 were anxious, fidgeting more, and more behavioural problems were evident, and this led to a lack of eye contact, slouching on the desks and students looking quite sad. In Field Note 39, it is documented that students are indicating frustration and tantrums whilst looking bored and lacking interest. This is a contrast to previous lessons. To mitigate this, in Field Note 40, the teacher decides to invite the class outdoors to continue the work on the past paper in order to support their engagement. This behaviour was observed related to research carried out by Parsons et al. (2015), who also identified similarities with the least engaging tasks, including those that learners perceived as too hard or those related to the sole use of worksheets. Both aspects were present when doing past papers. This supports Adams' study (1998), which asserts that "seatwork" is related to lower levels of achievement and engagement in students. In such situations, the disparity between their perception of a complex task and the students' competency caused a lesser task engagement and manifested in students appearing confused, frustrated and bored.

## 5.6 Conclusion

The narratives of students who participated in this study are rich and some of these experiences are described explicitly through the interviews and some implicitly through behaviours and through thoughts and actions of important persons around these students. Four themes have been generated, but their subthemes gave rise to many pertinent issues regarding the experiences of these students during their literacy learning. Being inclusive research, and in line with the theoretical framework identified, all of the themes and subthemes identified will be discussed through the perspectives of the social model theory of disability and principles related to them, such as barriers, participation, social justice and giving

a voice to the disabled child are core. It also allowed me to view the experiences of these students through the reality of the classroom in order to instigate change and improve access to literacy learning for these students with intellectual disability.

In the next chapter, a summary of how these themes answered the research questions will be explored, together with a discussion of the limitations of the study and recommendations.



## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Introduction

The concluding chapter will intend to summarise the research findings and how these have addressed the study's overarching aim, objectives and research questions posed in the beginning. I will then address this research's contribution to theory and methodology in researching student voices. Limitations of the study will be reflected upon and discussed. This will be followed by recommendations for enhancing the literacy experiences of students as well as related to eliciting the voices of students with intellectual disability. Another final aspect that will be dealt with in the conclusion is the potential for further research through the adoption of the theoretical framework utilised in this study as well as finalising with some conclusive remarks on the study journey.

### 6.2 The summary of the study

The intention of the study has specifically sought to elicit the experiences of students aged 13-16 years who attend a Core Curriculum Programme in a Maltese mainstream secondary school. Students who participated in this research all had a mild or moderate intellectual disability, and five out of eight of these students had Autism as well. Whilst the research prioritises the students as the main participants and stakeholders, I am aware that parents, educators, and the Senior Management Team, together with their thoughts and actions, have a direct impact on these learning experiences in the Literacy subject. For this reason, insights from these stakeholders were sought and have complemented them. One highlight of the study is the multitude of ways that students with intellectual disability actually communicate with people around them. Engagement in the classroom played a considerable role and enriched their expression, which was an objective of the research. However, another facet to the study was situated beliefs of educators around these students who often created pathways for learning and in other instances created barriers for them implicitly. The study also sought to explore the parents' perceptions in relation to literacy experiences. Interviews were mainly carried out with students, parents, LSEs and SMT, who have an integral role in the teaching and learning within the classroom. The theoretical framework adopted was fundamental in this research. Being inclusive research, the Social model of disability enabled me to search for disabling

barriers and attitudes that might be hindering these students. It also helped me to adopt an approach whereby I focus on keeping students as the core participants rather than listening to other stakeholders instead. This approach also yielded a deeper insight into their experiences and understanding of their realities in the literacy lessons. The social model of disability also provided the lens through which the experiences were analysed and allowed me to seek whether inclusion and social justice were encompassed throughout. The review of the literature provided the required understanding for the pillars of this study, which were mainly intellectual disability, engagement, student voice, and literacy. In the methodology, I gave extra attention to the aspects of gatekeeping, ethical considerations due to the vulnerability of the students as well as techniques which are best utilised to elicit their voices. This allowed me to have interviews and observations in the classroom, which yielded abundant data, enabling me to answer my four main research questions. These will be addressed in the next section.

### 6.3 Addressing the Research Questions

The data collected has substantially responded to the research questions posed at the beginning of this study mainly:

Research Question 1. What are the experiences of learning literacy for a group of secondary school students with intellectual disability?

Research Question 2. How do parents perceive their children's experience of learning literacy in secondary schools?

Research Question 3. In what ways do these students engage with the literacy curriculum?

Research Question 4. What approaches can educators adopt to further support and enhance literacy learning for secondary school students with intellectual disability?

#### 6.3.1 Answering Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was answered through Theme 1 with the manifestations of student voice. This question was mainly concerned with the essence of the experiences that these students experienced throughout their literacy learning in the CCP. I felt that justice is not done to this theme unless the process of eliciting the voices of students is considered as well. The experiences of the students were expressed verbally through the elicitation process of some

questions, which mainly deal with aspects of language that they prefer, the challenges they encounter, their favourite topics and interests, the support they receive and the approaches which they find more useful. However, as I accentuated earlier, the experiences and their voice were not solely related to what they said in the interview but also to what transpired during the observations and the insights obtained from LSEs, parents and SMT. The experiences the students identified as fun and related to their interest were truly observed in the classroom, and students showed a high degree of engagement. With regards to language preferences, some students had a different reply to what their parents answered, but this could be affected by a liking to that language following a lesson which was highly engaging. Student responses also agreed greatly to challenges of literacy mainly related to the writing creative tasks, processing ideas and putting thoughts on paper. An aspect not mentioned verbally by students but was strongly echoed by parents, and LSEs involve the lack of IT. Whilst the students did not mention it, the manifestations of this were evident in the classroom as writing created a disabling environment for students with intellectual disability. Another relevant aspect is that the ratio of activities carried out in class still constitute a high percentage of 60% with the use of worksheets and workbooks which make the activities “contrived rather than natural” (Ruppar, 2015 p. 242). Multisensory techniques and approaches are the preferred learning style for these students in terms of the kind of activities that they enjoy. The students’ responses once again are credible, as even research supports this notion when students with intellectual disability are being taught. Their responses correspond to observations carried out in the class whereby students showed heightened engagement in activities related to personal experiences and topics which are relevant to them. Furthermore, the students valued peer collaboration and indicated that when given the opportunity to work collaboratively, the engagement is still strong even though the activity might be challenging. One strength observed in these CCP classrooms which goes against research, particularly Ruppar (2015), is that teachers were sensitive to the interests of the children and were flexible to extend these activities when the interest in the students became evident. In the second subtheme representing this overall theme, the processes of eliciting the voices of the students were particularly explored. Observations in class shed light on the limited opportunities that students had on verbalising or expressing their thoughts on aspects happening around them. When this happens, the predisposition and capabilities of these students to participate in conversations about their experiences or opinions will be limited. Throughout the interview,



basic questions were required as students found it challenging when I asked what, which and why questions. Another interesting aspect is that suggestibility may sometimes hamper the interviewing process. Keeping the interviews short and soon after the literacy lessons were key in obtaining this information, as memory and attention span issues might affect them. The tendency of acquiescence was evident in some situations through responding with the last option or using yes for all questions. However, even though it is evident when there is moderate intellectual disability, this was proved that this is not always the case with one of the students, and this continues to confirm that these challenges should not hinder researchers and educators from seeking their views. The aspect of immediate echolalia was another notion that had to be taken into consideration, and it was evident that the repetition of a phrase or word is done to confirm an answer or used for regulatory purposes. The importance of a significant other such as the LSE, is important when interviews are done with students. Furthermore, frustration is commonly observed when students are faced with certain questions that they struggle to answer. Depth of questioning was also another factor that was important in the elicitation and silences needed to be interpreted, and once again, the presence of an LSE in this case supported my decision in whether I should wait for an answer, probe further, repeat or rephrase the question. The use of simpler language, concrete words and paraphrasing are key strategies to use with such students.

### 6.3.2 Answering Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was answered through Theme 2 with the parental perceptions and experiences on Literacy Learning. The parents are those who know their children best, and the valid contributions in this research confirm it. A major aspect mentioned regarding the literacy experience is the accessibility of information with regard to what is being covered in literacy lessons. Parents usually link with the LSE to give them information on what their children are learning. Lack of information hinders parents in supporting them at home and in establishing the home school continuity. Parents view this as a lack of cooperative skills from the educators and dampen the inclusive experience overall. Homework was also another issue mentioned, and the lack of homework affects this greatly. These responses are all valid as, according to Lilley (2019), when a strong collaboration is present between school and home, parents can support their children in making sense of literacy learning whilst teachers can learn about the children's learning style. The parents gave lack of ICT use and assistive technology use huge

importance and this is considered a disabling practice throughout. Parents have reported bettered literacy skills at home when their children use their laptops, even in challenging areas such as writing sentences and compositions. They also highlight the importance of games, the use of PowerPoint, topics that interest them and hands-on activities as these approaches support their children in learning literacy. In fact, parents reportedly enjoyed online lessons during the pandemic as they could gauge and get to know more about what was happening at school and how their children learnt best. The parents' experiences were greatly affected by educators and their approach to them and their children. They reportedly mentioned that issues with educators, LSEs and SMT tend to dampen the inclusion experience when they feel that these are not trained enough to support their children. The IEP experience is also important and being heard during the IEP and focusing on language and literacy goals matter to them. One important aspect that transpired is the importance that teachers read the students' reports and know the nature of the condition and what support their children might need in class. Understanding that certain behaviours are part of a condition is also something else that parents mentioned, especially in relation to Autism. Providing students with options to choose subjects and allowing them to study subjects highly motivated to them is yet another key point indicated. Overall, a positive experience was remarked in terms of literacy experience, IEP and overall inclusion experience.

### 6.3.3 Answering Research Question 3

Research Question 3 is represented in Theme 4, which includes Engagement as part of the UDL concept. Engagement in the class by the students with intellectual disability said a lot about their interests, challenges, favourites, as well as motivators. Engagement was seen as stronger when collaborative opportunities were given in the class. In some lessons, students were engaged throughout, indicating that the educator used the correct approaches and tools for teaching and learning. When topics of interest such as hobbies, singers, films, sports, games and bike riding were carried out in class, full engagement was observed, thus confirming that knowing what motivates students is of utmost importance. Linking to personal experiences and making them relevant to their lives is another important concept. When this is done, understanding is heightened, and consequently, students were observed to get more engaged. Being relevant socially and age relevant were observed to be fundamental. Prior knowledge is also significant to understanding and engagement, and this has to be supported when absent.

Creating a supportive environment where students feel safe allows them to engage freely and be more expressive, as evident in the Grade 11 class when Nora was involved. Aspects which created negative feelings and resulted in poor engagement were also noted. Doing past papers, which require a lot of writing, is cognitively difficult and characterised by a lot of seatwork, tend to create negative feelings in the students as they find these boring, too challenging and taxing. The same aspects were mentioned by LSEs in the design of exam papers which were characterised by small print, a limited space to write, and minimal visuals which create considerable challenges in undertaking summative assessments.

Engagement was evidently dependent on the other two links of the chain of UDL, mainly representation and action and expression. When students were supported with adaptations or strategies, they were able to attend more. Adaptations and preparing material in advance for the lesson was not observed and was a barrier to their learning and a disabling practice in itself. However, when the lesson was presented through the use of role-playing, and included visuals and videos, the engagement was positive. Scaffolding in the questioning used was significant in the learning as well as in the engagement. On various occasions, teachers and LSE had to do downward scaffolding to support understanding and keep the conversation going. Highlighting important aspects and identifying information that matters was also something observed, which helped students in following a text. The expression aspect and response method were greatly discussed in terms of the lack of use of IT such as laptops or tablets. For the majority of students, writing was laborious, large, and without spacing, and thus using a keyboard was a far better option for these students who are all computer literate. Their parents confirmed this, and lack of permission from SMT on the issue was seen as a large barrier to these students in literacy learning and showing their competencies.

#### 6.3.4 Answering Research Question 4

Research Question 4 is represented by Theme 4 which discuss Representation and Action and Expression mapping out the approaches adopted and that can be utilised in the classroom to support literacy learning. Theme 3 on ableism and disabling practices is a cross-sectional theme. It will also inform this research question because the importance of identifying ableism and avoiding disabling practices is substantial in ensuring appropriate teaching and learning in

literacy. The first important notion in answering this research question is to identify aspects where the educators and SMT have to act as anti-ableist and actually presume competence when students with intellectual disabilities are involved. Teaching comprehensive literacy is an approach which is evidenced to be appropriate where students are supported to develop listening, reading but also speaking and writing. Speaking and writing in terms of expressing their ideas were aspects which were minimally observed in the classrooms. Activities were more related to listening and reading as well as receptive language. The involvement of the teacher, in the teaching and learning is a priority even when students have moderate and severe intellectual disability. Shifting responsibility on LSE is unfair on these students and they are being deprived of the right to be taught literacy from an educator with pedagogical background. It is also essential that these students are educated in the mainstream school and curriculum should be serving them whatever their level of intellectual disability. Accommodations and modifications should be part of the provision that accompanies UDL in class. Teachers should use more UDL to reach a broader range of abilities, but considering the need for adaptations should be prioritised. Accountability and supportive measures to ensure that this starts happening in CCP classes is fundamental. Having teachers knowledgeable about IEPs and condition of students is also another aspect which will greatly affect the literacy development. Whilst having all of this knowledge, displaying the information in the appropriate manner becomes second nature. When educators use multisensorial approaches and hands on activities students tend to learn much faster concepts which are important for their life. When worksheets are used, using appropriate fonts and font size and ample space to write can help the students express themselves better and understand more. Using ICT as a means to expressing themselves is an aspect of great consideration for educators and implementing ICT across the teaching, learning and assessment is a huge step forward in ensuring quality literacy learning. Integrating visuals in learning, as well as in assessments and oral examinations is practically an accommodation worth considering especially when Autism is present together with intellectual disability. Knowing scaffolding techniques has been proved crucial in learning and also in expressing themselves. Various aspects can support educators to ensure that literacy learning to students with intellectual disability is comprehensive.

#### 6.4 Limitations of the study.

The present study is not flawless, and even though particular care has been taken to ensure the best quality, some aspects are still limiting. The limitations of this study are discussed hereunder in point form:

- a. When in the initial stages of the study it was communicated that students with severe intellectual disability were out of the mainstream school an aspect of the research was left undealt with. Through the interviews with the SMT members this practice and notion was discussed thoroughly however carrying out student interviews with such students would have enriched the data considerably. It would also have provided insight on how to best elicit experiences out of this cohort of students. This is especially so as Turnpenny et al. (2015) refers to individuals with moderate and severe intellectual disability as those who are seldomly heard and more at risk to be excluded from research. Consequently, this created a lacuna in representation of individuals with moderate and severe intellectual disability in the educational research (Iacono, 2006). The students with moderate intellectual disability are heard in this study as they belong to the same school which was chosen. The research is a case study and teaching and learning within different CCP classes might vary thus it was decided that only mild and moderate students will be interviewed and participate. Considering it was during the pandemic, obtaining permission to do research in school was tricky. The conditional approval was given on the basis of the original school only and attending various schools was not recommended due to the pandemic risks. I have approached another Head of School with the possibility of reapplying to carry out research in another school however I was informed that students with severe difficulties have moved to Resource Centres as well.
- b. When the choice of students and possible participants was carried out, some students did not have an updated psychological report and IQ that was used to determine the severity of the intellectual disability was taken as per last report. In some situations, the IQ can vary with age and thus some students classified as moderate might have had higher IQs even though unlikely to change from moderate to mild. Having a recent psychological assessment would have given a clearer picture of their severity.

- c. Another limitation is that students might have still considered me as an authoritative figure in class. I spent a number of lessons with them to familiarize myself with them and get to know them more however my previous position as Education Officer in the school might have affected even for LSEs in the class.
- d. Every student required a different approach. Even though the student interview was piloted however each and every student needed a different way of asking questions. Reactions were also different. Thus, some of my questions might have been too complex for them. In some instances, I felt that through paraphrasing more words were being used and a lot of vocabulary might actually be distracting. Some silences might have been interpreted incorrectly. Thus, even though guidelines supported me in the process these might need to vary from one student to another. Factors such as tiredness, attention span, and general well-being during the interview affect greatly.
- e. Another limitation of this study is that on hindsight, using a choice method with visuals together with the verbal questioning would have supported the students. This is because even if students were unable to verbalise their experience or their thought, having cards available and using Talking Mats for instance could have been an appropriate approach to use in parallel with verbal questioning. By the time this was acknowledged, time had elapsed and going back to school and redoing the interview with cards would have lost its purpose as investigating long after it took place would have been nonsensical for students with intellectual disability.
- f. One limitation of the study is the considerable data that had to be transcribed. Transcriptions of student interviews took very long as non verbals had to be annotated. Interviews of parents and SMT were lengthy in particular.
- g. The nature of the study, being qualitative required a small sample size. Students with intellectual disability represent a percentage in schools in Malta and the eight students in this study is a very small representation. Thus, the experiences and opinion of these students do not adequately represent the rest. Should a larger sample be used, this could have generated richer data.
- h. Limited access to data related to the subject was a major constraint. Local research was minimal and not related to literacy. Okyere et al. (2020) also confirms that internationally

- i. there is the dearth of research that exists in listening to the voices of students with intellectual disability. When this was carried out it was more in relation to inclusion rather than specifically on literacy learning. Surprisingly even research on parent perceptions was extremely limited. Wakeman et al. (2021) discuss that no literature is available on examining literacy and instructional priorities from the perspectives of parents of children with Intellectual Disability.

## 6.5 Potential for further research

The present research can be replicated for other groups of students, and this can be potentially done as follows:

1. The research can be replicated on micro level and macro level. Educators can elicit experiences and thoughts in their own classroom on daily basis. Having question formats and techniques outlined in this study, it is available for these educators to follow.
2. On a macro level, the research can be repeated with other students with intellectual disability who attend other secondary schools. It is also interesting to obtain the views of the literacy experiences of students who attend Resource Centres and views of both cohorts are joined to evaluate the various experiences in an attempt that teachers in mainstream discuss more closely with teachers in Resource Centres.
3. Another aspect worth researching is listening to the voices of students with severe intellectual disability in order to represent the range of abilities. Possibly including students with profound and multiple learning difficulties can be an area worth exploring.
4. Getting views from students in various schools attending CCP classes can possibly give a clearer picture of the strengths and areas of development of the CCP curriculum and whether this can possibly give more functional opportunities to students.
5. Research on eliciting views of students with intellectual disability can be also be accompanied with use of visuals to support the expression of their thoughts and views. Systems such as Talking Mats can be utilised for eliciting these views (Murphy & Cameron, 2008). Exploring other suggested methods to elicit views which might include social media which can offer opportunities for students with intellectual disability to talk about their life and experiences (Caton & Chapman, 2016)

## 6.6 Recommendations

This study has identified various aspects that can be developed further to support more students with intellectual disability. These can be summarised as recommendations for practice at the school level as well as at the class level. These are as follows:

1. Schools can implement a policy of including student voice in their actions related to practices within the school. The voices of students with disability can be included in the school council, and aspects relevant to the students' life should be discussed in conjunction with them.
2. Parents of students with disability should be supported to make informed decisions about the placement of their children in relation to the CCP class. Furthermore, the possibility of students choosing option subjects can be considered and developed, especially when these are functional such as ICT, Media or Home Economics
3. School and educators can create stronger links with home and ensure that information on what is being covered in literacy is shared on regular basis. Descriptions of topics and work that can be done at home can facilitate this for all the families.
4. Schools to invest in ICT equipment including software that can possibly facilitate reading and writing with all students especially with those with intellectual disability.
5. Lessons in literacy should be characterised by multi-sensory approaches and taking in consideration the Universal Design for Learning as a principle. Considering the multiple intelligences and learning styles of students is key to ensuring comprehensive learning.
6. Literacy lessons are to be more balanced in their intention to target the four strands of literacy with special consideration to writing and expressive abilities to support further the development of these areas, which tend to be more challenging for these students
7. Educators are to be equipped with more specific training on how to provide comprehensive literacy teaching and strategies and approaches that can be utilised in the class. Knowledge on how disabilities impact literacy learning is also essential.
8. Workshops for teachers and LSEs can support liaison between them and allows for communication on what literacy activities will be covered and what kind of adaptations or



accommodations are required. This is particularly needed for scaffolding purposes and pre tasking when necessary.

9. Training specific on utilising ICT throughout learning and assessment in literacy is of utmost importance. Knowledge on software available and Assistive Technology equipment can sustain this endeavour.

### 6.7 Conclusive remarks.

In the beginning of the dissertation, I started with the idea of authorising the voices and perspectives of students with intellectual disability. Through this journey I realised that the word 'authorising' is incorrect. I didn't change it because this has been my journey. Student voice was already there. It was always there. It was not something for me to authorise or to give. They have it and always had even if they never utter a word verbally. The only thing I have to do is to honour it. The way to celebrate it is to listen to their voice with my ears and observe them with my eyes. My final hope is that I was loyal to the students' voices and that the essence of their experiences and may this reach the stakeholders who strive to make their literacy learning meaningful whilst developing their optimum potential.

## REFERENCES

- Abdolghaderi, M., Kafie, M., & Khosromorad, T. (2021). The effectiveness of assertiveness training on social anxiety and coping with stress among high school female students. *Journal of Research in Psychology, 1(4)*, 25–31.
- Adams, G. B., & M. Torchia, M. (1998) *School personnel: A critical link in the identification, treatment, and management of OCD in children and adolescents*. Milford, Conn.: Obsessive-Compulsive Foundation.
- Adlof, S. M., Klusek, J., Hoffmann, A.F., Chitwood, K. L., Brazendale, A., Riley, K., & Roberts, J. E. (2018). Reading in children with fragile X syndrome: Phonological awareness and feasibility of intervention. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 123(3)*, 193–211. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1944-7558-123.3.193>
- Adzongo, P. I., & Swande, V. S. (2014). How teachers utilize classroom teaching and management strategies in developing reading comprehension skills in pre-primary schools. *International Journal of Literacy and Development, 1, (1)*, 5-10.
- Agran, M. (2011). Promoting literacy instruction for people with severe disabilities: Achieving and realizing a literate identity. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 36*, 89-91.
- Agran, M., Brown, F., Hughes, C., Quirk, C., & Ryndak, D. (Eds.). (2014). *Equity and full participation for individuals with severe disabilities: A vision for the future*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.
- Ahlgrim-Delzell, L & Rivera, C. (2015). A content comparison of literacy lessons from 2004 and 2010 for students with moderate and severe intellectual disability. *Exceptionality 23(4)*: 258–269.
- Ahlgrim-Delzell, L., Browder, D. M., Wood, L., Stanger, C., Preston, A. I., & Kemp-Inman, A. (2016). Systematic Instruction of Phonics Skills Using an iPad for Students With Developmental Disabilities Who Are AAC Users. *The Journal of Special Education, 50(2)*, 86–97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466915622140>

Ahmad, W. (2018). Barriers of Inclusive Education for Children with Intellectual Disability. *Indian Streams research journal* 2,11.

Al Hazmi, A. N., & Ahmad, A. C. (2018). Universal Design for Learning to Support Access to the General Education Curriculum for Students with Intellectual Disabilities. *World Journal of Education*, 8(2), 66. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wje.v8n2p66>

Ali, M. & Farrugia, J. (2013). Why do students opt not to sit for SEC examinations at the end of their compulsory education? *Malta Review of Educational Research*, 7, 90-115.

Allan, J. (2008). *Rethinking inclusion: The philosophers of difference in practice*, Dordrecht: Springer.

Allor, J. H., Mathes, P. G., Roberts, J. K., Cheatham, J. P., & Champlin, T. M. (2010). Comprehensive reading instruction for students with intellectual disabilities: Findings from the first three years of a longitudinal study. *Psychology in the Schools*, 47, 445-466.

Allor, J. H., Al Otaiba, S., Ortiz, M., & Folsom, J. (2014). Comprehensive beginning reading. In D. M. Browder & F. Spooner (Eds.), *More language arts, math, and science for students with severe disabilities* (pp. 109–126). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

Almasi, J. F. (2003). *Teaching strategic reading processes*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Alnahdi, G. H., Elhadi, A., & Schwab, S. (2020). The positive impact of knowledge and quality of contact on university students' attitudes towards people with intellectual disability in the Arab world. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 106, 103765. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2020.103765>

Al Otaiba, S., Lewis, S., Whalon, K., Dyrlund, A., & McKenzie, A. R. (2009). Home Literacy Environments of Young Children With Down Syndrome: Findings From a Web-Based Survey. *Remedial and Special Education*, 30(2), 96–107.

Alston-Abel, N., & Berninger, V. (2017). Relationships between home literacy practices and school achievement: Implications for school-home collaboration and consultation practices. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2017.1323222> –

Alvesson, M & Sköldbberg, K. (2000). *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE.

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. (2020, June 17). Definition of intellectual disability. <http://aidd.org/intellectual-disability/definition>.

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5(TM))* (5th ed.). American Psychiatric Publishing.

Amorim, L.D., Capellini, S.A., & Germano, G.D. (2022). Systematic Review Study on the Impact of the Pandemic on Literacy: Experiences of Parents and Teachers. *Psychology Research Vol 12 No 010* 813-823.

Andre-Barron D., Strydom, A. & Hassiotis, A. (2008). What to tell and how to tell: a qualitative study of information sharing in research with adults with intellectual disability. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 34, 501–6.

Arnot, M., McIntyre, D., Peddar, D. & Reay, D. (2004) *Consultation in the Classroom: Developing Dialogue about Teaching and Learning*. Cambridge: Pearson.

Antaki, C. 2013. Two Conversational Practices for Encouraging Adults with Intellectual Disabilities to Reflect on Their Activities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research* 57 (6): 580–588.

Aspis, S. (1997). Self-advocacy for people with learning difficulties: does it have a future? *Disability and Society* 12 (4), 647–654.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011). *Disability, Vocation and Education Training 2009*. Canberra, ACT: Author.

Avigitidou, S. (2001). Peer culture and friendship relationships as contexts for the development of young children's pro-social behaviour. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 9, 145-152.

Baglieri, S., & Lalvani, P. (2020). *Undoing ableism: Teaching about disability in K-12 classrooms*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351002868>

Barton, L. (2005). *Disability and dependency*. Routledge.

Bassey, M. (2010). *Case Study Research in Education Setting*. England: Open University Press.

Baxter, I., Thorne L., & Mitchell A. (2001). *Small Voices Big Noises. Lay Involvement in Health Research: Lessons from Other Fields*. Short Run Press Ltd, Exeter.

Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life: robust vocabulary instruction*. New York: Guilford Press.

Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2013). *Bringing words to life: robust vocabulary instruction* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

Bedoin, D., & Scelles, R. (2015). Qualitative research interviews of children with communication disorders: methodological implications. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 30(4), 474–489. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2015.1035884>

Bell, S. (2010). Project-based learning for the 21st century: Skills for the future. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 83, 39-43.

Belo, N. A. H., McKenney, S. E., & Voogt, J. M. (2013). *Towards a knowledge base for using ICT to foster early literacy development: A review study*. Paper presented at the EARLI conference, August 27- 31, Munich, Germany.

Ben-Eliyahu, A., Moore, D., Dorph, R., & Schunn, C. D. (2018, April). Investigating the multidimensionality of engagement: Affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement across science activities and contexts. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 53, 87–105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2018.01.002>

Bennett, S., Gallagher, T., Shuttleworth, M., Somma, M., & White, R. (2017). Teen Dreams: Voices of Students With Intellectual Disabilities. *Journal on Developmental Disabilities, 23*(1), 64–75.

Beratan, G. (2008). The song remains the same: Trans-position and the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 11*, 337-354. doi:10.1080/13613320802478820

Berg, Y. H., van den M., & Stoltz, S. E. M. (2018). Enhancing social inclusion of children with externalizing problems through classroom seating arrangements: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 26*(1), 31–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426617740561>

Berghs, M., K. Atkin, C. Hatton, and C. Thomas. (2019) .“Do Disabled People Need a Stronger Social Model: A Social Model of Human Rights?” *Disability & Society 34* (7–8):1034–1039

Bernard, R. H. (2017). *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Sixth). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Beukelman, D. R., & Mirenda, P. (2013). *Augmentative and alternative communication: Supporting children and adults with complex communication needs* (4th ed.). Baltimore, MD: Paul Brookes

Bevis, E. (1993). Alliance for destiny: education and practice. *Nursing Management, 24* (4), 56-61.

Bhandari, L. P. (2020). Teaching writing through task-based instruction: Exploring English teachers’ experiences. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies, 2*(4), 177-186.

Biklen, D. (2000). Constructing inclusion: lessons from critical, disability narratives. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 4*(4), 337–353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110050168032>

Biklen, D. P. (2006). *Autism and the Myth of the Person Alone*. New York: New York University Press.

Biklen, S., & Moseley, C. (1988). "Are you retarded?" "No I'm Catholic": Qualitative methods in the study of people with severe handicaps. *Journal of the Association of Severe Handicaps*, 13, 155-162.

Billings, D. M., Halstead, J. A. (2009). *Teaching in Nursing, a guide for faculty* (3rd ed.). St Louis, MO: Saunders Elsevier.

Billington, T. (2006). Working with autistic children and young people: sense, experience and the challenges for services, policies and practices. *Disability & Society*, 21(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687590500373627>

Bishton, H. & Lindsay, G. (2011). 'What about what I think of school?' – Student Voice in Special and Inclusive Education: A Practitioner and Personal Response. In G. Czerniawski & W. Kidd (eds.), *The Student Voice Handbook: Bridging the Academic/Practitioner Divide*. Bingley: Emerald Group.

Bloom, A., Critten, S., Johnson, H., & Wood, C. (2020). A critical review of methods for eliciting voice from children with speech, language and communication needs. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 20(4) pp. 308–320.

Bock, A. K., & Erickson, K. A. (2015). The influence of teacher epistemology and practice on student engagement in literacy learning. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 40, 138-153.

Bodner, G. M. (1986). "Constructivism: A Theory of Knowledge." *Journal of Chemical Education* 63, no. 10: 873– 78. <https://doi.org/10.1021/ed063p873>.

Bolt, D. (2004). Disability and the Rhetoric of Inclusive Higher Education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*. 28(4), 353-358.

Bond, M., & Bedenlier, S. (2019). Facilitating student engagement through educational technology: Towards a conceptual framework. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, (1), 11.

Boote, J., Telford R. & Cooper C. (2002). Consumer involvement in health research: a review and research agenda. *Health Policy* 61, 213–236.

- Booth T. & Booth W. (1996). Sounds of silence: narrative research with inarticulate subjects. *Disability and Society* 11 (1), 55–69
- Booth T. & Booth W. (2003). In the frame: photovoice and mothers with learning difficulties. *Disability and Society* 18 (4), 431–442
- Bosse, M. L., Tainturier, M. J., & Valdois, S. (2007). Developmental dyslexia: The visual attention span deficit hypothesis. *Cognition*, 104(2), 198–230
- Bouck, E. C., & Joshi, G. (2012). Functional curriculum and students with mild intellectual disability: Exploring post school outcomes through the NLTS2. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 47(2), 139-153
- Boynton, L., & Mahon, J. (2018). Secondary teachers' experiences with students with disabilities: Examining the global landscape. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 22(3), 306–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1364793>
- Brantlinger, E., Jimenez, R., Klingner, J, et al. (2005) Qualitative studies in special education. *Exceptional Children* 71(2): 195–207.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qual. Res. Sport Exerc. Health* 11(4), 589– 597 <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2020). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. Online first
- Brenner-Camp, S. J. (2011). *Student voice in educational decision-making processes: A key component for change in school models for the future* (Doctoral dissertation, Jones International University).
- Britzman, D. (1989). Who has the floor? Curriculum, teaching and the English student teacher's struggle for voice. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 19,2,143-162.



- Broer, S. M., Doyle, M. B., & Giangreco, M. F. (2005). Perspectives of students with intellectual disabilities about their experiences with paraprofessional support. *Exceptional Children, 71*(4), 415–430.
- Brostrum, S. (2012). Children’s participation in research. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 20*(3), 257-269.
- Broun, L. & Heshusius, L. (2004). ‘Meeting the abled? / disabled? Self when researching the lives of disabled women.’ *Disability Studies Quarterly, 24* (2).
- Browder, D. M. (Ed). (2001). *Curriculum and assessment for students with moderate and severe disabilities*. New York: Guilford Press
- Browder, D., Gibbs, S., Ahlgrim-Delzell, L., Courtade, G.R., Mraz, M. & Flowers, C. (2009). “Literacy for Students with Severe Developmental Disabilities: What Should We Teach and What Should We Hope to Achieve?” *Remedial and Special Education 30* (5): 269–282. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932508315054>.
- Browder, D. M., & Spooner, F. (2014). *More language arts, math, and science for students with severe disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes
- Browder, D. M., Wood, L., Thompson, J., & Ribuffo, C. (2014). *Evidence-based practices for students with severe disabilities* [Document No. IC-3]. <http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/innovation-configurations/>
- Brown, A. (2010). Qualitative method and compromise in applied social research. *Qualitative Research 10*(2): 229–48.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford university press.
- Burke A., McMillan J., Cummins L., et al. (2003) Setting up participatory research: a discussion of the initial stages. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities 31*, 65–69.
- Cabell, S. Q., Tortorelli, L. S., & Gerde, H. K. (2013). How do I write...? Scaffolding preschoolers' early writing skills. *The reading teacher, 66*(8), 650-659.

Caldwell, K. (2014). "Dyadic Interviewing: A Technique Valuing Interdependence in Interviews with Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities." *Qualitative Research* 14 (4): 488–507. doi:10.1177/1468794113490718.

Cameron, D. L., & Cook, B. G. (2013). General Education Teachers' Goals and Expectations for Their Included Students with Mild and Severe Disabilities. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 48(1), 18–30.

Campbell, F.K. (2009). *Contours of ableism: Territories, objects, disability and desire*. London: Palgrave Macmillan

Capp, M. (2017). The effectiveness of universal design for learning: A meta-analysis of literature between 2013 and 2016. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21, 791-807.

Carnovali, S. (2017). The right to inclusive education of persons with disabilities in Italy. Reflections and perspectives. *Athens Journal of Education*, 4, 315-326.

Carr, W. (1995). *For Education-towards critical educational inquiry*. Buckingham, Open University Press.

Carr, A., & O'Reilly, G. (2016). "Lifespan Development and the Family Lifecycle." In *The Handbook of Intellectual Disability and Clinical Psychology Practice*, edited by A. Carr, G. O'Reilly, P. N. Walsh, and J. Mcevoy, 45–78. Hove and New York: Routledge.

Carter, E. W., & Kennedy, C. H. (2006). Promoting access to the general curriculum using peer support strategies. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 31, 284-292.

Carter, E. W., Moss, C. K., Asmus, J., Fesperman, E., Cooney, M., Brock, M. E., Lyons, G., Huber, H. B., & Vincent, L. B. (2015). Promoting Inclusion, Social Connections, and Learning Through Peer Support Arrangements. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 48(1), 9–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059915594784>

Cartwright, K. B., Marshall, T. R. & Wray, E. (2016) 'A longitudinal study of the role of reading motivation in primary students' reading comprehension: implications for a less simple view of reading.' *Reading Psychology*, 37 (1), pp. 55–91

Cascella, P. W., & Aliotta, F. (2014). Strategies to Enhance the Informed Consent Process for Communication Disorders Researchers. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 35(4), 248–251.

CAST: Center for Applied Special Technology. (2019, November 9). About universal design for learning. <http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html>

CAST (2020, October 6) UDL: The UDL Guidelines. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

CAST (2022, December 10) UDL: The UDL Guidelines. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

Caton, S., & Chapman, M. (2016) The use of social media and people with intellectual disability: a systematic review and thematic analysis. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability* 41(2): 125–139.

Causton-Theoharis, J., Theoharis, G., Orsati, F., & Cosier, M. (2011). Does self-contained special education deliver on its promises? A critical inquiry into research and practice. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 24, 61–78.

Chi, M. T., & Wylie, R. (2014). The ICAP framework: Linking cognitive engagement to active learning outcomes. *Educational psychologist*, 49(4), 219-243.

Chopra, P. (2001). Betrayal and solidarity in ethnography on literacy. Revisiting research homework in a north Indian village. In B. V. Street (Ed.), *Literacy and development, ethnographic perspectives* (pp. 78Y91). London: Routledge

Cihak, D. F., & Smith, C. C. (2018). Teaching academic skills to elementary-age students with intellectual disability. In *Instructional strategies for students with mild, moderate, and severe intellectual disability*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Clark, A. (2006). Listening to and involving young children: a review of research and practice. *Early Child Development and Care*. 175(6), 489-505.

Clark, M. C., & Sharf, B. F. (2007). The Dark Side of Truth(s) Ethical Dilemmas in Researching the Personal. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13(3), 399–416.

Cogher, L. (2010). Communication with children and young people. In M. Grant, G. Ramcharan, P. Flynn and M. Richardson (eds) *Learning Disability: A Lifecycle Approach*, 2nd ed., 119–134. Maidenhead: Open University Press and McGraw Hill Education.

Colozzo, P., McKeil, L., Petersen, J. M., & Szabo, A. (2016). An Early Literacy Program for Young Children with Down Syndrome: Changes Observed over One Year. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 13(2), 102–110. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jppi.12160>

Connor, D. J. (2014). Social justice in education for students with disabilities. In L. Florian (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Special Education*. London: Sage

Cook-Sather, A. (2002) Re(in)forming the conversations: student position, power, and voice in teacher education, *Radical Teacher*, 64, 21–28

Cook-Sather, A. (2006) “Sound, Presence, and Power: “Student Voice” in Educational Research and Reform. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 36 (4): 359-390

Cooper, R. (2018). *Diagnosing the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fifth Edition*. Routledge.

Copeland, S. R., & Keefe, E. B. (2007). *Effective literacy instruction*. Baltimore: Brookes.

Copeland, S.R., Head, S.L., & Keefe, E.B. (2021): ‘It’s all about community’: educators’ experiences addressing literacy instruction for adults with complex support needs, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.

Corby, D., Taggart, L., & Cousins, W. (2015). People with Intellectual Disability and Human Science Research: A Systematic Review of Phenomenological Studies Using Interviews for Data Collection. *Research in Developmental Disabilities* 47: 451–465.

Corbin-Dwyer, S. & Buckle, J., (2009). The space between: on being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), 54-63.

Coyne, P., Pisha, B., Dalton, B., Zeph, L. A., & Smith, N. C. (2012). Literacy by Design: A Universal Design for Learning Approach for Students with Significant Intellectual Disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 33(3), 162–172.

Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage

Creswell, J. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Creswell, J. (2015). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. New York: Pearson.

Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Huby, G., Avery, A., & Sheikh, A. (2011). The case study approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 11:100.

Crowhurst, I. (2013). The fallacy of the instrumental gate? Contextualising the process of gaining access through gatekeepers. *International journal of social research methodology*, 16 (6), 463–475.

Cummins, R. A. (2002). "Proxy Responding for Subjective Well-being: A Review." *International Review of Research in Mental Retardation* 25: 183–207.

Cuskelly, M., Povey, J., & Jobling, A. (2016). Trajectories of Development of Receptive Vocabulary in Individuals with Down Syndrome. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 13(2), 111–119.

Da Fonte, M., & Barton-Arwood, S. (2017). Collaboration of general and special education teachers: Perspectives and strategies. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 53, 99-106.

Dahl, S. (1981). Oral language and its relationship to success in reading. In V. Froese and S. B. Straw (Eds.). *Research in language arts: Language and schooling*. Baltimore, M.A.: University Park Press.

Dalton, A. J. & McVilly, K. R. (2004). Ethics guidelines for international, multicentre research involving people with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 1 (2), 57–70.

Daly, J., Kellehear, A., & Gliksman, M. (1997). *The public health researcher: A methodological approach*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.

Danby, S. and Farrell, A., 2005. Opening the research conversation. *In*: A. Farrell, ed. *Ethical research with children*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 49–67

Datta, P., & Talukdar, J. (2017). The impact of support services on students' test anxiety and/or their ability to submit assignments: A focus on vision impairment and intellectual disability. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(2), 160–171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2016.1193561>

Davis, J. & Watson, N. (2000). Disabled children's rights in everyday life: Problematizing notions of competency and promoting self-empowerment. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*. 8, 211-228.

Deakin, H., & Wakefield, K. (2013). Skype interviewing: Reflections of two PhD researchers. *Qualitative Research*, 14(5), 603–616. Doi:10.1177/1468794113488126

Dean, J. (2017). *Doing Reflexivity: An Introduction*. Bristol: Policy Press

Dean, J., Furness, P., Verrier, D., Lennon, H., Bennett, C., & Spencer, S. (2018). Desert island data: an investigation into researcher positionality. *Qualitative Research: QR*, 18(3), 273–289.

De Bruin, K. (2020). Does inclusion work? In L. J. Graham (Ed.), *Inclusive education for the 21st century: Theory, policy and practice* (pp. 55–76). Allen & Unwin.

Dee-Price, B. (2019). Making Space for the Participant with Complex Communication (Access) Needs in Social Work Research. *Qualitative Social Work*. 18 (6): 908–925.

Dee-Price, B. J. (2020). Social researchers and participants with intellectual disabilities and complex communication (access) needs. Whose capacity? Whose competence? *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 7(2), 132–143.

Delaporte, Y. (2002). *Les Sourds, c'est comme ça [Deaf people, That's What it is]*. Paris: Éditions de la MSH.

Demchak, M. (2010, December 14). Symbol assessments and symbolic levels of representation. University of Nevada, Reno. <https://webcampus.unr.edu/webct/urw/eResourceManager?contentID>

Dempsey, I. & Nankervis, K. (eds) (2005) *Community Disability Services: An Evidence-Based Approach to Practice*. Sydney, Australia: University of NSW Press

Denzin, N. K. (2019). The Death of Data in Neoliberal Times. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(8), 721–724. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419847501>

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). *The Sage Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). (Eds, Ed.) London: Sage.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). (Eds, Ed.) Thousand Oaks: CA: SAGE.

Dessementet, R. S., Bless, G., & Morin, D. (2012). Effects of inclusion on the academic achievement and adaptive behavior of children with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 56, 579–587

Dessementet, R. S., Linder, A.-L., Martinet, C., & Martini-Willemin, B.M. (2021). A descriptive study on reading instruction provided to students with intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17446295211016170>

Dewey, J. 1997 [1938]. *Experience and Education: The Kappa Delta Pi Lecture Series*. New York, NY: Touchstone.

Dewey, J. (1913). *Interest and effort in education*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Dolmage, J.T. (2017). *Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Downing, J. (2010). *Academic instruction for students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities in inclusive class-rooms*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Dowse, L. (2009). 'It's like being in a zoo.' Researching with people with intellectual disability. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 9(3), 141–153. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2009.01131.x>

Doyle, S. (2007). Member checking with older women: a framework for negotiating meaning. *Healthcare for Women International*, 8, 888-908.

Drever, E. (2003). *Using Semi-structured Interviews in Small-Scale Research: A Teacher's Guide*. Glasgow: the SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow

Duffy, M. A. (2013). *Parents' Perspectives on the Literacy Instruction Received by their Children with Intellectual Disabilities*. Reading and Language Arts - Dissertations. 36. [https://surface.syr.edu/rla\\_etd/36](https://surface.syr.edu/rla_etd/36)

Duncan-Andrade, J., & Morrell, E. (2007). Critical pedagogy and popular culture in an urban secondary English classroom. In J. L. Kincheloe, & P. McLaren (Eds.), *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now?* New York: Peter Lang

Dunne, M., Pryor, J., & Yates, P. (2005). *Becoming a Researcher: a Research Companion for the Social Sciences*. Maidenhead: open University Press

Edwards, R. (2013). Power and trust: an academic researcher's perspective on working with interpreters as gatekeepers. *International journal of social research methodology*, 16 (6), 503–514.

Ellem, K., Wilson, J., Chui, W. H., & Knox, M. (2008). Ethical challenges of life story research with ex-prisoners with intellectual disability. *Disability & Society*, 23(5), 497–509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687590802177064>

Ellis, D. E. (2014). What Discourages Students from Engaging with Innovative Instructional Methods: Creating a Barrier Framework. *Innovative Higher Education*, 40(2), 111–125. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-014-9304-5>

Ellis, N., & Large, B. (1988). The early stages of reading: A longitudinal study. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 2(1), 47–76

Ely, M., A. M., Friedman, T., Gardner, D., & McCormack Steinmetz, A. (1991). *Doing Qualitative research: Circles within circles*. London: The Falmer Press.

Emerson, E., C. Hatton, T., Thompson, & Parmenter, T. (2004). *International Handbook of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*. Chichester: Wiley

Emmison, M., & Smith, P. (2000). *Researching the visual: Introducing qualitative methods*.



England, K.V.L. (1994). Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *Professional Geographer*, 46 (1); 80-89

Equal Opportunities Act (Act XXIV of 2016) (2022, July 19) <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8879&l=1>

Erickson, K. A., & Geist, L. A. (2016). The profiles of students with significant cognitive disabilities and complex communication needs. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 32(3), 187–197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07434618.2016.1213312>

Erickson, K. A., Hatch, P., & Clendon, S. (2010). Literacy, assistive technology, and students with significant disabilities. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 42(5), 1-16

Erickson, K., & Koppenhaver, D.A. (2021). *Comprehensive Literacy for All: Teaching Students with Significant Disabilities to Read and Write* (1st ed.). Brookes Publishing.

Ertmer, P. A., & Ottenbreit, L. (2013). Removing obstacles to the pedagogical changes required by Jonassen’s vision of authentic technology-enabled learning. *Computers and Education*.

Etikan, I. (2016). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1.

European Agency for Development in Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2014). *Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta. External audit report*. Odense: EASNIE 2

European Commission. *Evaluation of Legislation, Policy and Practice on Child Participation in the European Union (EU)*; Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg, 2015.

Eurostat (2021, November, 7). [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early leavers from education and training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_leavers_from_education_and_training).

Evans, V., & Fredericks, B. (1991). Functional curriculum. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 3(4), 409-447.

Fajardo, I., Ávila, V., Ferrer, A., Tavares, G., Gómez, M., & Hernández, A. (2014). Easy-to-read texts for students with intellectual disability: Linguistic factors affecting comprehension.

*Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 27, 212–225. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12065>

Farrimond, H., 2013. *Doing ethical research*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Farrugia, C. J. (2002) Rewards and tribulations of senior education managers in small states. In: G. Baldacchino & C. J. Farrugia (Eds) *Educational planning and management in small states: concepts and experiences* (London, Commonwealth Secretariat).

Felix, E ., & Brown,M. (2011). “The Case for a Learning Space Performance Rating System.” *Journal of Learning Spaces* 1, no. 1. <http://libjournal.uncg.edu/jls/article/view/287/154>

Fielding, M. (2001). Beyond the Rhetoric of Student Voice: new departures or new constraints in the transformation of 21st century schooling?. *Forum*. 43. 10.2304/forum.2001.43.2.1.

Finlay, W. M. L., & Antaki, C. (2012). “How Staff Pursue Questions to Adults with Intellectual Disabilities.” *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research* 56 (4): 361–370. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2788.2011.01478.x.

Finlay, W. M. L., & Lyons, E (2001). “Methodological Issues in Interviewing and Using Self-report Questionnaires with People with Mental Retardation.” *Psychological Assessment* 13 (3): 319–335. doi:10.1037/1040-3590.13.3.319.

Finn, J. D. & Zimmer, K. S. (2012) ‘Student engagement: what is it? Why does it matter?’ In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly & C. Wylie (eds), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*, pp. 97–131. New York, NY: Springer -Verlag.

Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Hattie, J. (2016). *Visible learning for literacy: Implementing the practices that work best to accelerate student learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Quaglia, R.J. (2018). *Engagement by design: Creating learning environments where students thrive*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Fletcher, K., Blair, C., Bolger, K., & Scott, M. (2004). Specific patterns of cognitive abilities in young children with mild mental retardation. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 39, 270- 278.

Flick, U. (2006) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. (3rd Ed.). London: Sage Publication, Ltd

Flowerday, T., & Shell, D. F. (2015). Disentangling the effects of interest and choice on learning, engagement, and attitude. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 40, 134–140. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2015.05.003>

Flutter, J. (2007) 'Teacher development and pupil voice.' *The Curriculum Journal*, 18 (3), pp. 343–54.

Flutter, J., & Rudduck, J. (2004). *Consulting pupils: What's in it for schools?* London, Routledge Falmer.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2011). Case study. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln, *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 301-316). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Ford, A., Davern, L., & Schnorr, R. (2001). Learners with significant disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 22, 214–222.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Freer, J. R. R. (2021). Students' attitudes toward disability: A systematic literature review (2012–2019). *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1866688>

Franck, B., & Joshi, D.K (2017). Including Students with Disabilities in Education for All : Lessons From Ethiopia. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 21 (4): 347–360.

Fredericks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59-109

Fredricks, J. A., & McColskey, W. (2012). The measurement of student engagement: A comparative analysis of various methods and student self-report instruments. In *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 763-782). Springer, Boston, MA.

Fredericks, J., Caldwell, G. A., & Tomitsch, M. (2016). Middle-out design: collaborative community engagement in urban HCI. In *Proceedings of the 28th Australian Conference on Computer-Human Interaction* (pp. 200-204).

Freedman, R. I. (2001). Ethical challenges in the conduct of research involving persons with mental retardation. *Mental Retardation*, 39 (2), 130–141.

Freire, P. (1971) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth UK: Penguin.

Freire, P. (2006). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who teach*. New York NY Westview Press

Friend, L. (2017). IRE and content area literacies: A critical analysis of classroom discourse. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, The*, 40(2), 124-134.

Fullan, M. G. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. London, Cassell.

Furlong, M. J., & Christenson, S. L. (2008). Engaging students at school and learning: A relevant construct for all students. *Psychology in the Schools*, 45(5), 365-368.

Galien, J. (2010). A subject beyond mental disability. Ethical issues in the mental disability clinic. *Psychological Practices*, 16(1), 49-59.

Gallagher, D.J., Connor, D.J., & Ferri, B.A (2014) Beyond the far too incessant schism: special education and the social model of disability, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 18:11, 1120-1142, DOI: [10.1080/13603116.2013.875599](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2013.875599)

Gappmayer, G. (2020). Disentangling disablism and ableism: The social norm of being able and its influence on social interactions with people with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 28(1), 102–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2020.1814394>

Garrels, V. (2019). Student-directed learning of literacy skills for students with intellectual disability. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 19(3), 197–206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12442>

Gaskin C.J (2015) On the Potential for Psychological Researchers and Psychologists to Promote the Social Inclusion of People with Disability: *A Review, Australian Psychologist*, 50:6, 445-454, DOI: [10.1111/ap.12128](https://doi.org/10.1111/ap.12128)

Georgiou, G. K., Parrila, R., & Liao, C. H. (2008). Rapid naming speed and reading across languages that vary in orthographic consistency. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 21(9), 885–903

Ghesquiere, P., Maes, B., & Vandenberghe, R. (2004). The Usefulness of Qualitative Case Studies in Research on Special Needs Education. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 51(2), 171-184.

Giangreco, M. (2010). One-to-one paraprofessionals for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms: Is conventional wisdom wrong? *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 48(1), 1-13. doi:10.1352/1934-9556-48.1.1

Giangreco, M., Broer, S., & Suter, J. (2011). Guidelines for selecting alternatives to overreliance on para-professionals: Field-testing in inclusion-oriented schools. *Remedial and Special Education*, 32, 22-38. doi:10.1177/0741932509355951

Gibbs, B., Hilburn, J. (2020). "No one should see what they have to do": Military children and media representations of war. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2020.07.002>

Gilbert, T. (2004). Involving people with learning disabilities in research: issues and possibilities. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 12(4), 298–308. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2524.2004.00499.x>

Giroux, H. (1997). *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, culture and schooling*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Glicken, M. D. (2009). *Evidence-based Practice with Emotionally Troubled Children and Adolescents*. San Diego, CA: Elsevier.

Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: *Inclusion and Education: All Means All*; UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization): Paris, France.

Goering S. (2015). Rethinking disability: the social model of disability and chronic disease. *Current reviews in musculoskeletal medicine*, 8(2), 134–138. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12178-015-9273-z>

Gomwalk, N. V. (2018). *Effects of Language Experience Approach on Literacy Skills of Learners with Intellectual Disabilities in Jos Metropolis, Plateau State* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Jos).

Goodley, D. (1996). Tales of hidden lives: A critical examination of life history research with people who have learning difficulties. *Disability and Society*, 11, 333–348.

Goodley, D. (2000) *Self-Advocacy in the Lives of People with Learning Difficulties*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Goodley, D. (2014) *Dis/ability studies: Theorising disablism and ableism*. Routledge.

Goodwin, C. (2018). *Co-operative action*. Cambridge University Press.

Gough, P. B., & Tunmer, W. E. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, 7, 6–10

Gough, B., & Madill, A. (2012). Subjectivity in psychological research: From problem to prospect. *Psychological Methods*, 17(3), 374–384.

Graham, B. & Iannacci, L., (2013). Reconceptualizing Special Education Curriculum in a Bachelor of Education Program: Teacher Candidate Discourses and Teacher Educator Practices. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 2(2), 10–34. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v2i2.79>

Graham, S., McKeown, D., Kiuahara, S., & Harris, K. R. (2012). A meta-analysis of writing instruction for students in the elementary grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(4), 879–896. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029185>

Graneheim, U. & Lundman, B. (2004) Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Education Today* 24, 105–112.

Gray, L. M., Wong-Wylie, G., Rempel, G. R., & Cook, K. (2020). Expanding qualitative research interviewing strategies: Zoom video communications. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(5), 1292-1301.

Greene, S., & Hill, M (2005). Researching Children's Experience: Methods and Methodological Issues in Greene, S., & Hogan, D. (Eds.) (2005). *Researching children's experience*. SAGE Publications Ltd <https://www-doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.4135/97818492>

Greenstein, A. (2014). Is this inclusion? Lessons from a very 'special' unit. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 18(4), 379-391.

Greenwood, C. R., Buzhardt, J., Walker, D., Jia, F., & Carta, J. J. (2020). Criterion validity of the early communication indicator for infants and toddlers. *Assessment for Effective Intervention*, 45(4), 298-310.

Greig, A., Taylor, J., and Mackay, T. (2013). *Doing research with children. A practical guide*. 3rd ed. London: SAGE.

Gremmen, M. C., van den Berg, Y. H. M., Segers, E., & Cillessen, A. H. N. (2016). Considerations for classroom seating arrangements and the role of teacher characteristics and beliefs. *Social Psychology of Education*, 19, 749–774.

Griego, A. W., Datzman, J. N., Estrada, S. M., & Middlebrook, S. S. (2019). Suggestibility and false memories in relation to intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder: a meta-analytic review. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 63: 1464– 1474. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jir.12668>.

Griffen, A.K (2017). *Special Education teachers, literacy and students with moderate and severe intellectual disability: A survey*. Theses and Dissertations Early Childhood, Special Education and Rehabilitation Counselling, 42.

Griffith, A. I. (1998). Insider/outsider: epistemological privilege and mothering work. *Human Studies*, 21(4), 361-376.

Griful-Freixenet, J., Struyven, K., & Vantieghem, W. (2021). Toward More Inclusive Education: An Empirical Test of the Universal Design for Learning Conceptual Model Among Preservice Teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 72(3), 381–395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487120965525>

Gudmundsdottir, G. B., Brock-Utne, B. (2010). An exploration of the importance of piloting and access as action research. *Educational Action Research*, 18, 359–372. doi:10.1080/09650792.2010.499815

Guthrie, J.T. (1996). Educational contexts for engagement in literacy. *The Reading Teacher*, 49(6), 432-445.

Guthrie, J. T., & Klauda, S. L. (2014). Effects of Classroom Practices on Reading Comprehension, Engagement, and Motivations for Adolescents. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 49(4), 387–416. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.81>

Gvion, A., & Friedmann, N. (2004). *The dyslexia: Types, features, and therapeutic directions*. Shikumada Bulletin of the Israeli Society of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, 22, 3–6. (Hebrew)

Hadfield, M., & Haw, K. (2001). 'Voice': Young people and action research. *Educational Action Research*, 9,3, 485-502.

Haebig, E., & Sterling, A. (2016). Investigating the Receptive-Expressive Vocabulary Profile in Children with Idiopathic ASD and Comorbid ASD and Fragile X Syndrome. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 47(2), 260–274. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-016-2921-3>

Haegele, J.A., & Hodge, S. (2016) Disability Discourse: Overview and Critiques of the Medical and Social Models, *Quest*, 68:2, 193-206.

Haley-Mize, S & Reeves, S. (2013). Universal Design for Learning and Emergent-Literacy Development: Instructional Practices for Young Learners. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*. 79.



Hallberg, L. (2013). Quality criteria and generalization of results from qualitative studies. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Wellbeing*, 8(1).

Halliday, J. (2002). Researching Values in Education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 28(1), 49-62.

Hamilton, J., Ingham, B., McKinnon, I., Parr, J. R., Tam, L. Y.-C., & Le Couteur, A. (2017). Mental capacity to consent to research? Experiences of consenting adults with intellectual disabilities and/or autism to research. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 45(4), 230–237. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bld.12198>

Hammersley, M. (1990). What's Wrong with Ethnography? The Myth of Theoretical Description. *Sociology*, 24(4), 597–615. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038590024004003>

Han, Y., & Hyland, F. (2015). Exploring learner engagement with written corrective feedback in a Chinese tertiary EFL classroom. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 30, 31-44.

Hanreddy, A., & Östlund, D. (2020). Alternate Curricula as a Barrier to Inclusive Education for Students With Intellectual Disabilities. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 12(3), 235–247. <https://doi.org/10.26822/iejee.2020358217>

Harris, K. R., Graham, S., & Mason, L. H. (2006). Improving the Writing, Knowledge, and Motivation of Struggling Young Writers: Effects of Self-Regulated Strategy Development With and Without Peer Support. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), 295–340. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312043002295>

Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hauerwas, L. B., & Mahon, J. (2017). Secondary teachers' experiences with students with disabilities: examining the global landscape. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 22(3), 306–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1364793>

Havercamp, S., & Nevill, R. (2018). Intellectual disability. In E. Braaten (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of intellectual and developmental disorders* (pp. 814-821). SAGE Publications, Inc., <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781483392271.n256>

Helme, S., & Clarke, D. (2001). Identifying cognitive engagement in the mathematics classroom. *Mathematics Education Research Journal*, 13(2), 133-153.

Hermanns, H. (2004) Interviewing as an Activity. In U. Flick, E. von Kardoff and I. Steinke (Eds.), *A Companion to Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications

Herrero, P,R., Gasset, D.I., & Garcia, A,C.. (2020). Inclusive education at a Spanish University: the voice of students with intellectual disability. *Disability & Society*, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1745758>

Hess, R. S., Molina, A. M., & Kozleski, E. B. (2006). Until somebody hears me: parent voice and advocacy in special educational decision making. *British Journal of Special Education*, 33(3), 148-157.

Heyder, A., Südkamp, A., & Steinmayr, R. (2020). How are teachers' attitudes toward inclusion related to the social-emotional school experiences of students with and without special educational needs?. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 77, 101776.

Hobby, R. (2002). *Transforming learning: What does it feel like to learn in our schools?* London: The Hay Group Management Ltd.

Hogan, J., Dolan, P., & Donnelly, P. (2009). *Introduction: Approaches to Qualitative Research: Theory and Its Practical Application* (A Guide for Dissertation Students). Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

Holec, V., & Marynowski, R. (2020). Does it Matter Where You Teach? Insights from a Quasi-Experimental Study on Student Engagement in an Active Learning Classroom. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, 8(2), 140–164. <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearningqu.8.2.10>

Holland, S., Renold, E., Ross, N. & Hillman, A. (2008) *Rights, 'right on' or the right thing to do? A critical exploration of young people's engagement in participative social work research*.

Hollingshead, A., Williamson, P., & Carnahan, C. (2018). Cognitive and Emotional Engagement for Students with Severe Intellectual Disability Defined by the Scholars with Expertise in the

Field. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 43(4), 269–284.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796918812803>

Hollomotz, A (2017). “Successful Interviews with People with Intellectual Disability.” *Qualitative Research* 18 (2): 153– 170.

Homan, R. (2002). The principle of assumed consent: the ethics of gatekeeping. In: M. McNamee and D. Bridges, eds. *The ethics of educational research*. Blackwell: Oxford, 23–39.

Hopkins, E. A. (2008). Classroom conditions to secure enjoyment and achievement: the pupils’ voice. Listening to the voice of Every child matters. *Education 3-13*, 36(4), 393–401.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004270801969386>

Hronis, A., Roberts, L & Kneebone I. (2017) A review of cognitive impairments in children with intellectual disabilities: Implications for cognitive behaviour therapy. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56(2): 189–207.

Hruby, G.G., Burns, L.D., Botzakis, S., Groenke, S.L., Hall, L.A., Laughter, J., & Allington, R.L. (2016). The metatheoretical assumptions of literacy engagement: A preliminary centennial history. *Review of Research in Education*, 40, 588-643.

Hudson, A.K. (2016). Get them talking! Using student-led book talks in the primary grades. *The Reading Teacher*, 70(2), 221-225.

Hughes, B., D. Goodley, & L. Davis. (2012). “Conclusion: Disability and Social Theory.” In *Disability and Social Theory: New Developments and Directions*, edited by D. Goodley, B. Hughes and L. Davis, 308–317. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Humphrey, N., & Parkinson, G. (2006). Research on interventions for children and young people on the autistic spectrum: a critical perspective. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 6(2), 76–86. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2006.00062.x>

Hyett, N., Kenny, A., & Dickson-Swift, V. (2014). Methodology or method? A critical review of qualitative case study reports. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well being*, 9, 23606.

Iacono T. (2006) Ethical challenges and complexities of including people with intellectual disability as participants in research. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability* 31, 173–9. doi: 10.1080/13668250600876392.

Ikwen, E. U. (2013). *Effects of concentrated language encounter methods in developing beginning reading skills in primary school pupils in Cross-River State*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Jos.

Inoue, T., Georgiou, G. K., Parrila, R., & Kirby, J. R. (2018). Examining an extended home literacy model: The mediating roles of emergent literacy skills and reading fluency. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 22(4), 273–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888438.2018.1435663>

Irvin, J.L., Meltzer, J., & Dukes, M.S. (2007). *Chapter 1: Student motivation, engagement, and achievement*. In *Taking action on adolescent literacy* (pp. 27-50). Alexandria, VA: ACSD.

Irvine, A. (2010). Conducting qualitative research with individuals with developmental disabilities: Methodological and ethical considerations. *Developmental Disabilities Bulletin*, 38, 21–34.

Jang, B.G., Conradi, K., McKenna, M.C., & Jones, J.S. (2015). Motivation: Approaching an elusive concept through the factors that shape it. *The Reading Teacher*, 69(2), 239-247.

Joffe, H. (2011). Thematic Analysis. In D. Harper, A.R. Thompson. *Qualitative methods in mental health and psychotherapy: a guide for students and practitioners*. Chichester (UK): John Wiley & Sons: p. 209-224.

Jolley,E., Lynch,P., Virendrakumar,B., Rowe,S & Schmidt,E. (2018) Education and social inclusion of people with disabilities in five countries in West Africa: a literature review, *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 40:22, 2704-2712, DOI: 10.1080/09638288.2017.1353649

Jonassen, D. H. (2013). Transforming learning with technology: Beyond modernism and post-modernism, or whoever controls the technology creates the reality. In M. P. Clough, J. K. Olson, & D. S. Niederhauser (Eds.), *The nature of technology: Implications for learning and teaching* (pp. 101-110). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers

Jones, M.M. (2007). An ethnographic exploration of narrative methodologies to promote the voice of students with disabilities. *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research*, 2(1), 32-40.

Joseph, L., & Konrad M. (2009). Teaching students with intellectual or developmental disabilities to write: A review of the literature. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 30(1), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2008.01.001>

Kármán, Szekeres, Ágota, & Papp, G. (2022). Interventions for acceptance and inclusion of people with intellectual disability: A systematic review. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 35(3), 641-654. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12968>

Katims, D. S. (2000). Literacy instruction for people with mental retardation: Historical highlights and contemporary analysis. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 35, 3-15.

Kay, L. (2019). Guardians of research: negotiating the strata of gatekeepers in research with vulnerable participants. *Practice (Abingdon, England)*, 1(1), 37-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25783858.2019.1589988>

Keefe, E. B., & Copeland, S. R. (2011). What is literacy? The power of a definition. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 36, 92-99.

Keith, H., & Keith, K. D. (2013). *Intellectual disability: Ethics, de-humanization, and a new moral community*. Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell.

Keller, J. M. (2010). The Arcs model of motivational design. In *Motivational design for learning and performance* (pp. 43-74). Springer, Boston, MA.

Kennedy, M. J. & Deshler, D. D. (2010) Literacy instruction, technology, and students with learning disabilities: research we have, research we need. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 33, pp. 289-98

Kennette, L & Wilson, N. (2019). Universal Design for Learning (UDL): What is it and how do I implement it?. *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal*, 12, 1.

Kenny, W., & Grotelueschen, A. (1984). Making the case for case study. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 16, 37-51.

Kent-Walsh, J., Stark, C., & Binger, C. (2008). Tales from School Trenches: AAC Service-Delivery and Professional Expertise. *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 29(02), 146–154. <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-2008-1079128>

Khatib, M., Sarem, S. N., & Hamidi, H. (2013). Humanistic Education: Concerns, Implications and Applications. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 4(1), pp. 45 – 51.

Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE Guide No. 131. *Medical Teacher*, 42(8), 846–854. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159x.2020.1755030>

Kim, J. S., Hemphill, L., Troyer, M., Thomson, J. M., Jones, S. M., LaRusso, M. D., & Donovan, S. (2016). Engaging Struggling Adolescent Readers to Improve Reading Skills. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 52(3), 357–382. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.171>

Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). *Critical pedagogy primer*. New York: Peter Lang.

Kirby, J. R., Georgiou, G. K., Martinussen, R., & Parrila, R. (2010). Naming speed and reading: From prediction to instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 45(3), 341–362

Kitchin, R. (2000). The researched opinions on research: Disabled people and disability research. *Disability and Society*, 15, 25-47.

Kleiman, S. (2007). Revitalizing the humanistic imperative in nursing education. *Nursing Education Perspectives*, 28 (4) 209-213.

Kliewer, C. (1998). *Schooling Children With Down Syndrome: Toward an Understanding of Possibility* (New York, N.Y.) Teachers College Press

Kliewer, C., & Biklen, D. (2001). “School’s Not Really a Place for Reading”: A Research Synthesis of the Literate Lives of Students with Severe Disabilities. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 26(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.2511/rpsd.26.1.1>

Klingner, J. K., Urbach, J., Golos, D., Brownell, M., & Menon, S. (2010). Teaching Reading in the 21st Century: A Glimpse at How Special Education Teachers Promote Reading Comprehension. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 33(2), 59–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/073194871003300201>

Koch, K. A. (2020). “The Voice of the Parent Cannot be Undervalued”: Pre-Service Teachers’ Observations after Listening to the Experiences of Parents of Students with Disabilities. *Societies*, 10(3), 50. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc10030050>

Koppenhaver, D. A., & Yoder, D. E. (1993). Classroom literacy instruction for children with severe speech and physical impairments (SSPI): What it is and what it might be. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 13, 1–15. doi:10.1097/00011363-199302000-00003

Koppenhaver, D.A. & Erickson, K.A. (2013). *Writing: Text types and purposes video transcript*. Lawrence, KS: Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Consortium, Kansas University.

Kozol, J. (1985). *Illiterate America*. New York: Doubleday.

Kramer, J., Meltzer, A., & Strohm, K. (2021). Social support when a sibling has a disability. In *Brothers and sisters* (pp. 257-276). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Krämer, S., Möller, J., & Zimmermann, F. (2021). Inclusive education of students with general learning difficulties: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 91(3), 432–478. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654321998072>

Kubiak, J. (2017). Using ‘voice’ to understand what college students with intellectual disabilities say about the teaching and learning process. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 17(1), 41–48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12098>

Kumar, R. (2011). *Research Methodology: a step-by-step guide for beginners*. 3rd ed. London: SAGE

Kumashiro, K. K., & Ngo, B. (2007). *Six lenses for anti-oppressive education: Partial stories, improbable conversations* (Vol. 315). Peter Lang.

Kurt, X. (2016). Constructivism, Dewey, and academic advising. *NACADA Journal*, 36(2), 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.12930/NACADA-14-027>

Kurth, J. A., Born, K., & Love, H. (2017). Eco-behavioral characteristics of self-contained high school classrooms for students with severe cognitive disability. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 41, 227-243

Kutner, M., Greenberg, E., Jin, Y., Boyle, B., Hsu, Y. C., & Dunleavy, E. (2007). *Literacy in Everyday Life: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy*. NCES 2007-490. National Center for Education Statistics.

Kvale, S. (1996) *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Sage, London

Labaree, R., 2002, The risk of ‘going observationalist’: negotiating the hidden dilemmas of being an insider participant observer. *Qualitative Research*, 2(1), 97-122.

Lalvani, P. & Hale, C. (2015). Squeaky wheels, mothers from hell, and CEOs of the IEP: parents, privilege, and the “fight” for inclusive education. *Understanding and Dismantling Privilege* 5, 21–41.

Lancioni, G. E., Singh, N. N., O’Reilly, M. F., Oliva, D., & Basili, G. (2005). An overview of research on increasing indices of happiness of people with severe/profound intellectual and multiple disabilities. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 27, 83-93. doi:10.1080/09638280400007406

Landis, D., Umolu, J., & Mancha, S. (2010). The power of Language Experience for cross-cultural reading and writing. *The Reading Teacher*, 63, 580-589.

Lassen, L. M. (2014). *Rådgivning. Kunsten å hjelpe og sikre vekstfremmende prosesser* [Counselling. *The Art of Helping and Ensuring Growth-promoting Processes*]. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Leger, A., Victoria C., Vicki W, & Annie R. (2014). *Active Learning Classrooms in Ellis Hall: September 2013-August 2014*. Kingston: Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen’s University. [https://www.queensu.ca/activelearningspaces/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.ehalcwww/files/files/Report%20for%20Active%20Learning%20Classrooms%20in%20Ellis%20Hall%20-%20Fall%202014%20\(Oct%20\).pdf](https://www.queensu.ca/activelearningspaces/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.ehalcwww/files/files/Report%20for%20Active%20Learning%20Classrooms%20in%20Ellis%20Hall%20-%20Fall%202014%20(Oct%20).pdf).



Lehr, C. A., Sinclair, M. F. & Christenson, S. L. (2004). Addressing student engagement and truancy prevention during the elementary school years: a replication study of the check and connect model. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 9 (3), pp. 279–301.

Lee, R. M. (1993). *Doing research on sensitive topics*. London, Sage

Lieber, J., Horn, E., Palmer, S., & Fleming, K. (2008). Access to the general education curriculum for preschoolers with disabilities: Children's school success. *Exceptionality*, 16(1), 18-32.

Lieberman, L. J. (2017). The Need for Universal Design for Learning. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 88(3), 5–7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2016.1271257>

Le Lant, C. (2015). *The Effect of Interactive Whiteboard use on the Engagement of Students with Intellectual Disability in Early Reading Lessons*. (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia). Available from: <https://flex.flinders.edu.au/file/b5733a1c9af7-41b2-97b9-7550be7ef7a8/1/thesis%20Le%20Lant%202015.pdf>

Le Lant, C., & Lawson, M.J. (2019). A new student engagement observational instrument for use with students with intellectual disability. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 19(4), 304-314.

LaRocque, M., Kleiman, I., & Darling, S. M. (2011). Parental Involvement: The Missing Link in School Achievement. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 55(3), 115–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10459880903472876>

Lemons, C. J., King, S. A., Davidson, K. A., Puranik, C. S., Fulmer, D., Mrachko, A. A., ... Fidler, D. J. (2015). Adapting phonological awareness interventions for children with Down syndrome based on the behavioral phenotype: A promising approach? *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 53(4), 271–288. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-53.4.271>

Lenhart, J., Suggate, S. P., & Lenhard, W. (2022). Shared-Reading Onset and Emergent Literacy Development. *Early Education and Development*, 33(4), 589–607. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2021.1915651>

Lere, M. M. (2013). *Mental retardation*. Unpublished Postgraduate Lecture Notes. Faculty of Education, University of Jos

Levitt, J.M (2017) Exploring how the social model of disability can be re-invigorated: in response to Mike Oliver, *Disability & Society*, 32:4, 589-594, DOI: [10.1080/09687599.2017.1300390](https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2017.1300390)

Lewis, A. (2001). Reflections on interviewing children and young people as a method of inquiry in exploring their perspectives on integration/inclusion. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 1(3), no-no.

Lewis, J. 2009. Redefining Qualitative Methods: Believability in the Fifth Moment. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8 (2): 1–14.

Lewis, A. & Porter, J. (2007). Research and pupil voice. In *Handbook of Special Education*, 222-232. Sage Publications.

Light, J., & McNaughton. M. (2015). Designing AAC research and intervention to improve outcomes for individuals with complex communication needs. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* 31(2): 85-96.

Lightner, S.C. & Wilkinson, I.A.G. (2016). Instructional frameworks for quality talk about text: Choosing the best approach. *The Reading Teacher*, 70(4), 435-444.

Lilley, R. (2019). Fostering Collaborative Family–School Relationships to Support Students on the Autism Spectrum. *The SAGE Handbook of Autism and Education*, 351–362. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526470409.n29>

Lindlof, T.R. & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. (2nd Ed.) California: Sage Publication

Loveall, S. J., & Conners, F. A. (2013). Individuals with intellectual disability can self-teach in reading. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 118(2), 108–123. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1944-7558-118.2.108>

Lonsdale, M., & McCurry, D. (2004). *Literacy in the new millennium*. Canberra City, ACT: Australian Council for Educational Research; The National Centre for Vocational Education

Research; Australian National Training Authority Adult Literacy National Project, The Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.

Lowrey, A., Hollingshead, A., Howery, K., & Bishop, J. (2017). More than one way: Stories of udl and inclusive classrooms. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 42(4), 225–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796917711668>

Luckasson, R., Borthwick-Duffy, S., Butinx, W., Coulter, D., Craig, E., Reeve, A., Schalock, R., Snell, M., Spitalnick, D., Spreat, S., Tasse, M.(2002). Mental retardation: Definition, support and systems (10th ed.). In: *American Association on Mental Retardation*.

Lundy, L. (2007). ‘Voice’ is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 927–942. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033>

Lunsford, A. A., Morgan, H., & Slevin, J. (1990). *The right to literacy*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America.

Lutz, S. L., Guthrie, J. T., & Davis, M. H. (2006). Scaffolding for engagement in elementary school reading instruction. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 100(1), 3-20.

Lutz, D., Fisher, K. R. & Robinson, S. (2015). Sharing the focus: engaging with support workers to include people with communication needs in research. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 44 (2), pp. 138–145.

MacBeath, J., Demetriou, H., Rudduck, J. & Myers, K. (2003) *Consulting Pupils: A Toolkit for Teachers*. Cambridge: Pearson Publishing.

MacDonald, B. (1993). A political classification of evaluation studies in education, in: M. Hammersley (Ed.) *Social Research-philosophy, politics and practice*. London: Sage.

MacLeod, A. G., Lewis, A., & Robertson, C. (2014). ‘Using a participatory methodology with individuals on the autism spectrum. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 37(4), 407-420.

Magaldi, D., & Berler, M. (2020). Semi-structured Interviews. In: Zeigler-Hill V., Shackelford T.K. (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3\\_857](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_857) Accessed on July 5th, 2021

MacLure, M., Holmes, R., Jones, L. & MacRae, C. (2010). Silences as resistance to analysis: or on not openings one's mouth properly. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16,6, 492-500.

Mangiaracina, A., Kefallinou, A., Kyriazopoulou, M., & Watkins, A. (2021). Learners' Voices in Inclusive Education Policy Debates. *Education Sciences*, 11(10), 599. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11100599>

Marom, M., Cohen, D., & Naon, D. (2007). Changing disability-related attitudes and self-efficacy of Israeli children via the partners to inclusion programme. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 54(1), 113–127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10349120601149821>

Martin G. E., Lee, M., & Losh, M. (2017). Intellectual disability. In: L. Cummings (ed) *Research in Clinical Pragmatics*, vol. 11. London: Springer, 109–130.

Martinelli, V. (2016) Weak English Language Literacy and Early School Leaving in a Maltese Context. *Bulgarian Comparative Education Society*, Paper presented at the Annual International Partner Conference (4th, Sofia, Bulgaria, Jun 14-17, 2016)

Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative Researching*. (2nd Ed.) London: Sage Publication

Matther, N., & Goldstein, S. (2005). *Thinking with language, image, and strategies*. Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books Publishing Group.

Mazzei, L. A. (2008). Silence speaks: Whiteness revealed in the absence of voice. *Teaching and teacher education*, 24(5), 1125-1136.

Mazzei L (2009) An impossibly full voice. In: A. Jackson and L. Mazzei (eds) *Voice in Qualitative Inquiry: Challenging Conventional, Interpretive, and Critical Conceptions in Qualitative Research*. London: Routledge, 45–62.

McDonald, K. & Kidney, C. A. (2012). What is right? Ethics in intellectual disabilities research. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities, 9* (1), 27–39.

McDonald, K. E., Conroy N. E., & Olick, R.S.. 2016. “Is It worth It? Benefits in Research with Adults with Intellectual Disability.” *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities 54* (6): 440–453. doi:10.1352/1934-9556-54.6.440.

McDonald, K. E., Kidney, C. A., & Patka, M. (2012). ‘You need to let your voice be heard’: research participants’ views on research. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 57*(3), 216–225. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2788.2011.01527.x>

McDonald, K., & Patka, M. (2012). “There is no black or white”: Scientific community views on ethics in intellectual and developmental disability research. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities, 9*, 206–214.

McGrath, C., Palmgren, P. J., & Liljedahl, M. (2019). Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews. *Medical Teacher, 41*(9), 1002–1006. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2018.1497149>

McKenzie, K., Milton, M., Smith, G., & Ouellette-Kuntz, H. (2016). Systematic review of the prevalence and incidence of intellectual disabilities: current trends and issues. *Current Developmental Disorders Reports, 3*, 104- 115. doi:10.1007/s40474-016-0085-7

McKenzie, A. R. (2009). Emergent literacy supports for students who are deaf-blind or have visual and multiple impairments: A multiple-case study. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness, 103*, 291–302

McIntyre, D., Pedder, D. and Rudduck, J. (2005) Pupil voice: comfortable and uncomfortable learning for teachers. *Research papers in education 20*, 149–168.

McLaren, P. (2007). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education* (5th ed. ed.). Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

MEDE: Ministry for Education and Employment (2013). Core Curriculum Programme. Retrieved ( May, 26) [Core Curriculum Programme Englishx \(gov.mt\)](http://www.gov.mt/core-curriculum-programme-english)

MEDE: Ministry for Education and Employment (2019). A Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools. (May, 26) [A Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools - Route to Quality Inclusion.pdf \(gov.mt\)](#)

Memis, A., & Sivri, D. A. (2016). The analysis of reading skills and visual perception levels of first grade Turkish students. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 4(8), 161–166

Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (3rd ed.). San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S., Johnson-Bailey, J., Lee, M., Kee, Y., Ntseane, G., & Muhamad, M. (2001). Power and positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20(5), 405-416. Available from: doi: 10.1080/02601370110059537

Mertens, D. M. (2005). Research and Evaluation in Education and-Psychology: Integrating diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods (pp.2 & 88-189). Thousand Oaks, London, Sage press.

Messiou, K. (2019). The missing voices: students as a catalyst for promoting inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(7–8), 768–781. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1623326>

Messiou, K. (2018) Using primary school children’s voices to promote inclusive education. *Voces de la Educacion, numero especial*, 11-27.

Meyer, C. (2001). A case in case study methodology. *Field Methods*, 13(4), 329-352.

Meyer, A., Rose, D. H., & Gordon, D. (2014). Universal Design for Learning: Theory and practice. Wakefield, MA: Center for Applied Special Technology. (May, 20) Retrieved from [udltheorypractice.cast.org](http://udltheorypractice.cast.org)

Michael, J. (2006). Where’s the Evidence that Active Learning Works?. *Advances in Physiology Education* 30, no. 4: 159–67. <https://doi.org/10.1152/advan.00053.2006>.

Mietola, R., Miettinen, S., & Vehmas, S. (2017). Voiceless subjects? Research ethics and persons with profound intellectual disabilities. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(3), 263-274.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, Johnny. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis : a methods sourcebook* (Third edition.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Mkrttchian, V. (2018). Project-based learning for students with intellectual disabilities. In P. L. Epler (Ed.), *Instructional strategies in general education and putting the Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) into practice* (pp. 196-221). doi:10.4018/978-1-5225-3111-1.ch007

Molina, L. (2017). *Literacy Instruction for Learners with Moderate to Severe Intellectual Disabilities: A Chance for Growth in Reading through Adapted Materials and Evidence-Based Strategies*. Web.

Moll, K., Göbel, S.M., Gooch, D., Landerl, K., Snowling, M.J. (2016) Cognitive Risk Factors for Specific Learning Disorder: Processing Speed, Temporal Processing, and Working Memory. *J Learn Disability*, 49(3):272-81. Doi: 10.1177/0022219414547221.

Moosa, D. (2013). Challenges to anonymity and representation in educational qualitative research in a small community: a reflection on my research journey, *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 43(4), 483-495

Morgan, M. F., Cuskelly, M., & Moni, K. B. (2011). Broadening the conceptualization of literacy in the lives of adults with intellectual disability. *Research and Practice for Persons With Severe Disabilities*, 36, 112–120.

Morgan, P. L., & Fuchs, D. (2007). Is there a bidirectional relationship between children's reading skills and reading motivation? *Exceptional Children*, 73 (2), pp. 165–83

Morrison, K. (2006). Sensitive educational research in small states and territories: the case of Macau, *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 36(2), 249-264.

Morrison, J., Bradshaw, J., & Murphy, G. (2021). Reported communication challenges for adult witnesses with intellectual disabilities giving evidence in court. *The International Journal of*

*Evidence & Proof*, 25(4), 243–263. <https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/13657127211031040>

Morrison, J., Forrester-Jones, R., Bradshaw, J., & Murphy, G. (2019). Communication and cross-examination in court for children and adults with intellectual disabilities: A systematic review. *The International Journal of Evidence & Proof*, 23(4), 366–398. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365712719851134>

Morse, J. (2009). Mixing qualitative methods. *Qualitative Health Research*, 21(8), 1523-1524.

Morse, J.M (2012). *Qualitative Health Research: Creating a new discipline*. California: Left Coast Press.

Morse J.M., Barrett M., Mayan M., Olson K. & Spiers J. (2002) Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1(2) 1–19.

Mulhall, A. (2003). In the field: Notes on observation in qualitative research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 41, 306-313

Mundial, G. B., & UNICEF. (2016). Education 2030: Incheon declaration and framework for action: towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.

Munsell, S. E., & O'Malley, L. (2019). The Lived Experiences of Mothers of Children with Disabilities. *The New Educator*, 15(4), 269–280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1547688x.2019.1601315>

Murphy, J., & Cameron, L. (2008). The effectiveness of Talking Mats with people with intellectual disability. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 36(4), 232–241. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-3156.2008.00490.x>

Myers, L.P. (2019a). Insider Research: Ethics, Professionalism and Positionality. Conference: British Accounting and Finance Association (BAFA) Accounting Education Conference. Belgium



Myers, L.P. (2019b). A social realist account of constraints and enablements navigated by South African students during the four year professional accounting programme at Rhodes University, South Africa. (Doctor of Philosophy). Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa.

Neuman, L. (2014). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 7th ed. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Ne'eman, A., & Shaul, S. (2022). The Association Between Emergent Literacy and Cognitive Abilities in Kindergarten Children. *Child & Youth Care Forum*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-022-09697-7>

Nicolaidis C., Raymaker D., McDonald K., Dern S., Ashkenazy E., Boisclair C. et al. (2011) Collaboration strategies in nontraditional community-based participatory research partnerships: lessons from an academic community partnership with autistic self-advocates. *Progress in Community Health Partnerships* 5, 143–50. doi: 10.1353/cpr.2011.0022.

Nieminen, J.H. (2022). Unveiling ableism and disablism in assessment: a critical analysis of disabled students' experiences of assessment and assessment accommodations. *High Educ.* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00857-1>

Nishimura, T., Sakurai, S. & Shinrigaku, K. (2013). Changes in academic motivation among elementary and junior high school students. *The Japanese Journal of Psychology*, 83 (6), pp. 546–55. <https://doi.org/10.4992/jjpsy.83.546>

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of qualitative methods*, 16(1), 1609406917733847.

O'Day, B., & Killeen, M. (2002). Research on the lives of persons with disabilities: The emerging importance of qualitative research methodologies. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 13, 9–15.

Okyere, C, Aldersey, H. M, & Lysaght, R. (2020). Strategies for engagement of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities: Reflections from a study in inclusive schools in Accra, Ghana. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 1-16

Osler, A., & Osler, C. (2002). Inclusion, Exclusion and Children's Rights: A Case Study of a Student with Asperger Syndrome. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*, 7(1), 35–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363275202007001004>

Oyetunde, T. O. (1987). The teaching of reading in Nigeria secondary schools: A preliminary investigation. In S.U. Unoh, R.A. Omojuwa and E.A. Abe (Eds.). *Literacy and reading in Nigeria*, 3, 266-286. Zaria: Institute of Education, ABU.

Ozegya, A.E. (2015). Effect of students and teachers actively reading text strategy on reading comprehension of students with hearing impairment in Jos, Plateau State. Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, University of Jos.

Paju, E. (2013) Everyday matters of childhood: Ethnographic research on materiality, embodiment and agency in a nursery. Helsinki: Tutkijaliitto.

Palacios, N. (2017). Why All Teachers Matter: The Relationship Between Long-Term Teacher and Classroom Quality and Children's Reading Achievement. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 31(2), 178–198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2016.1272509>

Palmgren, M.H., Pyhalto, K., Soini, T., & Pietarinen, J. (2017). Students' engaging school experiences: A precondition for functional inclusive practice. *International Journal of Whole Schooling, Special Issue*, 26-49

Palmer, M., & Harley, D. (2012). Models and measurement in disability: An international review. *Health Policy and Planning*, 27, 357–364.

Pantaleo, S. (2016). Teacher expectation and student literacy engagement and achievement. *Literacy*, 50(2), 83-92

Papen, U. (2005). Literacy and development: What works for whom? Or, how relevant is the social practices view of literacy for literacy education in developing countries? *International Journal of Educational Development*, 25, 5Y17. doi: 10.1016/j.ijedudev.2004.05.001

Park, Y., Brownell, M. T., Bettini, E. F., & Benedict, A. E. (2017). Multiple Dimensions of Instructional Effectiveness in Reading: A Review of Classroom Observation Studies and Implications for Special Education Classrooms. *Exceptionality*, 27(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2017.1283628>

Parsons, S.A., Malloy, J.A., Parsons, A.W., & Burrowbridge, S.C. (2015). Students' engagement in literacy tasks. *The Reading Teacher*, 69(2), 223-231.

Partanen, M., & Siegel, L. S. (2014). Long-term outcome of the early identification and intervention of reading disabilities. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 27(4), 665–684

Paseka, A., & Schwab, S. (2020). Parents' attitudes towards inclusive education and their perceptions of inclusive teaching practices and resources. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 35(2), 254–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2019.1665232>

Patel, D. R., Apple, R., Kanungo, S., & Akkal, A. (2018). Narrative review of intellectual disability: definitions, evaluation and principles of treatment. *Paediatric Medicine*, 1, 11. <https://doi.org/10.21037/pm.2018.12.02>

Pennington, R. C. (2016). Write on! Using Assistive Technology and Systematic Instruction to Teach Sentence Writing to Students With Moderate to Severe Disability. *Journal of Special Education Technology*, 31(1), 50–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162643416633336>

Perry, J., & Felce, D. (2002). Subjective and objective quality of life assessment: Responsiveness, response bias and resident proxy concordance. *Mental Retardation*, 40, 445-456.

Petitpierre, G., Gremaud G., Veyre A., Bruni I., & Diacquenod C. (2013). Beyond Alibi. Informed Consent in Research Involving People having Intellectual Disability. Ethical 488 D. Bedoin and R. Scelles *Case Studies in Ethnological Research*. Société Suisse d'Ethnologie.

Picon, I. (2009). Adolescence and Learning Disability. A Clinical Approach to Young People Attending a Vocational Rehabilitation Centre (Impro) or a Specialized Teaching Unit (UPI).]

ALTER – *European Journal of Disability Research* / Revue Européenne de Recherche sur le Handicap 3 (4): 303–319

Piekkari, R., Welch, C., & Paavilainen, E. (2009). The case study as disciplinary convention: Evidence from international business journals. *Organizational Research Methods*, 12(3), 567-589.

Playle, J. F. (1995). Humanism and positivism in nursing: contradictions and conflicts. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 22, 979-984.

Plummer, K. (2001). *Documents of Life 2: an Introduction to Critical Humanism*. London: Sage

Pole, C. (2005). *Fieldwork*. London, Sage.

Powell-Smith, K. A., Stoner, G., Bilter, K. J., & Sansosti, F. J. (2008). Best practices in supporting the education of students with severe and low-incidence disabilities. *Best Practices in School Psychology, "Fifth" Edition*, 1233-1248.

Prior, M.T. (2018). Interviews and Focus Groups. In: Phakiti, A., De Costa, P., Plonsky, L., Starfield, S. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Applied Linguistics Research Methodology*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59900-1\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59900-1_11)

Pritchard, A. (2017). *Ways of Learning: Learning Theories for the Classroom* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315460611>

Proctor, C. P., Dalton, B., & Grisham, D. L. (2007). Scaffolding English Language Learners and Struggling Readers in a Multimedia Hypertext Environment with Embedded Strategy Instruction and Vocabulary Support. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 39, 71-93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10862960709336758>

Prunty, A., Dupont, M. & McDaid, R. (2012). Voices of students with special educational needs (SEN): views on schooling. *Support for Learning*, 27(1), 29-36.

Purpura, D. J., Schmitt, S. A., & Ganley, C. M. (2017). Foundations of mathematics and literacy: The role of executive functioning components. *Journal of experimental child psychology*, 153, 15-34.

Queirós, A., Faria, D., & Almeida, F. (2017). Strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative research methods. *European journal of education studies*.

Rao, K., & Meo, G. (2016). Using Universal Design for Learning to Design Standards -based lessons. *SAGE Open*, 6 (4), 01-12.

Rao, K., Smith, S. J., & Lowrey, K. A. (2017). UDL and intellectual disability: What do we know and where do we go? *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 55(1), 37-47,53,55. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1352/1934-9556-55.1.3>

Rapp, W. (2014). *Universal design for learning in action*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes

Rapley, M., & Antaki, C. (1996). A Conversation Analysis of the 'Acquiescence' of People with Learning Disabilities. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 6(3), 207–227. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(sici\)1099-1298\(199608\)6:3](https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1099-1298(199608)6:3)

Rattanaich, S. (2008). *Methods of other kinds*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Reay, D. (2006). "I'm not seen as one of the clever children": consulting primary school pupils about the social conditions of learning" *Educational Review*, 58(2): 171-181

Resch, J. A., Mireles, G., Benz, M. R., Grenwelge, C., Peterson, R., & Zhang, D. (2010). Giving parents a voice: A qualitative study of the challenges experienced by parents of children with disabilities. *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 55(2), 139–150

Reschly, A.L., & Christenson, S.L. (2012). Jingle, jangle, and conceptual haziness: evolution and future directions of the engagement construct. In: Christenson, S.L., Reschly, A.L., & Wiley, C., (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*. Berlin: Springer. pp. 3-19.

Richards, B. A., & Frankland, P. W. (2017). The persistence and transience of memory. *Neuron*, 94(6), 1071-1084.

Richardson, W. (2015). "The Classroom is Not a Place. . . ." *Modern Learners*.

Rioux, M. & Bach, M. (1994) *Disability is not Measles: New Research Paradigms in Disability*. Ontario: The Roeher Institute.

Robinson, O.C. (2014) Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 11(1): 25–41.

Rogers J. (1999) Trying to get it right: undertaking research involving people with learning difficulties. *Disability and Society* 14 (4), 421–433.

Rokeach, M. (1973). *The Nature of Human Values*. New York: The Free Press.

Rubin, H.J. and Rubin, C.S. (2005) *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. (2nd Ed.). California: Sage Publications.

Rudd, T. (2007) Personalisation and Digital Technologies. Bristol: Futurelab. (2015, February , 1 ) [www.futurelab.org.uk/research/personalisation.htm](http://www.futurelab.org.uk/research/personalisation.htm)

Rudduck, J. & Flutter, J. (2003) *How to Improve your School: Giving pupils a Voice*. London and New York: Continuum Press.

Ruppar, A. L. (2013). Authentic Literacy and Communication in Inclusive Settings for Students with Significant Disabilities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 46(2), 44–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991304600205>

Ruppar. (2015). A Preliminary Study of the Literacy Experiences of Adolescents With Severe Disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 36(4), 235–245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932514558095>

Ruppar. (2017). “Without being able to read, what's literacy mean to them?”: Situated beliefs about literacy for students with significant disabilities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 67, 114–124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.06.003>

Ruslin Mashuri, S., Abdul Rasak, M.S., Alhabsyi, F. Syam, H. (2022) Semi-structured Interview: A Methodological Reflection on the Development of a Qualitative Research Instrument in Educational Studies." *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, 12(01), p. 22-29.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American psychologist*, 55(1), 68.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2009). Promoting self-determined school engagement: Motivation, learning, and well-being. In K. R. Wentzel & A. Wigfield (Eds.), *Handbook on motivation at school*. (pp. 171-196). New York: Routledge

Ryndak, D. L., Morrison, A. P., & Sommerstein, L. (1999). Literacy before and after inclusion in general education settings: A case study. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 24, 5–22. doi:10.2511/rpsd.24.1.5

Ryndak, D., Jackson, L., & White, J. (2013). Involvement and progress in the general curriculum for students with extensive support needs: K-12 inclusive education research and implications for the future. *Inclusion*, 1, 28-49. doi:10.1352/2326-6988-1.1.028

Saad, M.A., & ElAdl, A.M. (2019). *Defining and Determining Intellectual Disability* (Intellectual Developmental Disorder): Insights from DSM-5.

Sailor, W. S., & McCart, A. B. (2014). Stars in alignment. *Research & Practice for Persons With Severe Disabilities*, 39(1), 55–64. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1540796914534622>

Sandelowski M. (1986) The problem of rigor in qualitative research. *Advances in Nursing Science* 8, 27–37.

Sandelowski, M. (1993). Theory unmasked: The uses and guises of theory in qualitative research. *Research in nursing & health*, 16(3), 213-218.

Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing & Health*, 33(1), 334-340.

Sandelowski M. & Barroso J. (2002) Reading qualitative studies. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1(1), Article 5.

Sato, M. (2017). Interaction mindsets. Interactional behaviors, and L2 development: An affective-social-cognitive model. *Language learning* 67(2), 249-283.

Save the Children (2011). Every Child's Right to Be Heard. A Resource Guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12; Save the Children: London, UK.

Savvides, N., Al-Youssef, J., Colin, M. & Garrido, C. (2014) 'Journeys into inner/outer space: reflections on the methodological challenges of negotiating insider/outsider status in international educational research, *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 9(4), 412-425

Schwartz, T. (1993). Kastom, 'custom', and culture: Conspicuous culture and culture-constructs. In *Anthropological Forum* (Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 515-540). Taylor & Francis Group.

Sciberras, C., & Schembri, H. (2020). A COACTION model to explore remote teacher and learning support educator collaboration during COVID19 school closure in Malta. *Malta Review of Educational Research*, 14(2), 183-210.

Serravallo, J. (2015). Jennifer serravallo: *Focusing on engagement*. [Web log]. Retrieved from [www.heinemann.com/blog/jenniferserravallofocusingonengagement](http://www.heinemann.com/blog/jenniferserravallofocusingonengagement).

Sewell, M. (2009) *The Use of Qualitative Interviews in Evaluation*. Cyfernet-Evaluation. Tucson: University of Arizona. <http://ag.arizona.edu/fcs/cyfernet/cyfar/Intervu5.htm>

Shakespeare, T., & Watson, N. 'Frameworks, Models, Theories, and Experiences for Understanding Disability' (2023) in Robyn Lewis Brown, Michelle Maroto, and David Pettinicchio (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Disability* (2023; online edn, Oxford Academic.

Shaw, S. R., & Jankowska, A. M. (2018). *Pediatric Intellectual Disabilities at School: Translating Research into Practice (Pediatric School Psychology)* (1st ed. 2018 ed.). Springer.

Sheehan, A.D., & Sheehan, C.M. (2000). Lost in a sea of ink: How I survived the storm. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 44(1),20-32.

Sherhoff, D.J. (2013). *Optimal learning environments to promote student engagement*. New York, NY: Springer.



- Shogren, K., Gross, J., Forber-Pratt, A., Francis, G., Satter, A., Blue-Banning, M., & Hill, C. (2015). The perspectives of students with and without disabilities on inclusive schools. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 40(4), 243–260. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796915583493>
- Shogren, K., Wehmeyer, M. L., Seo, H., Thompson, J., Schalock, R., Hughes, C., & Palmer, S. (2017). Examining the reliability and validity of the Supports Intensity Scale–Children’s Version in children with autism and intellectual disability. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 32, 293-304. doi:10.1177/1088357615625060
- Sigstad, H. M. H. 2014. Characteristic Interviews, Different Strategies: Methodological Challenges in Qualitative Interviewing Among Respondents with Mild Intellectual Disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities* 18 (2): 188–202. doi:10.1177/1744629514523159.
- Sigstad, H. M. H. (2017). Qualities in Friendship – Within an outside Perspective – Definitions Expressed by Adolescents with Mild Intellectual Disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities* 21 (1): 20–39. doi:10.1177/1744629516631682.
- Sigstad, H. M. H., & Garrels, V. (2018). Facilitating qualitative research interviews for respondents with intellectual disability. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 33(5), 692–706. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1413802>
- Silverman, D. (2013). What counts as qualitative research? Some cautionary comments. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 9(2), 48-55.
- Silverman, D. (2020). *Qualitative research*. London: Sage Publishing.
- Simons, H. (1996). The paradox of case study. *Cambridge journal of education*, 26(2), 225-240.
- Skinner, E. A., & Belmont, M. J. (1993). Motivation in the classroom: Reciprocal effects of teacher behaviour and student engagement across the school year. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 85(4), 571-581.
- Smith, M.W., Brady, J.P., & Clark-Chiarelli, N. (2008). *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool (K-3)*. Research Edition. Newton, MA: Paul Brookes

Smith, G.J., Booth, J.R., and McNorgan, C. (2018) Longitudinal Task-Related Functional Connectivity Changes Predict Reading Development. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 60.

Snow, D. A., & Morrill, C. (1995, October). NEW ETHNOGRAPHIES: REVIEW SYMPOSIUM. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 24(3), 341–348.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/089124195024003005>

So, W. W. M., He, Q., Chen, Y., Li, W. C., Cheng, I. N. Y., & Lee, T. T. H. (2022). Engaging Students with Intellectual Disability in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Learning. *Science Education International*, 33(1), p. 25. doi:10.33828/sei.v33.i1.3

Springer, S.E., Harris, S., & Dole, J.A. (2017). From surviving to thriving: Four research-based principles to build students' reading interest. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(1), 43-50.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Stalker K. (1998) Some ethical and methodological issues in research with people with learning difficulties. *Disability and Society* 13 (1), 5–19.

Stanford, B., & Reeves, S. (2009). Making it happen: Using differentiated instruction, retrofit framework, and universal design for learning. *Teaching Exceptional Children Plus*, 5(6), n6.

Stark, P. & Noel, A. M. (2015). *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972-2012*. (NCES 2015-015). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015015.pdf>

Starks, H., & Brown Trinidad, S. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative health research*, 17(10), 1372-1380.

Strati, A.D., Schmidt, J.A., & Maier, K.S. (2016). Perceived challenge, teacher support, and teacher obstruction as predictors of student engagement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(1), 131-147.

Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Sturm, J. M., & Clendon, S. A. (2004). Augmentative and alternative communication, language, and literacy: Fostering the relationship. *Topics in Language Disorders, 24*, 76–91. doi:10.1097/00011363-200401000-00008

Subban, P., Round, P., & Sharma, U. (2018). 'I can because I think I can': An investigation into Victorian secondary school teacher's self-efficacy beliefs regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 1*–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1550816>

Suggate, S., Schaughency, E. A., McAnally, H., & Reese, E. (2018). From infancy to adolescence: The longitudinal links between vocabulary, early literacy skills, oral narrative, and reading comprehension. *Cognitive Development, 47*, 82–95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogdev.2018.04.005>

Šukys, S., Dumčienė, A., & Lapėnienė, D. (2015). Parental Involvement in Inclusive Education of Children with Special Educational Needs. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal, 43*(2), 327–338. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2015.43.2.327>

Suri, H (2011). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qual Res J. 11*(2):63–75.

Svalberg, A. (2009). *Engagement with language: Interrogating a construct*. *Language Awareness, 18*. 10.1080/09658410903197264.

Svalberg, A. (2018). Researching language engagement: Current trends and future directions. *Language Awareness, 27*(1-2), 21- 39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2017.1406490>

Tangen, R. (2008). Listening to the children's voices in educational research: some theoretical and methodological problems. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 23*, 2, 157–66.

Taua, C., Neville, C., & Hepworth, J. (2014). Research participation by people with intellectual disability and mental health issues: An examination of the processes of consent. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing, 23*(6), 513–524. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12079>

Taub, D., & Foster, M. (2020). Inclusion and Intellectual Disabilities: A Cross Cultural Review of Descriptions. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 12*(3), 275–281. <https://doi.org/10.26822/iejee.2020358221>

Taub, D., Apgar, J., Foster, M., Ryndak, D. L., Burdge, M., & Letson, S. (2019). Investigating the alignment between English language arts curricula developed for students with significant support needs and the CCSS. *Remedial and Special Education*. doi:10.1177/0741932519843184

Tellis, W. (1997). Introduction to case study. *The qualitative report*, 3(2), 1-14.

Thomas, G. (2011). A typology for the case study in social science following a review of definition, discourse and structure. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(6), 329-339.

Thomas, C. 2007. *Sociologies of disability, 'impairment', and chronic illness: Ideas in disability studies and medical sociology*. London: Palgrave

Thomson, R. G. (1996). *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (1st ed.). Columbia University Press.

Tight, M. (2010). The curious case of case study: A viewpoint. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 13(4), 329-339.

Timberlake, M. T. (2016). The path to academic access for students with significant cognitive disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education*, 49, 199-208

Tisdall, E.K.M., Davis, J.M. and Gallagher, M. (2009) *Researching with Children and Young People: Research Design, Methods and Analysis*. Sage: Los Angeles, CA. ISBN 9781412923880

Tomlinson, C. A. (2017) *How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms* (3rd edn). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Tones, M., Pillay, M., Carrington, S., Chandra, S., Duke, J., & Joseph, R. M. (2017). Supporting disability education through a combination of special schools and disability-inclusive schools in the Pacific Islands. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 64(5), 497–513. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2017.1291919>

Tracey, D.H. & Morrow, L.M. (2017). *Lenses on reading: An introduction to theories and models*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Trainor, A. A. (2010). Diverse approaches to parent advocacy during special education home-school interactions: Identification and use of cultural and social capital. *Remedial and Special Education, 31*, 34-47.

Traynor, M. (2009). Humanism and its critiques in nursing research literature. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 65* (7), 1560 – 1567.

Tryfon, M., Anastasia, A., & Eleni, R. (2019). Parental perspectives on inclusive education for children with intellectual disabilities in Greece. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities, 67*(6), 397–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2019.1675429>

Tuffrey-Wijne, I., Bernal, J., & Hollins, S. (2008). Doing research on people with learning disabilities, cancer and dying: ethics, possibilities and pitfalls. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities, 36*(3), 185-190.

Turnbull, A., 2000, 'Collaboration and censorship in the oral history interview', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 3*(1), 15-34.

Turnpenny, A., Caiels, J., Crowther, T., Richardson, L., Whelton, B., BeadleBrown, J., & Rand, S. (2015). *Developing an easy read version of the Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit* (ASCOT). Canterbury: QORU Quality and Outcomes of Person-Centred Care Policy Research Unit.

Twomey, M., & Shevlin, M. (2017). Parenting, autism spectrum disorders and inner journeys. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, v. 17*, (3), 157-167. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12373>.

Twomey, M. (2020). Can you hear me? - Accessing the voice of the child with Autism and their parent. *Educação, 43*(1), e35477.

UNESCO. (2004). Position paper: The plurality of literacy and its implications for policies and programs. Paris, France. UNESCO Workshop. (2021, September 10) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001362/136246e.pdf> .

UNESCO (2012). Education for all global monitoring report: factsheet, (2021 October, 11) [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/multimedia/hq/ed/pdf/nigeria\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/multimedia/hq/ed/pdf/nigeria_factsheet.pdf)

UNESCO. (2014). Literacy for all. UNESCO: Author. (2021 February 10) [www.unesco.org/themes/literacy-all](http://www.unesco.org/themes/literacy-all).

*What you need to know about literacy.* (2023, February 2). UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/need-know>

UNESCO-IBE (2016) What makes a quality curriculum? (2022, May 26) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002439/243975e.pdf>

United Nations, 1989. Convention on the Rights of the Child

United Nations. 2006. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. New York: United Nations.

Ungurean, B. C. (2021). THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY - DEFINITION, CLASSIFICATION. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov. Series IX, Sciences of Human Kinetics*, 14(1), 247-252. doi:<https://doi.org/10.31926/but.shk.2021.14.63.1.31>

University of Texas (2006) Circle Classroom Observation Tool. [cotrevised\\_91216.pdf](http://cliengage.org/cotrevised_91216.pdf) ([cliengage.org](http://cliengage.org))

Vaismoradi, M., Jones, J., Turunen, H., & Snelgrove, S. (2016). Theme development in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*, 6 (5).

Van Meter, K. M. (2000) Sensitive topics—sensitive questions: overview of the sociological research literature, *Bulletin de Methodologie Sociologique*, 68, October, 59–78

Van Scoter, J., Ellis, D., & Railsback, J. (2001). *Technology in Early Childhood Education: Finding the Balance*. By Request Series.

Van Wingerden, E., Segers, E., van Balkom, H., & Verhoeven, L. (2014). Cognitive and linguistic predictors of reading comprehension in children with intellectual disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 35(11), 3139–3147.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2014.07.054>

Veck, W. (2009). Listening to include. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. 13(2), 141-155.

Veugelers, W. (2011). Introduction: Linking autonomy and humanity. In: Veugelers, W. (Ed.). *Education and Humanism: Linking Autonomy and Humanity* (pp. 1 – 7). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Vollet, J.W., Kindermann, T.A., & Skinner, E.A. (2017). In peer matters, teachers matter: Peer group influences on students' engagement depend on teacher involvement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(5), 635-652.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Wakeman, S. Y., Pennington, R., Cerrato, B., Saunders, A., & Ahlgrim-Dezell, L. (2021) Parent perceptions regarding literacy instruction for students with intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 65: 86– 98. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jir.12795>.

Walker, R., Swain, J., & Pellicano, E. (2022). “It’s about sharing a moment”: Parents' views and experiences of home reading with their autistic children with moderate-to-severe intellectual disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 128, 104289–104289. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2022.104289>

Walker, M.A., & Stevens, E.A (2017) Reading instruction for students with learning disabilities: an observation study synthesis (1980–2014). *Learning Disability Quarterly* 40(1): 17–28.

Walmsley, J. (1993) Explaining. In: P. Shakespeare, D. Atkinson & S. French (Eds) *Reflecting on Research Practice: Issues in Health Social Welfare*, pp. 36–46. Open University Press, Buckingham.

Walmsley, J., & Johnson, K. (2003). *Inclusive Research with People with Learning Disabilities: Past, Present and Futures*. London and New York: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Warmington, M., & Hulme, C. (2012). Phoneme awareness, visual-verbal paired-associate learning, and rapid automatized naming as predictors of individual differences in reading ability. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 16(1), 45-62.

Watson, D., & Tinsley, D. (2013). *Integrating information technology into education*. London: Springer.

Watson, S. L., Richards, D. A., Hayes, S., Lecomte, J. & Taua, C. (2012). The right to consent to treatment. In: D. Griffiths, F. Owen & S. L. Watson (Eds). *The Human Rights Agenda for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities*. (pp. 139–168). New York: NADD Press

Wehmeyer, M. L. (2006). Beyond access: Ensuring progress in the general education curriculum for students with severe disabilities. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 31(4), 322–326. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/154079690603100405>

Wei, X., Blackorby, J., & Schiller, E. (2011). Growth in reading achievement of students with disabilities, Ages 7 to 17. *Exceptional AMERICAN JOURNAL ON INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AAIDD 2018, Vol. 123*, No. 5, 474–494

Weller, P. J. (2011). The Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities and the social model of health: New perspectives (Monash University Faculty of Law Legal Studies Research Paper No. 20). *Journal of Mental Health Law*, 74–83. doi:10.2139/ssrn.2142323

Westling, D. L., & Fox, L. (2009). *Teaching students with severe disabilities* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson

WHO (2018) World Health Organization & The World Bank: World Report on Disability. (2021, February, 17) [https://www.who.int/disabilities/world\\_report/2011/report.pdf](https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf)

Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (2000). Expectancy–Value Theory of Achievement Motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 68–81. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1015>

Wigfield, A., Eccles, J. S., Fredricks, J. A., Simpkins, S., Roeser, R. W., & Schiefele, U. (2015, March 23). Development of Achievement Motivation and Engagement. *Handbook of Child Psychology and Developmental Science*, 1–44. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118963418.childpsy316>

Williamson, P., Hoppey, D., McLeskey, J., Bergmann, E., & Moore, H. (2020). Trends in LRE placement rates over the past 25 years. *The Journal of Special Education*, 53(4), 236–244. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466919855052>



Willig, C. (2008) *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology* Maidenhead: Open University Press

Wilson, L. (2004). Towards equality: the voices of young disabled people in Disability Rights Commission Research. *Support for Learning*. 19(4), 162-168.

Wink, J. (2000). *Critical pedagogy: Notes from the real world* (2nd ed. ed.). New York: Longman.

Winiarska, A. (2017). Qualitative longitudinal research: Application, potentials and challenges in the context of migration research. *CMR Working Papers*, 103(161), 1-29.

Winne, P. H. (1996). A metacognitive view of individual differences in self-regulated learning. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 8(4), 327-353.

Wolf, M., & Bowers, P. G. (2000). Naming-speed processes and developmental reading disabilities: An introduction to the special issue on the double-deficit hypothesis. *Journal of learning disabilities*, 33(4), 322-324.

Wollak, B.A., & Koppenhaver, D.A. (2011). Developing Technology-Supported, Evidence-Based Writing Instruction for Adolescents with Significant Writing Disabilities. *Assistive Technology Outcomes and Benefits*, 7(1), 1–23.

Woodring J., Foley S., Santoro Rado G., Brown K. & Hamner D. (2006) Focus groups and methodological reflections: conscientious flexibility in the field. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* 16, 248–58. doi: 10.1177/10442073060160040601.

Woods, P., & Sikes, P. (2022). *Successful Writing for Qualitative Researchers* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Woolfolk, A., & Margetts, K. (2007). *Educational psychology*. NSW, Australia: Pearson. Prentice Hall.

Yin, R. (1989). *Case study research: Design and methods* (rev.ed ). Beverly Hills CA: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (1994). Discovering the future of the case study. Method in evaluation research. *Evaluation practice*, 15(3), 283-290

Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Ypsilanti, A., Grouios, G., Zikouli, A., & Hatzinikolaou, K. (2006). Speed of naming in children with Williams and Down syndromes. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 31*, 87–94.

Ysseldyke, J. E., Algozzine, R., & Algozzine, B. (2006). *The legal foundations of special education: A practical guide for every teacher* (Vol. 2). Corwin Press.

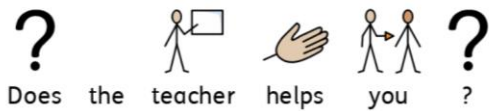
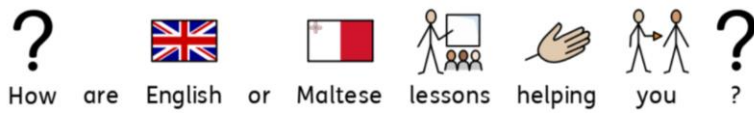
Zeilinger, E. L., Stiehl, K. A. M., Bagnall, H., & Scior, K. (2020). Intellectual disability literacy and its connection to stigma: A multinational comparison study in three European countries. *PLOS ONE, 15*(10), e0239936. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239936>

Zucker, T.A., Cabell, S.Q., Oh, Y., & Wang, X. (2020). Asking Questions Is Just the First Step: Using Upward and Downward Scaffolds. *The Reading Teacher, 74*(00), 275– 283. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1943>

APPENDIX A: OPEN ENDED AND CLOSE ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS -SYMWRITER

VERSION

Range of open-ended questions











Range of close-ended questions

 Do you  prefer  English  or Maltese  lessons?

 Which  is harder  reading  or writing?

 What  do you  prefer  grammar  or writing stories  ?

 Who  helps  you  in  class,  teacher  or support assistant  ?

## APPENDIX B: SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – SMT AND PARENTS

### Questions for SMT

What is your role within the school?

For how long have you been in this role?

What do you think about the literacy experience that students have in the CCP class?

In what ways do teachers and LSEs ask for support on the literacy aspect?

What do you observe regarding interaction between teachers and LSEs during literacy lessons?

The school support students who mainly have a mild and moderate intellectual disability. Students with severe intellectual disability are receiving their education in other settings. What is your experience of these students who are severe?

What challenges were encountered when teaching literacy to these students?

Were educators willing to support them in a mainstream context?

Can you kindly explain what system is used to decide which students and how students move from a mainstream school to a Resource Centre?

### Questions for Parents

For how many years has your child been attending CCP class for literacy?

What have been your experience so far?

Were literacy experiences positive for your child?

Do you think that the experiences that students are receiving in literacy are preparing them for their life and for future employment?

What areas of literacy does your child prefers and why?

What areas of literacy does your child struggles with and why?

What can you tell me about the experience of literacy homework in relation to what goes on in class?

Would you like to see any changes with regards to the literacy curriculum? Are there any skills that you wish that they learnt?

What are your general experiences in the secondary school in relation to inclusion in general and the IEP process especially when discussing goals related to language, communication and skills related to literacy?

## APPENDIX C: OBSERVATION TOOL

Experiencing Literacy: Listening to the voices of students with intellectual disabilities in Maltese Secondary Schools.

1

**Name of Student:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Grade:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Level of intellectual disability:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teacher:** \_\_\_\_\_

**LSE:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **OBSERVATION CHECKLIST - ENGAGEMENT**

**Taken from** Le Lant, C., & Lawson, M.J. (2019). Anew student engagement observational instrument for use with students with intellectual disability. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 19(4), 304-314.

### **OBSERVATION CHECKLIST - LITERACY INSTRUCTION**

**Taken from** University of Texas (2006) Circle Classroom Observation Tool. Retrieved [cotrevised\\_91216.pdf \(cliengage.org\)](https://cliengage.org/cotrevised_91216.pdf)

### **OBSERVATION CHECKLIST - INCLUSION MARKERS FOR ENGAGEMENT**

**Taken from** Nicholas, N. (2020, November 12). *The ultimate student engagement observation checklist* - *Classcraft Blog*. Resource Hub for Schools and Districts.

<https://www.classcraft.com/blog/student-engagement-observation-checklist/>

**STUDENT PROFILE OF CHALLENGES IN THE CLASSROOM**

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL FUNCTIONING		COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING	
<input type="radio"/>	Needs some direction with changes to routine/transitions	<input type="radio"/>	Difficulties acquiring new information, making connections and generalizing
<input type="radio"/>	When frustrated, will respond with minor or no physical aggression	<input type="radio"/>	Some difficulties understanding and following instructions
<input type="radio"/>	Some difficulties with impulse and anger control	<input type="radio"/>	difficulties with multistep and complex tasks
<input type="radio"/>	Minor levels of anxiety	<input type="radio"/>	Skills and abilities unevenly developed across assessed areas
<input type="radio"/>	Occasionally fails to respond to mild behavioural intervention e.g., proximity, signalling, stating expectations, redirection, verbal correction, etc	<input type="radio"/>	Needs concrete task presentation
<input type="radio"/>	Needs some structured behaviour management techniques /procedures e.g., token economy, checklists, shaping, response cost, quiet time, praise, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	Difficulties with complex problem solving
<input type="radio"/>	Will take responsibility for own action only when urged	<input type="radio"/>	Can learn information, but may not generalize or easily apply concepts learned
<input type="radio"/>	Generally attempts new or novel experiences/ activities independently		Difficulties understanding social/interpersonal nuances, especially when they are not easily observable
<input type="radio"/>	Some inability to respect the rights of others		Difficulties with transitions or changes in routine
<input type="radio"/>	Able to problem solve personal and interpersonal issues with minimal adult support	<b>COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONING</b>	
<input type="radio"/>	May attempt to cajole or intimidate others - antisocial or inappropriate behaviours	<input type="radio"/>	Difficulty understanding multi-step
<input type="radio"/>	Sometimes interacts/plays with children much younger or need adult support to socialise	<input type="radio"/>	Requires support to attend to or participate in conversations/class discussions /social interactions
<input type="radio"/>	Occasional non-compliance/defiance	<input type="radio"/>	Difficulty using and interpreting abstract language
<input type="radio"/>	Easily influenced by peers to engage in risky behaviours	<input type="radio"/>	Difficulty interpreting, responding to, or using non-verbal cues
<input type="radio"/>	Socializes with peers at a superficial level	<input type="radio"/>	Requires significant time to process language
<input type="radio"/>	Intermittently invades personal space of others	<input type="radio"/>	Requires reduced rate of oral presentation
<input type="radio"/>	Can only read obvious and concrete social cues	<input type="radio"/>	Information must be presented in steps/chunk
<input type="radio"/>	Displays sexualized behaviour e.g. comments, touching, language.	<input type="radio"/>	Difficulty communicating needs, experiences and interests
<input type="radio"/>	Occasionally uses some verbal aggression (words, volume, tone) to respond to conflict	<input type="radio"/>	May use some vocalizations to try to communicate with others
		<input type="radio"/>	Augmentative and/or alternative communication systems required for self-expression and learning
		<input type="radio"/>	Support to interact with others needed
		<input type="radio"/>	Dependence on imitation/scripts to follow routines
		<input type="radio"/>	Lack of communication skills may lead to frustration/anger; often socially isolated
		<input type="radio"/>	May have moderate to severe dysfluencies impeding overall communication



**OBSERVATION CHECKLIST - ENGAGEMENT**

Name of student	
Age and Year group	
Degree of ID	<input type="checkbox"/> Mild ID <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate ID
Lesson	<input type="checkbox"/> Maltese <input type="checkbox"/> English
Time of lesson	

Description of the lesson in class.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Task engagement behaviours: [Time on task]

- no activity related to task, refuses to do task, pushes task away
- on task rarely, reluctantly complies with instructions
- on task some of the time, complies with instructions, but gets distracted, fidgety, does not perform task readily
- on task most of the time, performs task quickly and readily without interruption, attending.

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Task engagement behaviours: [Eye contact with teacher or task and posture]

- No eye contact with teacher
- Looking towards teacher or activity, but not to engage
- Eyes frequently on teacher or activity
- Predominantly watching teacher or activity.

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Affective engagement behaviours: [Facial expressions, showing emotion]**

- Sad, cries, pouts, angry, frustrated, tantrums; child clearly not enjoying self
- Not upset but lacks real interest; looks bored and expressionless
- Shows some momentary, intense interest; smiling and looks pleased
- Shows sustained intense interest; laughing appropriately, looking to interact with the Teacher, be part of the group.

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Affective engagement behaviours: [Persistence]**

- No attempt to complete focus activity when persistence required
- Made some effort to complete focus activity with assistance when persistence required
- Made some effort on own, but also required assistance with focus activity when persistence required
- Persisted with focus activity independently.

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Cognitive engagement behaviours: [Looking for any feature that connects material to anything the student knows or adds to the task] – Selection use of material**

- No sign of selecting material
- Selects material, but inappropriate to the task
- Selects some or part of the material but not enough to complete task
- Selects correct material, completes task.

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Cognitive engagement behaviours: [Looking for any feature that connects material to anything the student knows or adds to the task] – Elaboration – relating to or transformation of material

- No sign of connecting material to prior learning
- With or without prompting, but no clear connection with material i.e. attempts to elaborate but comments unrelated to ask
- With or without prompting, connects material with previous learning
- No prompting required, connects material with an original elaboration; extends ideas creates other relevant words. Can include non-verbal responses i.e. writing, sign.

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Cognitive engagement behaviours: [Self correction, questioning]

- No sign of relevant questions, self -correction or recognition of error
- With prompting shows some recognition of error, but no clear connection or questions related to task
- With prompting recognises error, some comments related to error and/or task. No relevant questioning
- With no prompting, self corrects, asks relevant questions. Can include statements about the task, the environment.

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Cognitive engagement behaviours: [Progress with a problem in terms of accuracy]

- No progress or not required
- Some progress with much assistance
- Attempts on own, selects a strategy, partially correct.
- Carries out task spontaneously and accurately. Selects a strategy.

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

**OBSERVATION CHECKLIST - INCLUSION MARKERS FOR ENGAGEMENT**

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL MARKERS – These markers are essential to create a conducive learning environment

- Is there evidence to suggest that students feel safe respectfully sharing an unpopular opinion or a view that may challenge the educator?  
.....
- Does the educator create a growth mindset atmosphere in the classroom?  
.....
- Are student successes celebrated?  
.....
- Is student misbehaviour redirected through clear and straightforward instructions?  
.....
- Are consequences clear, immediate, predictable, and connected to specific behaviours?  
.....
- Are student voices heard as often as the teacher's voice?  
.....
- Is there evidence of student joy in the classroom? (Indicated by student demeanour – smiles, laughter and humour and excitement to work on new product)  
.....
- Is there evidence of teacher joy and enthusiasm in their teaching work?  
.....

INTELLECTUAL MARKERS – These markers are essential to create an inclusive learning environment

- Do students have an opportunity to share their thinking verbally, visually or through writing?  
.....
- Does the educator use strategies to solicit participation from every student in the room?  
.....
- Are objectives clear and framed around higher order thinking questions?  
.....
- Are objectives relevant to students? Are students told why a lesson is relevant?  
.....
- Do students have the opportunity to discuss higher order thinking questions with their peers?



.....  
 Does classroom discussion move from peer to peer , allowing them to respond to peer thinking, instead of always moving between teacher and student?  
.....

Do students have the opportunity to solve problems collaboratively with their peers?  
.....

Are there scaffolds in place to help all students meet the respective objectives?  
.....

Is there evidence that assignments have been differentiated based on student needs?  
.....

Is risk taking encouraged in a safe learning environment?  
.....

Does the educator have strategies for checking all students' understanding?  
.....

Are high standards for student behaviour and work quality apparent in the classroom?  
.....

PHYSICAL MARKERS – These classroom markers are essential to create an atmosphere conducive to learning .

Are desks arranged to facilitate discussion or collaboration? Is the desk or seat arrangement student centred?  
.....

Are there options for flexible seating e.g. bean bag, rug?  
.....

Do classroom visuals support content or skill goals from the curriculum? Do classroom visuals enhance or support student understanding of the material?  
.....

STRUCTURAL MARKERS – These markers are essential to create a class that moves away from one size fits all and routines are balanced.

Are there clear routines and procedures in place that students have learned?  
.....

Are lessons structured to include multiple learning modalities?  
.....

Are lessons structured to avoid down time? ( challenge work for early finisher or teacher moving some students through activities without breaking the instructional flow for others)

.....

Are brain breaks and movement breaks present in the lesson structure?

.....

Further notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**OBSERVATION CHECKLIST - LITERACY INSTRUCTION**

Name of student	
Age and Year group	
Degree of ID	<input type="checkbox"/> Mild ID <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate ID
Lesson	<input type="checkbox"/> Maltese <input type="checkbox"/> English
Time of lesson	

Description of the lesson in class.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**ORAL LANGUAGE USE: LANGUAGE TO BUILD BASIC AND ADVANCED UNDERSTANDING**

- Names/labels various items and specific parts of objects (e.g., instead of "Hand me that," "Hand me the apron.").
- Describes how items look and feel; describes action
- Compares/contrasts how items/actions/etc. are the same or
- Inference/judgment, i.e., discusses something not explicitly stated or obvious; discusses making a decision based on evidence or prior knowledge
- Links/makes connections to child's personal experience or child's prior knowledge (e.g., the bear in the text "sniffs" and teacher links
- Explains function/cause and effect

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

**ORAL LANGUAGE USE: VOCABULARY / LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION**

- Talks about vocabulary word(s) in the context of a meaningful activity when it occurs outside of a book reading activity (e.g., during a science activity).
- Excludes vocabulary talk before, during, and after read alouds.
- Provides a child-friendly definition that explains the meaning of a vocabulary word
- Encourages children to say/repeat a vocabulary word with the teacher.
- Encourages children to act out a vocabulary word
- Uses graphic organizer to teach vocabulary or concepts
- Gives examples and non-examples or synonyms/antonyms of the vocabulary word to build meaning around target word

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

**ORAL LANGUAGE USE: ELICITS LANGUAGE FROM CHILDREN**

- Asks knowledge level, basic questions (have right or wrong answers based on what you can see, hear, smell, taste, touch, name, describe, recall, etc.).
- Asks higher level, open-ended, thinking questions (analysis or thinking required, "why," "how," compare, link, explain, etc.).
- Downward scaffolds children's incorrect, ambiguous, or non- response to build their oral language use (e.g., simplify the question; provide clues; reduce choices to either/or question, "Is it too deep or too heavy?"; provide a cloze prompt, "The bucket was too dee..." (deep);
- Upward scaffolds children's correct responses or child's new topic to build their oral language use (e.g., ask for explanation, alternative ideas, or linking; brainstorm more challenging ways to play/use materials).
- Attempts to elicit language from all children, not just those who volunteer or those with stronger speaking skills (e.g., some tools like equity sticks, name tags, or calling on/ directing comments to less engaged children).
- Engages children in conversations that involve child and teacher taking multiple turns about a conversational topic



Notes:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**ORAL LANGUAGE USE: SPEAKING/GRAMMAR SKILLS**

- Models for children how to express their ideas in more mature sentences (e.g., expand child's words by adding an idea)
- Explains to children how to listen to others by looking at speakers and showing genuine interest in their ideas
- Encourages children to correctly pronounce a word (e.g., recast child's statement with correct grammar)

Notes:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**ORAL LANGUAGE USE: CONTEXT (THE WHEN/WHERE)**

- Involves children in large group oral language activities.
- Involves children in small group oral language instruction (e.g., Tier 1-small group for all students or Tier 2-additional small-group for targeted students).
- Provides support and encourage children in oral language practice during center activities (e.g., joins child in center and has a conversation with him/her about what s/he is doing).
- Involves children in oral language transition activities (e.g., having children answer questions before moving from whole group to centers).
- Talks about oral language during unplanned/spontaneous activities (e.g., taking advantage of a teachable moment during an unstructured activity such as outdoor time or meal/ snack, or making a meaningful connection to oral language during an activity in another concept area).

Notes:

.....  
.....

.....

.....

READ ALOUDS: BEFORE READING

- Talks about book and print concepts such as: title, author, illustrator, or cover/parts of book, directionality, etc.
- Asks questions/prompts children to activate prior knowledge of book content or elements related to children's knowledge
- Introduces words/concepts that build background knowledge for the overall understanding of the story
- Tells what the story is about with a brief introduction/ overview,
- Uses a read aloud chart or other visual aid to support or introduce the read aloud or topic (e.g., flannel board pieces, puppets, other props).
- Asks for predictions ("What do you think will happen?"; "What is this story about?"; "How do you think...?").
- Gives a purpose for listening to the story ("As I read, I want you to think about/listen for...").
- Defines a comprehension strategy and explains this is generally something good readers do (e.g., making connections, making predictions, summarizing, asking questions, using prior knowledge, comparing/contrasting, making inferences)

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

READ ALOUDS: DURING READING

- Reads with expression to capture children's attention (e.g., dramatic tone, special voices for characters, etc.).
- Acknowledges child responses or acknowledges children who initiate their own topic during reading with simple praise or brief acknowledgement
- Asks knowledge level, basic questions (have right or wrong answers based on what you can see in illustrations or hear from the words read aloud; eg. recalls names, events, and descriptions, etc.).
- Asks higher level, thinking questions (analysis or thinking required, "why," "how," compare, link, explain, etc.).
- Builds or expands on child responses by adding more information with more than simple praise/brief acknowledgement
- Gives child-friendly explanation of vocabulary words in text (e.g., "Dangerous means not safe)
- Asks children to quickly act out important words or ideas in story
- Encourages children to say/repeat a vocabulary word with the teacher.
- Models or asks children to use prior knowledge connected to previous themes or classroom learning topics
- Models or asks children to make connections between the text and their life or experiences outside the classroom
- Models or asks for predictions ("What do you think will happen if...?"; "How do you think...?").
- Follows up on predictions made to confirm whether the prediction did/did not occur.

- Models or encourages children to think about the purpose for listening discussed before reading (e.g., "We were thinking about...").
- Models or thinks aloud to draw attention to a comprehension strategy (e.g., making connections, making predictions, summarizing, asking questions, using prior knowledge, comparing/contrasting, making inferences)

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

**READ ALOUDS: AFTER READING**

- Asks knowledge level, basic questions (have right or wrong answers based on what you can see in illustrations or hear from the words read; name, describe, recall, etc.).
- Asks higher level thinking questions (analysis or thinking required, "why," "how," compare, link, explain, etc.).
- Summarizes the book's main idea or what was learned (e.g., "In this book we learned...").
- Talks about or reviews vocabulary from the text (e.g., review words on the read aloud chart, discuss vocabulary).
- Discusses/involves children in activities or discussions that extend the read aloud into whole group, transitions, centers, or small groups (e.g., props to act out story, class-made books, etc.).
- Revisits purpose for listening to story (same purpose as stated before reading).
- Defines a comprehension strategy and explains this is generally something good readers do (e.g., making connections, making predictions, summarizing, asking questions, using prior knowledge, comparing/contrasting, making inferences.)

Notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

**WRITTEN EXPRESSION: CORE CONCEPTS (THE WHAT)**

- Talks about correct letter formation
- Talks about letter names/letter-sound correspondence during writing activities
- Talks about print directionality and flow of writing such as - writing progresses from left to right, top to bottom, return sweep during writing activities
- Talks about print features such as letters make words, words versus letters, sentences are made up of words, spaces between words, etc.
- Talks about capitalizing words (name, first word of sentence, I, proper nouns) during writing activities.
- Talks about punctuation (period, question mark, exclamation mark, quotation marks, comma) during writing activities.

Notes:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**WRITTEN EXPRESSION: APPROACHES (THE HOW)**

- Talks about and/or engage children in independent writing activities linked to current themes or topics of interest (e.g., teacher provides support, scaffolding, and guidance as needed).
- Involves children in modeled writing activities in which the teacher controls the pen and the message, but models the writing process (e.g., thinking aloud about process; using correct capitalization, spelling, etc.).
- Engages small or large group of children in shared writing opportunities in which the teacher does all the writing, but elicits ideas for writing from children (e.g., response to literature, daily news, charts related to curriculum theme)
- Engages small or large group of children in interactive writing opportunities in which the teacher shares the pen with students so that they can help write part of the message (e.g., shared writing activities in which children help add punctuation, letters, or words they can write with assistance)

Notes:

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....



## APPENDIX D: UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD RESEARCH ETHICAL APPROVAL



Downloaded: 11/12/2020  
Approved: 11/12/2020

Amanda Schembri Muscat  
Registration number: 180131044  
School of Education  
Programme: Doctorate in Education

Dear Amanda

**PROJECT TITLE:** Experiencing Literacy: Listening to the voices of students with intellectual disability in Maltese Secondary Schools.

**APPLICATION:** Reference Number 037104

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 11/12/2020 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 037104 (form submission date: 10/12/2020); (expected project end date: 30/11/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1084708 version 1 (20/11/2020).
- Participant information sheet 1084462 version 4 (24/11/2020).
- Participant consent form 1084673 version 1 (20/11/2020).
- Participant consent form 1084463 version 2 (20/11/2020).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt  
Ethics Administrator  
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPpolicy.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPpolicy.pdf)
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

## APPENDIX E: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY IN SCHOOLS



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA  
MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION  
DIRECTORATE FOR RESEARCH, LIFELONG  
LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY

Tel: 25982743

researchandinnovation@ilearn.edu.mt

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY

Date: 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021

Ref: R09-2021 926

To: Head of School -  
From: Director

**Title of Research Study:** *Experiencing Literacy: Listening to the voices of students with intellectual disabilities in Maltese Secondary Schools.*

---

The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability would like to inform that approval is granted to **Amanda Schembri** to conduct the research in State Schools according to the official rules and regulations, subject to approval from the Ethics Committee of the respective Higher Educational Institution.

The researcher is committed to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and will ensure that these requirements are followed in the conduct of this research. The researcher will be sending letters with clear information about the research, as well as consent forms to all data subjects and their parents/guardians when minors are involved. Consent forms should be signed in all cases particularly for the participation of minors in research.

For further details about our policy for research in schools, kindly visit [www.research.gov.mt](http://www.research.gov.mt).

Thank you for your attention and cooperation.

Claire Mamo  
MA Ed (Open)  
Research Support Teacher  
Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability

f/ Alex Farrugia  
Director  
Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability  
Great Siege Road | Floriana | VLT 2000  
t: +356 25982443 e: alex.farrugia@gov.mt | [www.education.gov.mt](http://www.education.gov.mt)



MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION

---

MINISTERU GHALL-EDUKAZZJONI  
MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION



## APPENDIX F: EMAIL FROM HEAD OF SCHOOL

---

### Fwd: Authorisation Letter to carry out Research in Schools

---

Anna Spiteri  
To: muscatamanda10 <muscatamanda10@gmail.com>

Sun, Feb 20, 2022 at 9:01 PM

Thank you for your reply. I find no objection with your request. Kindly let me know how you wish to proceed. TY



MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

[www.education.gov.mt](http://www.education.gov.mt)  
Valletta 2018 - European Capital of Culture [www.valletta2018.org](http://www.valletta2018.org)

*Kindly consider your environmental responsibility before printing this e-mail*

[Quoted text hidden]



**image001.jpg**  
24K



## APPENDIX G: INFORMATION EMAIL TO SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM



Amanda Muscat <muscatamanda10@gmail.com>

---

### Research at

---

Amanda Muscat <muscatamanda10@gmail.com>  
To:

Sun, Feb 27, 2022 at 1:28 PM

Dear all

I Hope this email finds you well.

First of all I would like to thank you for the warm welcome last Friday. It is always welcoming coming to your school.

The following is a brief summary of my doctoral dissertation. Should you require more information I will happily provide it accordingly.

**Experiencing Literacy: Listening to the voices of students with intellectual disabilities in Maltese Secondary Schools.**

This research will explore the literacy learning experiences of secondary school students who have a condition which causes a secondary intellectual disability or cognitive impairment and having language difficulties or related communication challenges. This study will focus on students with mild, moderate and severe intellectual disability especially in allowing their voices to emerge. In the Malta local research context, this area has been largely unresearched and this research will provide a platform to students with intellectual disability to voice their experience and thoughts regarding their literacy experiences.

The objectives of the research involve: a. Determining the lived literacy experiences of a group of secondary students aged 13-16 years in the Core Curriculum Programme b. Explore the parents' perception of the literacy curricular experiences that their children are receiving through the Core Curriculum Programme c. Investigating the manner in which the students are engaging in the literacy curricular experience d. Identifying any teaching strategies or approaches which teachers and support educators can adopt to further support and enhance literacy learning for secondary school students with intellectual disabilities. e. Evaluating the suitability of the Literacy Core Curriculum Programme for students with Intellectual disability in secondary mainstream schools.

Research will mainly involve

- Student Observations: These will be carried out in CCP , during literacy lessons. Two lessons of 45 minutes each observations for each student will be carried out. Notes and educators' feedback record fieldnotes will supplement these observations
- Focus groups with parents : permissions and consents will be requested at a later stage
- Open ended interviews with the students using multimodal methods :The interviews with the students will be carried out to capture the perspective and experiences in literacy learning. Multimodal methods include an AAC device used by student or other proposed methods.

Participants : The research focus on students with intellectual disability aged 13-15 years who attend a mainstream Secondary School. The area under research is the emergence of the voices of these students in relation to their literacy experiences. These students will be identified from secondary schools in CCP class in Form 3 or Form 4 (corresponding to ages 13-15)

The plan is as follows:

Friday 4th March 2022 - Will go over files of students in order to identify potential participants in Year 9, 10 and 11. (Year 9 and 10 for actual data, Year 11 for piloting)

After I identify the participants will email another list of dates when I would be coming to observe students accordingly.

Thanks so much and sorry for the lengthy email.

**Kind regards**

## APPENDIX H: SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM CONSENT FORM



### Senior Management Team Consent Form

Experiencing Literacy: Listening to the voices of students with intellectual disabilities in Maltese Secondary Schools.

<b>Please tick the appropriate boxes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Taking Part in the Project</b>		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include participating in focus group for parents or caregivers and for students will be participating in an interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>How my information will be used during and after the project</b>		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers</b>		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

**Project contact details for further information: Amanda Schembri Muscat**

## APPENDIX I: EMAIL SENT TO CCP CLASS EDUCATORS AND CONSENT FORM OF LSES



Amanda Muscat <muscatamanda10@gmail.com>

---

### Information to be provided to CCP literacy teachers

---

Amanda Muscat <muscatamanda10@gmail.com>

Fri, Mar 11, 2022 at 11:04 AM

To: 'Amanda Muscat' <muscatamanda10@gmail.com>

Dear Ms

In preparation for the class visits in Literacy CCP Class kindly find hereunder some information to be kindly be forwarded to Maltese and English CCP class teachers in Year 9, 10 and 11

The following is a brief summary of my doctoral dissertation. Should you require more information I will happily provide it accordingly.

**Experiencing Literacy: Listening to the voices of students with intellectual disabilities in Maltese Secondary Schools.**

This research will explore the literacy learning experiences of secondary school students who have a condition which causes a secondary intellectual disability or cognitive impairment and having language difficulties or related communication challenges. This study will focus on students with mild, moderate and severe intellectual disability especially in allowing their voices to emerge. In the Malta local research context, this area has been largely unresearched and this research will provide a platform to students with intellectual disability to voice their experience and thoughts regarding their literacy experiences.

The objectives of the research involve: a. Determining the lived literacy experiences of a group of secondary students aged 13-16 years in the Core Curriculum Programme b. Explore the parents' perception of the literacy curricular experiences that their children are receiving through the Core Curriculum Programme c. Investigating the manner in which the students are engaging in the literacy curricular experience d. Identifying any teaching strategies or approaches which teachers and support educators can adopt to further support and enhance literacy learning for secondary school students with intellectual disabilities. e. Evaluating the suitability of the Literacy Core Curriculum Programme for students with Intellectual disability in secondary mainstream schools.

Research will mainly involve

- Student Observations: These will be carried out in CCP , during literacy lessons. Two lessons of 45 minutes each observations for each student will be carried out. Notes and educators' feedback record fieldnotes will supplement these observations
- Focus groups with parents : permissions and consents will be requested at a later stage
- Open ended interviews with the students using multimodal methods :The interviews with the students will be carried out to capture the perspective and experiences in literacy learning. Multimodal methods include an AAC device used by student or other proposed methods.

Participants : The research focus on students with intellectual disability aged 13-15 years who attend a mainstream Secondary School. The area under research is the emergence of the voices of these students in relation to their literacy experiences. These students will be identified from secondary schools in CCP class in Form 3 or Form 4 (corresponding to ages 13-15)



## LSEs Consent Form

Experiencing Literacy: Listening to the voices of students with intellectual disabilities in Maltese Secondary Schools.

<b>Please tick the appropriate boxes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Taking Part in the Project</b>		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include participating in focus group for parents or caregivers and for students will be participating in an interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>How my information will be used during and after the project</b>		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers</b>		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date

**Project contact details for further information: Amanda Schembri Muscat**

## APPENDIX J: PARENT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM



### Parent/Caregiver Information Sheet

#### Information Sheet

---

Dear Parent

You are being invited to take part in a research project. This research is called Experiencing Literacy: Listening to the voices of students with intellectual disability in Maltese Secondary Schools.

Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.'

The planned duration of the project is of 2 years which may be extended to 3 years should this be necessary. This project is part fulfilment of the Doctorate in Education at University of Sheffield. Participants are chosen as follows: Students aged 13-16 with intellectual disability who attend Core Curriculum Programme in Secondary Schools. The intention is to listen to the experiences of these students regarding their literacy learning. This research intends to address the knowledge gap on experiences of students with intellectual disabilities especially in allowing their voices to emerge. In the Malta local research context, this area has been largely unresearched and this research will provide a platform to students with intellectual disabilities to voice their experience and thoughts regarding their literacy experiences. There is also a gap in the local scenario as the Core Curriculum Programme was not evaluated in terms of its suitability and the kind of experiences it is providing to students in that particular stream. The Core Curriculum Programme is offered in mainstream secondary schools for students with educational needs. The aim of the research is to explore and allow for the emergence of the voices of students with intellectual disabilities in relation to their literacy curricular experiences within the context of the Core Curriculum Programme.

The objectives of the research involve:

- a. Determining the lived literacy experiences of a group of secondary students aged 13-16 years in the Core Curriculum Programme
- b. Explore the parents' perception of the literacy curricular experiences that their children are receiving through the Core Curriculum Programme
- c. Investigating the manner in which the students are engaging in the literacy curricular experience
- d. Identifying any teaching strategies or approaches which teachers and support educators can adopt to further support and enhance literacy learning for secondary school students with intellectual disabilities.
- e. Evaluating the suitability of the Literacy Core Curriculum Programme for students with Intellectual disabilities in secondary mainstream schools.

Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary and if you do not wish to take part there will be no negative consequences. As a participant you may discontinue participation at any time. You do not need to give a





## Parent/Caregiver Information Sheet

reason. Researcher needs to be informed accordingly of this decision by being contacted on email on [aschembrimuscat1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:aschembrimuscat1@sheffield.ac.uk)

Should you wish to participate, your involvement will last for two years, possibly three. Parents are called for a focus group of around 1 hour and students will attend for one interview. Focus groups will be used for parents and observations in class will be held for every student identified. Besides this, interviews with students will be held accordingly. Students will be asked to describe the experience of literacy learning and this will be coupled with observations in the classrooms to research student engagement.

The benefits of taking part involve students who are voicing their experiences, identifying best practices and supporting educators in teaching and learning of literacy.

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to the researcher. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications unless you have given your explicit consent for this. If you agree to us sharing the information you provide with other researchers (e.g. by making it available in a data archive) then your personal details will not be included unless you explicitly request this.

When data is collected, no one will have access to it. The data will be coded and the participants involved will have their name anonymised. Data will be stored for 3 years after publication. As a participant you will be given a copy of this information sheet. I would like to thank you in advance for participating in this research

**Ms. Amanda Schembri Muscat BSc Hons Comm Ther MInc Ed**  
79064143



## Parent/Caregiver Consent Form

Experiencing Literacy: Listening to the voices of students with intellectual disabilities in Maltese Secondary Schools.

<b>Please tick the appropriate boxes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Taking Part in the Project</b>		
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated DD/MM/YYYY or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include participating in focus group for parents or caregivers and for students will be participating in an interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>How my information will be used during and after the project</b>		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers</b>		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant [printed]

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher [printed]

Signature

Date











**Project contact details for further information: Amanda Schembri Muscat**

## APPENDIX K: STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

 Experiencing 
  Literacy: 
  Listening 
  to the 
  voices 
  of 
  students 
  with 
  intellectual 
  disability 
  in 
  Maltese 
  Secondary Schools.












  
 Student information sheet

.....




 You 
  are being 
  invited 
  to 
  take 
  part 
  in 
  a 
  research 
  project.

 Please 
  read this 
  information.

 Ask 
  us 
  if 
  you 
  have 
  questions.

 In 
  this 
  project 
  I 
  would 
  like 
  to 
  know 
  how 
  you



 feel 
  during 
  literacy lessons 
  at 
  school.







 You can 
  choose 
  if 
  you 
  wish 
  to 
  participate 
  or 
  not.

 If 
  you 
  do not 
  participate 
  nothing 
  bad 
  will 
  happen



 Experiencing 
  Literacy: 
  Listening 
  to the 
  voices 
  of 
  students 
  with 
  intellectual 
  disability 
  in 
  Maltese 
  Secondary Schools.









 We 
  will 
  talk about 
  how 
  you 
  are doing 
  in the






 literacy lessons 
  and 
  how 
  you 
  feel 
  about it.

 The learning support 
  educator 
  will 
  be with 
  us 
  as well.







 The information 
  you 
  give 
  us 
  will not 
  be 
  given to anyone.






 Your 
  name 
  and 
  school 
  will not 
  show 
  in the 
  project.






 When 
  we 
  talk 
  there 
  will 
  be a 
  video 
  recording .

 If 
  you 
  do not like 
  it 
  you can 
  stop 
  anytime.




## Student Consent Form







  
 Experiencing Literacy: Listening to the voices of students with






  
 intellectual disability in Maltese Secondary Schools.

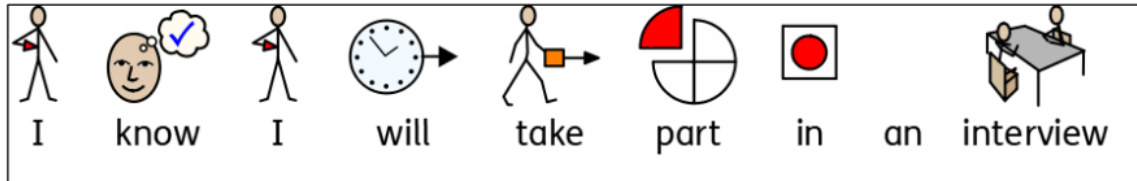





  
 I read and understood information sheet .






  
 I could ask questions



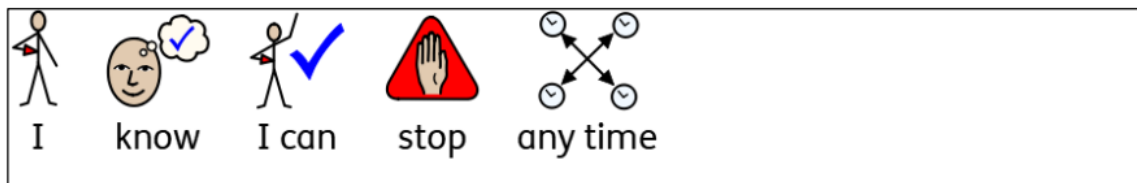
## Student Consent Form



yes



no

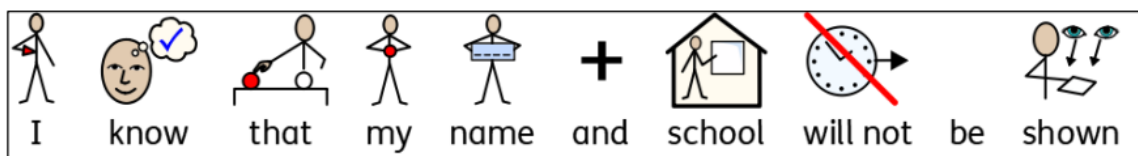


yes

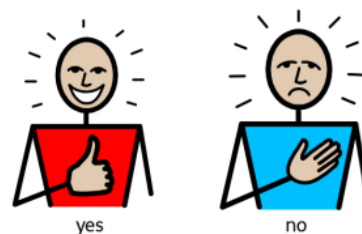
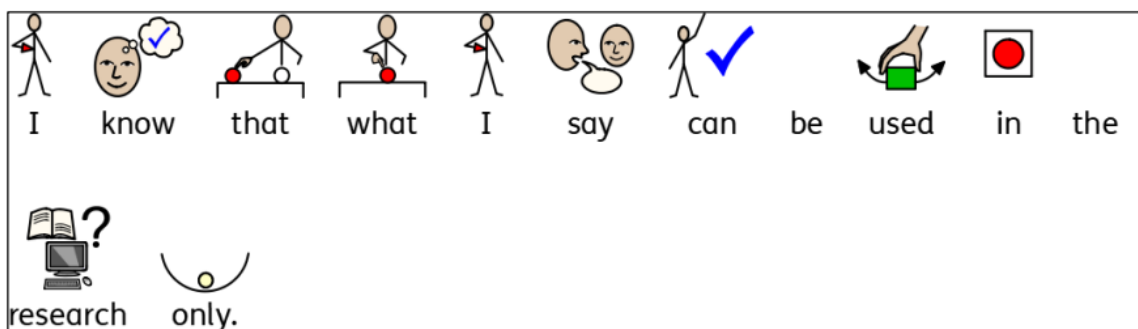


no

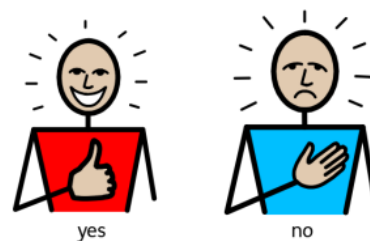
## Student Consent Form















I know that my name and school will not be shown



I know that what I say can be used in the research only.



## Student Consent Form





















I know that if other people use my words , my name






will not show



I know that this is a project of and copyright of

University of Sheffield





## Student Consent Form

.....



Signature



Date



Project



contact details

for



further



information

Amanda Schembri Muscat

[aschembrimuscat1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:aschembrimuscat1@sheffield.ac.uk)

356 79064143

## APPENDIX L: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF STUDENTS

Adolf transcript

Speaker	Verbal expressions	Non verbal communication
<b>Researcher</b>	This is what I would like to discuss with you Adolf. I was with you in English and Maltese lessons. What do you prefer most? English or Maltese?	Student looking attentively at my questions with visuals
<b>Adolf</b>	Maltese	Said it in convincing tone and pointing in air with pointer finger
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes all right. What activities do you prefer? Example when you do games, poems, acting? What do you like most?	
<b>Adolf</b>	Acting	Said it in convincing tone and pointing in air with pointer finger. The interview followed a Maltese lesson whereby they were acting a poem .
<b>Researcher</b>	Ah you like acting?	
<b>Adolf</b>	Acting	
<b>Researcher</b>	And do you prefer reading or writing?	
<b>Adolf</b>	Reading	Doing hand gesture so as to emphasise a point
<b>Researcher</b>	And do you prefer reading in English or Maltese?	
<b>Adolf</b>	English	
<b>Researcher</b>	Are you usually happy to be in class during the English lesson?	
<b>Adolf</b>	Yes I am happy	
<b>Researcher</b>	So you feel more happy in English than in Maltese?	
<b>Adolf</b>	Yes	
<b>Researcher</b>	Is there a topic you particularly liked? I heard you did about carnival, summer, (LSE suggests summer) Which topic did you enjoy most?	
<b>Adolf</b>	Hobbies	LSE confirms that they did about hobbies as well
<b>Researcher</b>	And what was your hobby? [8 second pause] LSE asks him again What is your hobby? Riding...	
<b>Adolf</b>	Riding the horse.	Adolf never made contact with LSE and kept looking

		downward at the paper with the questions.
<b>Researcher</b>	Riding the horse? [ I look at LSE to confirm response – LSE repeats the cue, No Adolf, Riding the h....]	
<b>Adolf</b>	The bike.	
<b>Researcher</b>	Okay reading the bike, the bicycle	
<b>Adolf</b>	Yes the bicycle	
<b>Researcher</b>	LSE interjects conversation and clarifies that he also enjoyed riding the horse when they went horse riding.	
<b>Adolf</b>	Yes	He did thumb up on the LSEs explanation and lifted head up indicating happiness that he was understood.
<b>Researcher</b>	That’s nice and fun. So you enjoyed it when you went horse riding?	
<b>Adolf</b>	Enjoyed	Repeated thumb up signal.
<b>Researcher</b>	Was it a big or small horse?	
<b>Adolf</b>	It was a big..	He signalled the sign for big.
<b>Researcher</b>	Ah ok it was a big horse. And was it scary or not?	
<b>Adolf</b>	Noooo	He signalled no
<b>Researcher</b>	Who helps you when you are in class? Ms Y? the teacher? Or together?	
<b>Adolf</b>	The teacher	Points to his LSE who is in front of him
<b>Researcher</b>	And Ms Y does she help you?	
<b>Adolf</b>	-----	He extends his hand and makes a clear reference to her with his pointing finger but does not say anything.
<b>Researcher</b>	Ah because she is the teacher. You are the teacher for him [addressing LSE]	
<b>Researcher</b>	So Ms Y helps you most?	
<b>Adolf</b>	Ehe [yes]	He confirms it by pointing at her again
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you prefer writing or sticking pictures like today?	
<b>Adolf</b>	Sticking pictures	Did action of sticking pictures
<b>Researcher</b>	When you do writing do you prefer it in a grammar activity or when you write a story?	
<b>Adolf</b>	When I write a story	
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you usually talk about the story with Ms Y before?	



<b>Adolf</b>	[unrecognisable vocalisation while pointing at Ms Y]
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you write something about it? [following my question Ms Y asks whether they ever discuss the story]
<b>Adolf</b>	Yes [he points at Ms Y and says Yes to indicate his choice]
<b>Researcher</b>	Is there anything you want to do more in the English and Maltese lessons?
<b>Adolf</b>	Maltese?
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes ok Maltese. What do you prefer to do more? Drawing, hands on, activities, games, or maybe to talk more in class with teacher
<b>Adolf</b>	[Took both hands out to signal] Hands on.
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes ok when activities are hands on. Thanks Adolf hi5
<b>Adolf</b>	Ok <span style="float: right;">Adolf does hi 5</span>

Andrew transcript

<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Verbal expressions</b>	<b>Non verbal communication</b>
<b>Researcher</b>	Andrew this is what we are going to do. What do you prefer most English or Maltese?	Student rubbing head and placing head down between legs
<b>Andrew</b>	English	
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you feel that you learn a lot in English? Yes or no?	
<b>Andrew</b>	Yes	Replies in fast manner and hiding face in hand.
<b>Researcher</b>	Is there any topic that you liked and enjoyed? [ LSE repeats question – What do you enjoy?] When you see videos, when you do activities?	Student tries to reach for switch as he enjoyed pressing them during consent exercise.
<b>Andrew</b>	Games	He takes both my hand and his LSE who is sitting next to him.
<b>Researcher</b>	All right games . And you take part in these games?	
<b>Andrew</b>	-----	He takes my hand and pulls me to go up. He seems to move away from interview but LSE calls him and he remains standing. He looks impatient and we reassure him that it is soon finished.

<b>Researcher</b>	And do you prefer reading or writing Andrew?	
<b>Andrew</b>	Reading	
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you prefer reading more in English than Maltese?	[ sits down again next to me]
<b>Andrew</b>	In English	[lies back on LSE but keeps looking at me]
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you like writing? [ LSE suggests using a scale and she says, a lot, a bit or none at all]	
<b>Andrew</b>	A lot	
<b>Researcher</b>	And you like writing more in English or Maltese?	Student starts humming a song.
<b>Andrew</b>	English	
<b>Researcher</b>	And who helps you more, your teacher, your miss [referring to LSE]? [after 10 seconds the question was repeated] Who helps you in the English?	
<b>Andrew</b>	Teacher	
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok so the teacher helps you as well in the lesson. So you enjoy your lessons?	
<b>Andrew</b>	Yes	Student places face in hands, looking tired and distressed so interview was finalised.
<b>Researcher</b>	Well done Andrew thankyou very much	

#### Adam transcript

<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Verbal expressions</b>	<b>Non verbal communication</b>
<b>Researcher</b>	This is what I would like to discuss with you Adam. I was with you in English and Maltese lessons and I saw you enjoying your lessons. Which subject do you prefer most?	Sitting calmly holdings both hands together and composed.
<b>Adam</b>	[Sigh] English [He closes eyes and looks stuck] [He places fingers on his forehead as if trying to find an answer] So..	Said it in convincing tone and pointing in air with pointer finger
<b>Researcher</b>	It is fine. Which one is your favourite English or Maltese?	[reworded question as he was visibly confused]
<b>Adam</b>	English	When giving answer makes hand movement indicating extra effort to say it.

<b>Researcher</b>	Very good so in English, do you prefer reading or writing? For example reading of a book or writing a story?	
<b>Adam</b>	Writ....ohh.. reading.	
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok reading. Do you enjoy reading aloud in class?	
<b>Adam</b>	Yes	Very composed and hands still joined.
<b>Researcher</b>	I could hear your reading how well it is. Can you tell me one thing that you have learnt in the English lesson?	
<b>Adam</b>	[ when question was asked he became visible tense again, did his face as if he was going to start shouting or getting angry but no sound came out. Instead he placed one hand on his forehead and another one tapping on the table] Come on! [this was a phrase used when talking to self]	
<b>Researcher</b>	Did you have a favourite lesson on something that you like?	
<b>Adam</b>	Ummm [3 seconds pause] Ummm [3 seconds pause]	
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you prefer topics on different countries, on sport, on ?	
<b>Adam</b>	Sports	[He said is clear and loudly and making eye contact]
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok so sports is your favourite topic. What is the hardest in English? When you talk and discuss something or when you are writing about something?	
<b>Adam</b>	Writing about something.	
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok writing. Is it when you do grammar activity or when you do an essay writing?	
<b>Adam</b>	The composition.	Gave answer and looked at me.
<b>Researcher</b>	DO you find help? Does someone helps you when you need?	
<b>Adam</b>	Yes	
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you get help from the teacher, from the LSE? Who helps you most.	
<b>Adam</b>	So [ pause of 4 seconds]	He looks visibly in difficulty to give an answer to this question.
<b>Researcher</b>	Who helps you in lesson, the teacher or Ms Erika?	

<b>Adam</b>	Hmmm [ he looks up and turns his head sideways] Teacher	He taps his head on the table when he says teacher. Physical movement of hand is done simultaneously with his verbal answer which seems effortful.
<b>Researcher</b>	What do you prefer in the English lesson? That the teacher talks or do you prefer that you have time to talk?	
<b>Adam</b>	I talk more	Answer given very fast
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok that is very good so you think that if you have time to talk more you will enjoy it more?	
<b>Adam</b>	Yes [mumbles something and looks visibly confused again]	
<b>Researcher</b>	LSE interjects and asks him 'Do you like talking Adam?'	
<b>Adam</b>	Yes	Very clear and fast answer
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes he likes talking during the lesson. When you do the compositions, what is hard, when you think about the ideas or when you write it down?	
	Here the LSE ask me to stop the recording as she is noticing that he is choosing the last answer and I explained that this is a possible occurrence in interviews with students with intellectual disability however the questions that follow will be checking this.	
<b>Researcher</b>	When you are writing the compositions what is the hardest, writing the composition or thinking of the ideas?	
<b>Adam</b>	Thinking of the ideas.	He chose the last answer once again
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok so that seems to be difficult as well.	
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok maybe we can even ask Ms Erika – What do you do when this happens?  Do pictures help you?	LSE replies that she shows him pictures related to the topic. My attention moves back to the student and I ask another question.
<b>Adam</b>	Yes	
<b>Researcher</b>	So pictures help you and you can think more about ideas on the topic. Thankyou Adam that's all	Smiled at me
<b>Adam</b>	You re welcome.	
<b>Researcher</b>	When you do writing do you prefer it in a grammar activity or when you write a story?	

Ian transcript

Speaker	Verbal expressions	Non verbal communication
Researcher	Ian do you prefer questions to be in English or Maltese?	
Ian	English	
Researcher	Ok very good we do them in English. Do you prefer your English lessons or Maltese lessons?	
Ian	English	
Researcher	How do you describe your English lessons? You can tell me	
Ian	Good?	[Opens hand and looking in a questioning manner]
Researcher	Ok. Are they fun?	
Ian	Sometimes	
Researcher	Can you give me an example of when they are fun? What do you do in the lesson when they are fun?	
Ian	[8 second pause] I don't know.	
Researcher	Ok I'll give you some examples. Is it more fun when you games, wordsearches, you tube?	
Ian	Wordsearches and games	
Researcher	You like games and you like word searches very good. Do you enjoy it when the lesson has a video on you tube or an activity on the interactive whiteboard?	
Ian	Yes when there is a video.	
Researcher	Ok. Do you feel that lessons in English and Maltese help you to learn more?	
Ian	Yes they do	
Researcher	Which aspects do you prefer more? Let's start with English- do you prefer reading, conversation, writing?	
Ian	Probably the reading.	
Researcher	Ok very good reading. DO you prefer reading a book for a story or when you do a comprehension activity.	
Ian	To read a story	
Researcher	So you read to enjoy the story and learn new things.	

lan	-----	Looks at me and confirmed with head gesture.
Researcher	Is there a particular topic that you like reading about? Sports, fiction, games, anything that you like?	
lan	I think about games	Looks confused and places hands over chin whilst thinking.
Researcher	On the computer?	
lan	[Nods yes] Yes computer games	
Researcher	Is there a lesson that you really enjoyed and it was good?	
lan	The lesson I enjoy the most is ICT	
Researcher	ICT ok and usually it is in English ?	LSE clarifies that tasks are in English
lan	Yes and sometimes Maltese	
Researcher	DO you usually have instructions and you do it on the computer?	
lan	Yes	He is doing more eye contact and more interested when topic changed to ICT.
Researcher	Ok that's how it works. Is there something you want to do more in your lessons? In my English lessons I want more....	
lan	[pause for 5 sec] More activities	
Researcher	More activities related to reading, writing, hands on activities?	
lan	More reading	
Researcher	Ok so you would like to do more reading and you prefer it. Do you manage to do more reading at home in your free time?	
lan	No I play a lot.	
Researcher	But do you do reading when playing in the games?	
lan	No	He shakes his head.
Researcher	When you need help during the lesson who helps you the most?	
lan	I get from my miss	Points at LSE in front of him.
Researcher	Do you usually do activities with your peers and friends?	
lan	Yes	
Researcher	Do you enjoy that?	
lan	Yes	

<b>Researcher</b>	How do you feel about the Maltese? Do you find it harder as a subject?
<b>Ian</b>	A bit hard and a little bit easy.
<b>Researcher</b>	Which parts are the hardest in Maltese?
<b>Ian</b>	The hardest is probably....[thinks for 4 sec] writing a story.
<b>Researcher</b>	That's a good point very good. Do you usually think about the ideas first? Or you sit down and write the story? DO you plan it?
<b>Ian</b>	Yes I plan the story
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok and then you write it. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your lessons in English and Maltese
<b>Ian</b>	No that's all
<b>Researcher</b>	Thankyou very much Ian.

Nora transcripts

<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Verbal expressions</b>	<b>Non verbal communication</b>
<b>Researcher</b>	So Nora, I have seen you in class and I saw you during your English and Maltese lessons. Is there a subject that you prefer most?	
<b>Nora</b>	English	
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes that's good – English. Do you think you learn a lot from your English lesson?	
<b>Nora</b>	Hmmhmm (yes)	Looks downward with less confidence
<b>Researcher</b>	Is there something that you like in your English lesson?	
<b>Nora</b>	Ehrrm ...[pause for 6 sec] -----	Student seems confused, with her pointer she is rubbing her forehead indicating she is thinking hard about the answer.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you prefer reading, writing, comprehensions?	
<b>Nora</b>	Writing	Very convinced tone of voice.
<b>Researcher</b>	That's good, writing. Very interesting. What do you prefer when writing? Grammar activities, when you have to write a story, a summary of a book, Which one do you prefer?	
<b>Nora</b>	Grammar	Thinks for about 3 seconds

<b>Researcher</b>	Ok so you prefer grammar exercises when they ask you to do verb, a pronoun, preposition etc?	
<b>Nora</b>	-----	She signals yes with her head.
<b>Researcher</b>	Is there something which you find very hard in English or in Maltese?	
<b>Nora</b>	Stammers on I I think to think ideas.	
<b>Researcher</b>	Hmm ok thinking about ideas. So when do you need to think about ideas?	
<b>Nora</b>	Hmmm [pause of 5 seconds]	Student seems confused, with her pointer she is rubbing her forehead indicating she is thinking hard about the answer.
<b>Researcher</b>	Is it during a comprehension when you try to find answer or in a composition or in a summary of a book?	She was very attentive to options.
<b>Nora</b>	To do a summary.	
<b>Researcher</b>	And do you find it difficult to find ideas when you are writing a story.	Repeated thumb up signal.
<b>Nora</b>	Ehe [yes]	
<b>Researcher</b>	Who usually helps you in class?	
<b>Nora</b>	Ms.E	Answer given very fast and looking at LSE who was close to us.
<b>Researcher</b>	Ms.E helps you very good. Does the teacher helps you as well?	
<b>Nora</b>	Yes	
<b>Researcher</b>	And what about your friends? Do they also help you sometime?	
<b>Nora</b>	Sometimes yes.	
<b>Researcher</b>	Is there a favourite topic that you did in your English lesson?	
<b>Nora</b>	-----	She looks confused again with this question. Trying to think hard.
<b>Researcher</b>	I saw you doing on the London city, some songs.. Which topic do you prefer?	
<b>Nora</b>	The street of London.	
<b>Researcher</b>	Ah ok it is the book that you just did. It was very interesting. Did you like a particular character?	
<b>Nora</b>	Yes	



<b>Researcher</b>	Who was it?	
<b>Nora</b>	I like Jimmy.	Stammered on the 'I'
<b>Researcher</b>	Ah ok yes Jimmy very good. Do you talk enough during the lessons?	
<b>Nora</b>	I talk more	Expressed herself using hands in determined manner.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you want to talk more or you already talk enough?	
<b>Nora</b>	I talk more	
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok you want to talk more during the lesson. But are you going to talk about the lesson?	
<b>Nora</b>	Yessss	
<b>Researcher</b>	What can you tell me about the Maltese lessons? What do you like most?	
<b>Nora</b>	[3 sec pause] Like English	She looked perplexed and rubbing chin
<b>Researcher</b>	So you still like English more and absolutely more than Maltese	
<b>Nora</b>	Yes it's my favourite subject.	
<b>Researcher</b>	Thanks so much Nora.	

Simon transcript

<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Verbal expressions</b>	<b>Non verbal communication</b>
<b>Researcher</b>	Simon what lessons do you prefer? English or Maltese?	
<b>Simon</b>	Maltese	Half way through my question let out a shout. He is looking in front of him with hands in pocket.
<b>Researcher</b>	SO you prefer more the Maltese activities or the English activities?	
<b>Simon</b>	[4 sec pause]  Maltese	He lied down on LSE and held her hand The LSE was encouraging him to sit properly to answer. When he said his answer was done in a very convinced voice.
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok very good. And there any activities that you like?	
<b>Simon</b>	Yeah	following his answer he got agitated, placed head down and started shouting and

		groaning. LSE tried calming him down.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you prefer word searches, you tube, when you do role plays? Which one do you prefer?	
<b>Simon</b>	Big small	Pointed towards my questions
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you do big and small?	LSE gestures that no they do not do them
<b>Simon</b>	-----	
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you prefer videos on you tube or the activities?	
<b>Simon</b>	Videos	
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok videos on you tube.	
<b>Simon</b>	Yes	[Simon pushes my tablet and paper away but no visible frustration]
<b>Researcher</b>	Which one do you prefer? Reading or writing?	
<b>Simon</b>	Writing	
<b>Researcher</b>	And you like writing even in Maltese? Do you prefer doing grammar or composition?	
<b>Simon</b>	[Shouting and doing unintelligible vocalisations] Grammar	He got agitated, placed head down and started shouting and groaning. LSE tried calming him down. LSE In the meantime asks him again, if grammar or compositions
<b>Researcher</b>	And do you like comprehensions or do you like to write stories?	
<b>Simon</b>	Writing stories	Very convinced answer He holds my hand and move my hand around.
<b>Researcher</b>	That s good to write stories. What do you like in English?	
<b>Simon</b>	I can calm myself down. Take a deep breath. Count to ten, think what I am trying to say, Keep hands and feet to myself.	Simon looked agitated and LSE got him visual cards of calming down and he read them.
<b>Researcher</b>	Is it ok if we do one more Sim?	Holding his hand as he didn't want to leave my hand.
<b>Simon</b>	Yes listening , focused.	
<b>LSE</b>	Simon you prefer Maltese or English?	

<b>Simon</b>	Maltese	Myself and LSE signal to each other that once again chose Maltese as his favourite.
<b>Researcher</b>	It s ok it's the Maltese. Who helps you in class? Ms E? The teacher?	
<b>LSE</b>	Who helps you Simon in class?	
<b>Simon</b>	The teacher	points at Ms E – his LSE
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes Ms E is your teacher. Is there a topic that you like Simon?	
<b>Simon</b>	[shouting]	Shouting level is more intense now and he gets up with his hands in his pocket.
<b>LSE</b>	Simon sit down it's the last question.	
<b>Simon</b>	-----	Sits down in 5 seconds
<b>Researcher</b>	What topic did you like most in the Maltese? You did poem, videos, songs?	
<b>Simon</b>	Songs [shouting]	Holding my hand and looking in my eyes
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you like songs in Maltese Simon?	
<b>Simon</b>	Yes	
<b>Researcher</b>	And do you sing with them Simon?	
<b>Simon</b>	Yes	
<b>LSE</b>	We did 'Xemx' (a maltese song)	
<b>Simon</b>	Xemx Stop Go Away	Looked at me and moved closer to my face when he told me to stop and go away, indicating he cannot take it anymore.
<b>Researcher</b>	It is ok Sim we will stop and I will go away. It is fine we stop.	

Shane transcript

<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Verbal expressions</b>	<b>Non verbal communication</b>
<b>Researcher</b>	Which lessons do you prefer most, English or Maltese? Which one? Maltese or English?	
<b>Shane</b>	Maltese	[pointed at my paper but did not show towards English or Maltese]
<b>Researcher</b>	Ok so you prefer more Maltese than English. Are you happy during the lesson or you find it difficult? Do you enjoy it or you find it hard? [repeated question]	[pointed at my paper but did not show towards any particular word]

Shane	Enjoy it	
Researcher	And what do you enjoy doing most?	
Shane	Yes	
Researcher	When you read, write, do poems?	
Shane	Maltese	
Researcher	What do you do in Maltese? Do you like reading or writing?	
Shane	Writing	
Researcher	What do you prefer to write? A grammar exercise or when you write a story?	
Shane	Story	
Researcher	And do you have anyone helping you during the lesson?	
Shane	Yes	Visibly shy and keeping head low
Researcher	Who helps you most the LSE, teacher or together?	
Shane	Both of them together.	Visibly shy and keeping head low
Researcher	Very good both of them Is there a topic you did that you really enjoyed it?	
Shane	Maltese	Looks at me when I am asking question.
Researcher	Ok Maltese again. Do you want to do more reading, to talk more in class, Is there anything you want to do more?	
Shane	Writing	Does action as well of writing.
Researcher	More writing of stories or more grammar?	
Shane	Grammatical	
Researcher	Ok good. What do you like most of English?	
Shane	Writing	
Researcher	Ok so you like writing in both languages. Is there a story you enjoyed reading?	
Shane	Yes, [then pointed at paper indicating question on helping from LSE]	
Researcher	Did teacher and LSE help you in it?	
Shane	Yes	
Researcher	Ok thankyou Shane	Does hi 5 with me.

Zaya transcript

Speaker	Verbal expressions	Non verbal communication
Researcher	So Zaya what lessons do you prefer? Do you prefer, English or Maltese? Or both of them	
Zaya	I like English most	

<b>Researcher</b>	Yes all right. How do you feel that English is helping you especially during lessons?	
<b>Zaya</b>	Reading, videos on youtube.	Looks at me to gauge how many answers I require from her.
<b>Researcher</b>	So if they use you tube videos they help you more in the lesson?	
<b>Zaya</b>	Yes.	
<b>Researcher</b>	Is there anything that you learnt from the English lessons?	Looks perplexed.
<b>Zaya</b>	Yes	
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you remember a lesson that you enjoyed?	
<b>Zaya</b>	When we learnt about the floats. It was a long time ago in Carnival.	
<b>Researcher</b>	Ah ok how nice so it was a lesson on the carnival.	Looked visibly like she wanted to say more things
<b>Zaya</b>	Even word search	
<b>Researcher</b>	Ah yes that 's good. And you enjoy doing them?	
<b>Zaya</b>	Yes	
<b>Researcher</b>	Is there anything that you find difficult in the English lesson?	
<b>Zaya</b>	No	
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you have someone to help you when you need something?	
<b>Zaya</b>	Yes	
<b>Researcher</b>	And who supports you, the LSE, teacher or all together?	
<b>Zaya</b>	Together with the LSE, teacher.	
<b>Researcher</b>	That's very good. I could see how much they support you in class. What can you tell me about Maltese? It seems that it is not the favourite. Is there something that you find hard?	
<b>Zaya</b>	To read	Gestures no immediately
<b>Researcher</b>	So you prefer reading in English than in Maltese?	
<b>Zaya</b>	Yes	
<b>Researcher</b>	That's ok. Is there anything in the lesson? For example in English I want to have more....	
<b>Zaya</b>	Umm [ pause of 5 seconds] Umm [ pause of 4 seconds]	
<b>Researcher</b>	Is there anything you enjoy and want to do it more in class?	

---

<b>Zaya</b>	I enjoy everything in class.
<b>Researcher</b>	That's good. And you find the English lessons interesting?
<b>Zaya</b>	Yes a lot
<b>Researcher</b>	That s good. Is there anything else you want to say on the lessons?
<b>Zaya</b>	No
<b>Researcher</b>	That's all thankyou very much
<b>Zaya</b>	You're welcome

---

## APPENDIX M: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF PARENTS

### Ian 's parent interview transcription

---

<b>Researcher</b>	I have been observing Ian in class together with other students and wanted to ask you what is your experience in literacy lessons in CCP class? Is this his first year
<b>Parent</b>	Yes it is his first year
<b>Researcher</b>	How was his experience?
<b>Parent</b>	If I had to explain the situation from the beginning, we felt the fact that he is in CCP is something very new and were quite taken aback by it. It was the first time we heard about the CCP and never knew anyone that has been in it so we were concerned. We tried explaining that it is for his own good as otherwise he will find more difficulty in literacy. Once he started CCP he is much better as it matches with his level and he is not struggling anymore. Even though previously he was with another track but he struggled in it especially because he doesn't like school – for him going to school is like a punishment. Maybe the fact that he doesn't like attending school is one of the difficulties which cause his challenges. However once he realized what CCP is he started enjoying it.
<b>Researcher</b>	What made him sad initially? Was it because he was going to be away from his peers or he feels that he was not given a choice to start attending CCP?
<b>Parent</b>	Losing his friends was the hardest part for him. Initially they were in another school due to works going on, then they went online due to COVID and then he found himself in a new classroom with no friends when he returned in class. Due to COVID bubbles he was not allowed to mix with his real friends and could not even meet them during the break so that affected him quite a lot until he started making new friends. He was becoming very hard to tackle at school but then when he got to know that there is no homework in CCP he felt happy about it. Something else that bothered him a lot is that he wanted to choose the subject Media however he couldn't possibly choose it because his results in other subjects were not good enough. The same happened with Computer studies. Then he realised that he will be having ICT subject and that made him very happy and is indeed his favourite subject. However the homework factor is what made him happy most of all .
<b>Researcher</b>	Lack of homework seemed to be positive for him. Was it the same to you as a parent?
<b>Parent</b>	It depends. Some homework helps a lot and cause no harm whatsoever. When he had homework he used to be very frustrated and after a day at work coming home to see his frustration on daily basis was hard. I used to beg him to do his homework and I used to explain even the consequences. So on certain aspects it was a relief that he doesn't have homework in CCP. However having homework would have helped along the way and it's a positive thing to have.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you think that having homework can actually support you as parent to prepare him for exams or do you use other means?
<b>Parent</b>	What I have noticed is that instead of homework it also helps me to read the notes in order to study for the exam. Having examples of how to do certain exercises or tasks or a particular sum is important to have as a reference because sometimes I find it difficult as they use different methods at school nowadays. Sometimes I even

---

---

use Google and search for certain examples. At times I don't know how they cover certain things and how they learned it so I need some notes. Having them on a copybook or a booklet can be helpful for example in the Maltese language when they covered pronouns the fact that they have examples can help me to support him for the exams. I have experienced this during the online lessons because I was with him all the time and I used to be with him for homework. I wish he could do his homework on his own, however he will not take any notice if left alone. The fact that he comes and does the homework can help to do something after school but sometimes he used to do it in a free lesson. When he used to have homework and he was in a bad mood it was very difficult to do it.

---

**Researcher** Does it happen regularly that you receive notes on English and Maltese lessons or not?

---

**Parent** This year was not hard because the LSE was very good, so I used to ask her, and she used to send me a very detailed e-mail every day. He had LSEs, there were a couple of occasions the years however when he was better without and she was inexperienced enough that my son used to correct her notes so let alone how much she was going to support him in class. This year he had a good support teacher, and she helps him without spoon feeding him. As a mother I need to learn not to spoon feed, him and give him too much motherly attention. However, whenever I got stuck, I used to ask her, and she used to provide me with the information I needed in order to support him in his studying. I never had notes or explanations and I was even surprised once when I went to parents' day and the teacher told me how good he is in Italian. This is because I have never seen any material at home on the Italian subject. I would like to know where my child is in certain subjects. I know there was COVID and they didn't have any lookers they used to keep their bags at school however we never got to see anything that they are doing in class. Past papers can help but detailed notes help us even more.

---

**Researcher** What do you think about exams? I have seen them in class and I am interested to know how Ian feels during the exam time. Is it just an extension of the lessons or does he feel it challenging?

---

**Parent** For Ian it is not easy to do exams he doesn't like that much. It is very difficult for him to start studying and to remain concentrated enough to prepare for exams. It is useless starting to study from three months before because he can only remember if we revise them before the exam. he even tends to blink during the exams so I try to do a little bit of revision regularly. whenever I tried starting early it never worked out however I give him past papers and he works them out and we also do a lot of reading. I am not saying that he did brilliantly in the exam but he scored much better than the previous years.

---

**Researcher** With regards to English and Maltese, do you think that topics covered actually prepare them for independent living and future employment?

---

**Parent** For instance Ian finds Maltese very challenging and he has a problem with speaking in Maltese. He has a hard time in Maltese and he doesn't enjoy lessons in Maltese. With regards to English he is fine and he enjoys it. He is even fluent talking the language and when he gets low marks in English is because he dislikes school and doesn't want to put an effort. Sometimes I do question why he needs to learn certain

---



	subjects and topics such as Joined pronouns and proverbs and in his case I'd rather have him learning basic things rather than useless material. I would rather he works hard on learning independent skills, how to survive in the employment roles, how to respect others etc and further life skills. Some people are against me when I tell them that we shouldn't expect big results from him in subjects such as social studies, religion and history. What he needs are basic skills as in reality he will not be anywhere with an O level of Religion and Social Studies.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you see life skills as your priority for him?
<b>Parent</b>	Yes they are exactly that, a priority for him as certain aspects that they study will not get them anywhere. It is useless pressuring him to study if he doesn't need a particular subject. I would rather support him more in the Maltese language as I am aware he struggles in it.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you think that school should dedicate more to the development of these skills and maybe have experiences even in the community?
<b>Parent</b>	Yes and this is something that I have noticed. I know that there was COVID and with restrictions they were not allowed to do outings however in my times we used to have a lot of historical outings and informative ones. When they do maths trials and outings in CCP they learn much more and he is very looking forward to them.
<b>Researcher</b>	Were they educational in nature or more pleasurable ones?
<b>Parent</b>	They had a science outing and a tracking one. It was related to science lessons. They should have these regular outings so they can learn more and focus but unfortunately these are not being held any more.
<b>Researcher</b>	Does it help to have exposure to activities such as getting to know the community, going shopping, crossing road>?
<b>Parent</b>	Yes definitely
<b>Researcher</b>	What is your opinion on these skills?
<b>Parent</b>	They are very useful and I agree with them. For instance having an experience in supermarkets, us parents joined them and it was interesting for all of us. This was done for Maths but they had to control money and budgeting and also involved a lot of skills like knowing where milk is, where past is etc.
<b>Researcher</b>	So do you feel that if they have more of it this will help them for life?
<b>Parent</b>	Yes definitely he needs to know what change he was give and not just throw them in the wallet. Last time I tried taking him for a bus ride. I know that if he wants to attend MCAST later on he needs to start catching the bus. He doesn't have friends so he doesn't have much opportunities to practice. He still feels unsettled when he s on his own and I don't trust him on his own.
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes and even because you can see him trying to cope in situations where he will be on his own.
<b>Parent</b>	When I know that he even gets scared of a fly and I worry that someone will do something to him because even if he's a big boy however I worry about what they will do to him.

<b>Researcher</b>	Are there any skills that you wish they learn at school especially in literacy? Maybe something else is to be given priority more than certain subjects or topics which are not needed as you previously discussed?
<b>Parent</b>	What I have noticed is that students like Issac needs a lot of visual support for instance. However it is important that even though learning through play is not used because of their age however the lessons should not be boring and listening all the time makes it very boring and they get annoyed. Being interactive is the best kind of lesson. For instance even if there is a boring topic such as algebra however doing it interesting like creating a chart and drawing will be more interactive.
<b>Researcher</b>	Are these games?
<b>Parent</b>	Not games, however at the end of the day I am not in the class so I am not sure what they do however I could see the reaction of Ian in certain online lessons. For instance there was a time when Ian used to do essay writing through typing the sentences on the computer. He used to add pictures according to the topic . He used to print them and place them on a scrapbook and he used to write the essay. Then we used to correct it, type it neatly and finalise it but the most important thing is that he uses the computer. If Ian is given the opportunity to type instead of write he will do much better in school .
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you think that there is a possibility of using more typing in class or is it used already?
<b>Parent</b>	No as far as I know they don't use it. Computer seems to be used only in ICT but as far as I know they don't use it in other subjects.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you think it will help him if he uses it?
<b>Parent</b>	It will definitely help him a lot. He feels better when he types rather than writing. He seems to be able to think more when he types and writing involves more work for him. Even in literacy, as we were discussing, life skills will be really helpful as he still struggles in communication, socialising, introducing work places and job opportunities. I think if he had to see the different possibility of job it would be useful for him . When lessons in home economics and gardening were done he enjoyed them as they were practice.
<b>Researcher</b>	My last question is about the IEP. How do you feel during the IEP? Did you discuss language and literacy in depth or was it an area that was not given so much importance?
<b>Parent</b>	Yes in the IEP whenever we needed something we always discussed it together with Asst Head and LSE. I know we have to teach independency however on a couple of occasions the LSEs did not support him in these. At times Ian still need to be followed to ensure that he can do something on his own. For instance he does his school bag and checks time table however I make sure that he did it right and does nt go school without certain books as I would know he would be moody and refuse to do anything in school. However in the IEP I always had the opportunity to discuss whatever I needed. I have nothing negative to say about the school and I always found them to

	be very helpful . When there were disagreements I always made sure I communicate properly with them and then they understood me.
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes it is very important to find them behind you.
<b>Parent</b>	Yes if they don't answer there and then I know that through emails they will reply.
<b>Researcher</b>	What was more important for you to have ? a good LSE or a good teacher?
<b>Parent</b>	In my case, the teams helped a lot because usually we don't know who the teachers are however the LSEs are the point of reference. With regards to teachers, I only made contact with one teacher of Home Economics because we had an issue but I never tried making contact with any teacher besides her but it is probably the way I felt as I could possibly communicate with them.
<b>Researcher</b>	Is it because the LSE is more the point of reference?
<b>Parent</b>	I did speak to the Maltese teacher once because we couldn't agree on certain aspects of the subject. My child used to come at home frustrated and I used to explain that he still has to stay during the lesson even if he doesn't like the teacher or the subject. It all started with a word 'step' in Maltese, which is a word hardly used in the language and he didn't know what it is. The teacher kept insisting but he didn't know it. If a difficult Maltese word was used e.g. brama (jellyfish), telling him the English version of it might have helped him to understand the word. These aspects were effecting him in school and got him frustrated but then I explained this to the teacher and our common good was for the child. Trying to understand words used in Maltese was a real struggle to him.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you think it was more related to not having a liking to the teacher or to the Maltese language?
<b>Parent</b>	I spoke to the teacher in parents' day and she seemed very nice and had the best interest of the children. One episode I had during the parents day is that I was speaking to his Form teacher, not knowing he is the Maltese teacher. He started explaining how much my child doesn't co-operate in class, and he was mentioned all the negative things that he shows in class. I let him explain everything without interruption and I simply asked him whether he had looked at my child's reports. I asked him whether he is aware what conditions my child had. He was stunned at that point and he answered No – in fact he never checked his reports. To make matters worse the LSE was supposed to be supporting him during that year but she was of no use. So my child was in Form 1 and teachers had no idea what challenges he had without realizing that certain aspects might be too hard for him. My child couldn't be tackled like any other student in class especially in Maltese. From that day onwards the teacher informed himself, he never complained any more and did his utmost to understand him and reward him whenever he performed well. It is important to understand the challenges that children have, not just labelling them without knowing any background, it is important to know about his short attention span, his speech difficulty, his challenge to learn Maltese. Teachers need to have knowledge on the children as otherwise they will struggle in lessons and not only in Maltese.
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes and these subjects are going to create challenges if communication in these language is not yet still fully developed as in the English and maltese language.

<b>Parent</b>	And there are other subjects as well for example social studies and history is Maltese based and he is not understanding much in these subjects. When he refuses to work in these subjects it is usually because he is struggling in them. Then when he struggles a lot, he shuts down and prompting is not useful at that point because when he shuts down it becomes very difficult to bring him back. He is very sensitive and the next step worries him i.e. when he starts his job experiences.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you have any plans for Ian for when he finishes secondary schooling?
<b>Parent</b>	We do try explaining that there is the MCAST option and that he can try different courses there even related to computer studies. Certain basics are required and we guide him that he still has to get the basics at the Secondary school in order to go to MCAST. I worry about the stigma related to our children especially when they start work. Being physically healthy but having cognitive difficulties are still seen as problematic even in the work place. I would rather he studies for some more years than start working immediately. We still have to check what options he has as a lot of things have changed since my eldest. It is ideal that even school helps in this regards and start providing them with information and job exposures on what kind of opportunities are available. I'd rather they focus on these things than when the Turkish invaded Malta. Because at times even home economics tends to be useless for him in terms of job opportunities as catering is not his line. Learning aspects related to cooking helps him in his self help skills though. His inclination is computing , creating videos, etc and that is why he wanted to learn media so much as that interest him.
<b>Researcher</b>	So practically he was refused Media because he doesn't classify for it once he is in CCP?
<b>Parent</b>	Yes because he didn't have enough marks and he was going to struggle in basics. He didn't get enough marks in the exams mostly English, Maltese and Maths and so he couldn't take it. I even tried finding private lessons for it but didn't manage. Maybe if he was given the opportunity to take the subject he would be more inclined to continue learning academically and he will see the benefit of studying English and Maltese. Studying something he enjoys might interest him enough to continue his studies.
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes that's it. So the more they have interactive activities the better?
<b>Parent</b>	Yes exposure to them so that they can have guidance and then they can choose the areas they want.
<b>Researcher</b>	I thankyou for your valid points and for your time.
<b>Parent</b>	Thanks to you as well.

<b>Researcher</b>	How many years has he been attending CCP and how has been your experience so far?
<b>Parent</b>	He has been attending for four years. The experience of the last two years in this school has been very good as subjects interest him and he s taking interest in them and also working hard. So I am very satisfied with the experience.
<b>Researcher</b>	With regards to literacy, lessons including Maltese and English, do you have the opportunity to follow what is going on in class?
<b>Parent</b>	He has always found Maltese much more difficult than English. He is able to read so he does that in class. He still struggles in answering and understanding questions such as what, who, why etc however he s progressing in them as well. Together with the LSE and teacher we tried that he speaks more the language however he gets frustrated and does not know how. He can understand Maltese but answering back in the same language is hard. Instead he uses English and we understand him so that encourages him more to communicate.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you think that Maltese and English lessons are preparing him for life skills and becoming independent?
<b>Parent</b>	I think they do these things sometimes as LSE mentions them but I am not in their class all the time so I wouldn't know. The LSE gives me feedback of what he does during the day and that is how I know what he did in class. In Maltese they do stories, and some grammatical exercises which are adapted for them and even in English they are trying to do comprehension tasks.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you think these Maltese and English lessons should be related to getting more experiences in the community? Would you prefer it in that case?
<b>Parent</b>	IN Form 1 and 2 there were instances when they were taken for outings and even trying to buy from shops etc. However, in this school they never experienced it that they practice life skills. I don't think that there is enough time to do these activities in the school. They do practice certain skills in home economics and that is a practical subjects and this is good when they have hands on experiences.
<b>Researcher</b>	Are you aware of any occasions when the teachers work together to give a more holistic experience to the students e.g. home economics one.
<b>Parent</b>	As far as I know there is always one teacher working and never work together. Usually there is the LSE supporting the students.
<b>Researcher</b>	What aspects of English does he prefer or maybe feels that they are a bit simpler?
<b>Parent</b>	For example he likes to read quite a lot and he also tries comprehension tasks however he needs a lot of support in them to understand. We try to repeat the exercises at home in order to revise and be confident in the concepts learned.
<b>Researcher</b>	How about writing essays or doing a creative writing task?
<b>Parent</b>	He manages to do sentences and manages up till 5 or 6 however he will not do a composition of around 200 words. He finds it difficult and gets frustrated to express himself in speech and in writing and sometimes starting the sentence

	and then he continues the sentence is much better. However when left alone he wouldn't do it.
<b>Researcher</b>	Did you try other alternatives to writing, maybe typing on a laptop?
<b>Parent</b>	In the primary he had a laptop and he used it in school however in the secondary school they are not allowing it. He used to feel much better typing rather than writing. He even used to type his needs e.g. I want to go to the bathroom. He used flashcards, communication board however we tried stopping those in order to encourage more speaking.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you think it effected him that he couldn't use a computer at school?
<b>Parent</b>	Now we are trying to get a communication device for him as that can be taken at school. Not even a tablet to type was allowed at school. So he practically was left without any possibility to use Microsoft word and type his work.
<b>Researcher</b>	How does he feel when he is given the opportunity to type his work?
<b>Parent</b>	Yes he prefers typing is able to use computer very well . he even uses it for other language such as Spanish. Through it he learnt many more languages. It is a very important tool for him and has been since he was young. Even in the ICT subject he does really well. Nowadays most jobs are based on knowledge of computer and ICT so it is important for his future. He can even use it to do videos, find music appropriate for videos, include photos etc. Nowadays use of computer and emails is very common in all activities.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you think that skills related to literacy like writing emails are important experiences to get from school and from computer use?
<b>Parent</b>	Yes and he even learnt how to send emails.
<b>Researcher</b>	Did he learn it from school?
<b>Parent</b>	No he learnt it from home. They don't do it at school. He sends me an email, then I reply back and he enjoys receiving my messages. He enjoys this task so we practice it at home.
<b>Researcher</b>	What is your homework experiences in relation to English and Maltese.
<b>Parent</b>	He doesn't get homework. The extra work he does is with my father and it helps him to repeat and learn a concept.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you think some homework helps?
<b>Parent</b>	It is always helpful because he loves learning. He always sits down for extra work so homework will be a continuation for him. Now he only does school work but nothing as homework.
<b>Researcher</b>	Would you like some skills in general to be learnt during English and Maltese?
<b>Parent</b>	Life skills activities that he usually does in Learning Zone are essential for students like him as every day skills are needed and required such as going to the supermarket, buying products, giving change etc.
<b>Researcher</b>	What is your experience of inclusion in the school and the IEP Process? Are aspects of language and literacy discussed accordingly?
<b>Parent</b>	The IEP is being a bit rushed and sometimes we have to discuss the aspects which are more essential for him and what his needs are.
<b>Researcher</b>	Are language and literacy given priority and tackled thoroughly in the IEP?

<b>Parent</b>	Yes they are given importance but Maltese is more emphasised.
<b>Researcher</b>	How does he feel during examinations?
<b>Parent</b>	He tried in examinations and the feedback given from the school is all positive. He participated in all examinations.
<b>Researcher</b>	How does he feel during exams?
<b>Parent</b>	He is usually very stressed and has headaches. When he comes back from exams he wants to sleep at home. I think tension and stress tires him out.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you think that the level of examinations is the same as they are used to in class?
<b>Parent</b>	It is usually very different but he still tries them out. For me this is a big achievement as he is new to the concepts of examinations. Last year has been his first year to do examinations. We used to do revision past papers so he gets used to the type of paper he will get in exams. The fact that he tries is already an achievement.
<b>Researcher</b>	Is it a new experience for him ? So he never did exams in primary?
<b>Parent</b>	He used to do English, Maths and Maltese but he always found them very difficult.
<b>Researcher</b>	Thanks for your answers. Those were the questions I had to ask unless you have some things to ask.
<b>Parent</b>	No only those thanks a lot
<b>Researcher</b>	Thanks for your time

## APPENDIX N: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF SMT

Transcript Head of School.

<b>Researcher</b>	Can you explain what your role involved in the school?
<b>HOS</b>	My role was that of a head of school. Obviously, I had to manage the school from various aspects and holistically. This includes the academic aspect, curriculum, teaching and learning, the environment, security and discipline in the school.
<b>Researcher</b>	As you are aware, the study is on CCP classroom and the experience that students have from the curricular aspect. What is your experience of what the students are receiving?
<b>HOS</b>	We reserve the CCP for those students who at the end of year 8 clearly show that their basic skills in literacy are not acquired. this is confirmed by the teachers' feedback and the exams marks. The CCP class is ideal for students who are struggling. Usually, they would be struggling across the board. their literacy level might be of year 4 primary level. sometimes we have students which is more basic than this and the CCP is not even appropriate for them. some students are below the CCP level. these students struggle more and even teachers struggle with them. In the same class a teacher would have students who are the level of CCP and students who are below this level. In this case literacy learning is very poor especially for those students with autism who have verbal challenges.
<b>Researcher</b>	In case of student who have literacy level below CCP what happens? Do they stay in the same school?
<b>HOS</b>	They will still remain in the same school. However, the teacher is aware that he has students below CCP. most of the times these students have a full-time learning support educator and they need to adapt the CCP curriculum. The CCP curriculum is already a low level when compared with the rest but then the learning support educator needs to lower the level further. It doesn't happen often however in the year 10 class of this year the students were below the level of the CCP. there are students in the CCP who have intellectual difficulties, mental challenges, psychological and psychiatric difficulties. There are also students who have behavioural challenges. These would have academic difficulties not because they are not intellectually capable but sometimes problems such as ADHD hinders their focus and study skills.
<b>Researcher</b>	When I started the research students with severe intellectual disability were not present in the school and they did not start year 9. What is your opinion on this?
<b>HOS</b>	Yes, these were students who are below of the below of CCP. the students had other needs however the school cannot cater for these needs. the parents have decided to move them to Helen Keller school. However, they could have stayed in our school. They stayed there in form one and form 2. In year 9 they did not remain at school and one of the parents decided to start at Helen Keller school. This was also based on the advice by NSSS. the other student had a parent who kept insisting on staying in our school however the following year she realised that Helen Keller is a better school to provide for her services. For example, they used to insist that we should support her walking however we didn't have the personnel to do it. In the second year they realised that moving to Helen Keller was a better option for her.



<b>Researcher</b>	When this is the case and there are students with severe disability is it suggested from the school or from the parents?
<b>HOS</b>	The school suggests but it doesn't force the parents. We also have to be careful to whom we suggest. sometimes experiences speak by themselves and at times suggesting a different school might cause further pain to these parents. At times these parents are already in pain due so their Child's disability. If we see that they can cope with the situation such as the grade ten class we keep them here. If we see that they are struggling especially the students, we try to explain that other schools exist which can give a better service to their child and finally it is up to the parents to decide.
<b>Researcher</b>	did you ever have any resistance from teachers when they have students with severe disability in their class?
<b>HOS</b>	Sometimes yes, we have. However, it might not be resistance because I used to ensure that different teachers teach the students on different years. If you teach the CCP class this year you will not have it the year after. this helps to train more teachers in teaching these classes. This is social justice. there are teachers who particularly ask not to be given these classes however I was always fair and told them that one year or another they will teach in such a class. It is unfair that the same teachers teach the best kids.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you think they are resistant because they are not knowledgeable enough?
<b>HOS</b>	Yes it could be that they are afraid of teaching such a class. it could also be because they do not want to prepare adaptation and different material. teaching the CCP class involves more material then teaching did track 3.
<b>Researcher</b>	With regards to the experiences that students received in literacy, do you think there is an opportunity for more functional activities?
<b>HOS</b>	Yes that is where the Prince's trust comes in. This year it was decided that the year 11 class will have six lessons instead of four and we reduced 2 English lessons. I think there are certain subjects which you can do without such as social studies, geography and history. On the other hand, it is important that a student, even if he has intellectual disability needs to know that for example our country is called Malta but they do not need certain detail such as the globigerina limestone. It is good for the student to know that Malta is a democratic place and what democracy is that they are citizens and that they have a vote. However, tackling these aspects in modules is better than wasting time identifying topics that might be appropriate for them especially in geography and in religion. The prince's trust for these students is a breath of fresh air because they can-do hands-on activities such as gardening, craft, teamwork activities, preparing sandwiches, cooking and life skills which are better men sitting down all day doing academic subjects. For this reason, Helen Keller is sometimes a better option because when there is a severe disability, they get a lot of hands-on activities. However, this is not the opinion of all parents as sometimes they even fail to accept that their children are in a CCP class. When students are placed in the mainstream these struggle three times as much and they spend around five years and they do not learn anything sometimes not even writing their name and surname.
<b>Researcher</b>	When I was in the classroom I happened to be there in June and the issue of exams was evident as they were preparing themselves for them. They were

	doing past papers and the climate in the classroom changed. The majority of them had a problem with the exam paper. How does it work when students in the CCP class sit for these exams?
<b>HOS</b>	If these students are not supported so sit for exams there is a big problem which is the school leaving certificate as this does not cater for their needs. Basically, if they do not sit for the exam their certificate will be practically empty. I still feel that at the service is being done to the students if they are not allowed to sit for the exam. the effort that the students do over the years will not be recognised and the school leaving certificate will fail to show the subjects they have studied. If I am not mistaken the assessment are not included in the certificate. I feel there should be a specific school living certificate for them where the teacher can write comments on what they have achieved rather than giving a mark. another option is to have the learning outcomes and through a ticking system it is identified the level at which the child is performing and there will be no need to sit for exams.
<b>Researcher</b>	Can the exam paper be adapted? student find it difficult even when their writing is a bit big and they have no space to write their answers.
<b>HOS</b>	Yes, it is true we receive a hard copy on the day we never received a soft copy to adapt. Hopefully with the learning outcomes the students would have a proper school leaving certificate without the need to sit for an exam.
<b>Researcher</b>	Is there a possibility that the learning outcomes will be used for this reason?
<b>HOS</b>	The learning outcomes started in Year 9 however I do not know if they are used in CCP and I am not in the school anymore. Definitely, they will not support the students to move onto their ordinary levels. if this if it is going to be a ticking system as it was in year seven and year 8 then students will have a school living certificate without having to sit down for the exam and the work, they did would have a weighting.
<b>Researcher</b>	The positive thing was that as part of the exam they had an assessment mark showing what they have done during the yeah. Something interesting which was evident is that there was more resistance from educators then parents for these students to sit for exams. What is your opinion on this?
<b>HOS</b>	I think because the parents considering that their students are in mainstream, they would want them to do the exam even though a nonverbal student would have done better if he had attended Helen Keller school but this is not so easy to explain to the parent.
<b>Researcher</b>	Did you have any cases when parents wanted to take their children to Helen Keller school and as a school you wanted them to remain with you?
<b>HOS</b>	No never we always present the other school as an option which can be more beneficial for the student however parents are usually resistant to taking their children to for example guardian Angel.
<b>Researcher</b>	So, they will always opt to keep them in the mainstream?

---

**HOS** Yes, especially those who are non- verbal. normally when another school is mentioned they will refuse. sometimes it persists even in form 5 at Wardija school and they wouldn't even want the name to be mentioned. We were always very careful so that after Form 5 students do not remain at home. For me, a parent who is in denial and not recognising the reality is doing a disservice to his child. In some cases not even MCAST can cater for the needs of certain students, only Wardija School can and we used to tell them that they even stay there till 24 years.

---

#### Transcript HOD Inclusion

---

**Researcher** What is your role in the school regarding students with individual needs? How long have you been in the school?

---

**HOD Inc.** I am an HOD Inclusion and my role involves supporting LSEs that support students with special needs. The needs are diverse. There are various conditions and learning needs. I have been doing this job since September 2012 i.e., will be ten years soon.

---

**Researcher** As you know, the focus of this present research is on the literacy experiences of students with intellectual disability in year 9, 10 and 11 particularly in the CCP class. What is your experience and what feelings do you have when you go in the CCP class and there are students with intellectual disability learning Literacy?

---

**HOD Inc.** Look Amanda, let me start with this. It is going to depend on the character of the LSE. Sometimes students work wonders with an LSE , then then another one comes along and you feel that they are not improving but development is being hindered. The Head of school and the classification is thought well as LSEs chosen are usually very conscientious. One has to be willing to support these students to improve. There needs to be a good team, with teachers and LSEs. In the secondary this becomes more challenging as there are more teachers changing for every subject. Even though we are mentioning Maths, Maltese and English however they are learning more subjects in the CCP and this makes LSEs meeting a number of teachers, all with their own character. There is one thing that angers me and this involves their examinations and that it is useless to adapt. However, even though there are good LSEs however I don't observe much adaptations. There are those who do instant adaptations.

---

**Researcher** Is it done on the material being used by the teacher?

---

**HOD Inc.** Yes, it is very dragging for LSEs to do adaptations. I am not saying that it is easy to do because to do it, you need to have the teachers' material before and this has to be sent from all teachers involved. In reality I rarely see adaptations in classes. But then again, even if adaptations are done, then the CCP class students still have to sit for the exams? And what exams! I would barely know the answers myself. Exams were completely beyond them.

---

<b>Researcher</b>	This was an issue that cropped up during the observations. Probably because I happened to be there when they were preparing for the exams. It was a big issue in the classroom as they felt that what they have learnt and the level of the exams do not match.
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Yes in reality the departmental exigencies are to have them do adaptations. Then again if they do exams on what the teacher is supposed to be learning it is useless doing adaptations. Exams were hard, and not only one. I got this feedback from educators as I was not in class with them .During that time I do transitions. Wouldn't I be frustrating someone with autism when I present him such an exam paper? Wouldn't I be disrupting his routine and will I be wasting his time?
<b>Researcher</b>	And setting him up for failure?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Yes as well, as well. And will they be happy with the result? How will you explain the result he got? Even because in this class there are a lot of kids with autism. Wouldn't I be confusing the student? There is something wrong. There is no co-ordination between the curriculum which is inclusive and the exams. No it is not working. What shall I do? Will they be doing adaptations? I don't see it much because at the end it is easier to follow the teacher's material.
<b>Researcher</b>	Does the teacher know the students well before she prepares material and resources for them? E.g., workbooks. Do you think there is a one size fits all in the CCP?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	It depends on the teacher. There is one who uses one size fits all because there are different teachers just as there are different LSEs. There are teachers in the CCP who give their all but others who do not care less. I went to see a lesson during exam times and the teacher was doing a past exam paper. It is useless that you mean well, as the exam paper was still hard.
<b>Researcher</b>	They know it is hard as they provided the same feedback themselves
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	They know it is hard for them but that's what they had in the exam. There is something going wrong. Exams papers are done at the Department for examinations. Do they know that these papers are done for students in the CCP? Do they know about students with autism when designing the paper? Do we have to provide all that grammar and orthography to these students? Not even kids without disabilities need all this grammar and orthography. Isn't it better that they know basic skills in order to have independent life ?
<b>Researcher</b>	This was going to be my next question. Regarding literacy and the way it is being taught, what experiences are these students given?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Are you referring for hands on?
<b>Researcher</b>	Exactly, how often do you observe hands on experiential learning and how much is it relevant to them when you consider that these students will be finishing their secondary schooling within a year?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	With regards to relevance I see it 200% as this will prepare them for their life. They need these experiences however teachers keep in mind the examinations. They have to finish the syllabus so they have to do it that way. Hands on require more time and more preparation and it yields better results however in my opinion the chalk and talk method is faster.
<b>Researcher</b>	Did you ever encounter teachers that focus on the functional aspect of literacy? How regular is it in the CCP?

<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Yes I saw teachers during religion class, doing a song and dancing, they had to read, it was good for co-ordination, out of seat instead of sitting and it is related to the religion subject. I have seen it also in the prince's trust whereby they sow beans, cut them and sell them as well.
<b>Researcher</b>	Are there instances where the literacy is used as a vehicle for them, which involves liaison between literacy teachers and other subjects e.g., home economics
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	No not that I am aware of. Every time I am in the school, I go into the CCP class however never saw this. In the Prince's trust they do these experiences related to literacy.
<b>Researcher</b>	So they could use skills...
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Yes, in that situation they used money, incorporated maths, weight and similar aspects. However, the teacher of the prince's trust discusses with the LSE not with other teachers.
<b>Researcher</b>	Initially, when I started the research, I had planned of having students with intellectual disability of varying degrees, mild, moderate and severe. When I came in school, I was informed that students with severe intellectual disability were already receiving their education in resource centres and thus they are not part of the school community. What is your personal experience of this situation, regarding students who are more severe than those currently attending? What was the process and what challenges were there? Did teachers show any willingness to educate them in mainstream?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Sometimes, there are students that when I see them in class, I think that they are suffering because they cannot move, and do long hours seated. In that case I feel resource centres are more appropriate for them. Obviously, it is difficult as Head of Inclusion I can't exclude these students however for their well-being it would be better. At the end of the day, they are still being educated in the Resource Centre and they are still following a curriculum. They might need physiotherapy everyday and the LSE is not certified to do it so if repositioning is required Resource Centres are better. I had teachers during the IEP discussing that they are willing to support the students who have intellectual disabilities but these could be counted on one hand. Most of them say that they belong to the LSE and even refuse to attend the IEP. This is not accepted from my end and it is a sin to allow this. The procedure to go to a centre has changed. When we used to work together and we had planned transition, you used to come and observe him before, come for IEP and then we discuss what happens in May or June. Nowadays Eos are not involved. At the end of January, we are asked from the Department to identify who might benefit from services in Resource Centres. We wouldn't know what they will eventually benefit from. It depends on the availability in the Resource Centres and other particular programmes. When EOs observe them or ask us about the students, they check severity and they decide if they will attend full time or part time.
<b>Researcher</b>	Is this discussed with the parents?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	This is something done by the EO however parents never know that we identified their children. Once selected we talk to the parents, the head , assistant head and myself. We tell them that they got selected for a particular programme and that we would need an immediate confirmation about it.

<b>Researcher</b>	Are there any instances when parents request to go to resource centres e.g. at year 9?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	No, I never had parents that asked themselves. I had a particular parent who had an issue with the school and went to visit a Resource Centre. Personally, I think the student benefitted from Resource Centre and mother wanted the mainstream and services from Resource Centre merged in one. She wanted her child to do physiotherapy, OT and speech in mainstream. You can't have both things. I got to know that she asked Head of Resource Centre, went to visit and without informing anyone she started the year after. The student was in CCP and she used to do exams however the mainstream has its limitations. You can't afford to have 2 LSEs to do physio or to walk a child.
<b>Researcher</b>	What happens when the severity is cognitive, e.g., they will be fine from the physical aspect but more intellectual challenges? Are there any challenges to adapt curriculum by teachers and LSEs?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	It will still get us to the exams. Students with intellectual disability might gain skills but still adaptations are not done and hands on experiences are not given. The mainstream is not catering for the students who are severe. Adaptations take time, differentiated teaching takes time as well and in a class, there might be more than three levels.
<b>Researcher</b>	Who usually supports students who have severe intellectual disability, teacher or LSE? For instance if the class 10 is taken as an example, would that material be fit for them?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	At the end all students are to be supported by teachers but if they don't do adaptations they have to ensure that LSEs are doing them. With around five LSEs in class asking the teacher is too much as well. There are LSEs who agree between them and share work.
<b>Researcher</b>	However, students all have different levels within a class?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Yes students all have different levels. The norm is to follow the teacher's lessons. I am quite happy with these LSEs and they do outstanding work however no adaptations. Not sure if you've seen them? Am I right to say that they just follow the teacher's lesson?
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes they follow the teacher and from my observations, LSE gets to know what is going to happen in the class at that particular time e.g. use of workbook, listening to a song. They will hear it for the first time there.
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	If you have a practiced LSE and she would have some highlighters she can use colour coding and it makes a lot of difference in that time.
<b>Researcher</b>	I think that was one of the strategies that was used.
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	It depends have been there myself (working as LSE) and we were not always provided with work prepared by the teacher in order to adapt before. So at least improvisation at that point is done.
<b>Researcher</b>	Is it a case of more scaffolding to do task at hand rather than activities which are adapted to encourage independent work?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Yes that's what it is but I am not happy as I don't see any (adaptations). Not sure how much I should insist when they are not required to do so in the exams.
<b>Researcher</b>	If there was such a student in class [severe] in this class is there an option not to sit for the exams?

<b>HOD Inc.</b>	It on the management. We didn't have this option. In this particular school, the management decided that everyone has to sit for exams.
<b>Researcher</b>	So like this, if there is an oral exam and someone is non verbal and non speaking he/she has to do the exam just the same and if the exam involves writing and one cannot write they have to sit for the exam just the same.
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Yes that's what it was said over and over again at school as otherwise they will leave with nothing on the school leaving certificate. That's what we did till now. I always believed that in this way we stretched the students to their maximum not to end up a Laisse affaire issue. Definitely we didn't do adaptations to the 100% but we try to push students to their limits. We are trying to get the best out of students.
<b>Researcher</b>	It seems that the assessment is still summative in nature, checking what they have learnt at the end of the scholastic year?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Yes if it comes from (examinations) department
<b>Researcher</b>	Thus only a small percentage of the mark will indicate work done during the year?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Like all the others.
<b>Researcher</b>	Summative still has an important part.
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Yes that's it. There is a small mark related to tasks carried out during the year but it's the same as all classes
<b>Researcher</b>	Is there the option that the CCP exam paper of Maltese and English be adapted?
<b>HOD Inc</b>	No not possible as otherwise a mark cannot be given. In the primary we used to have adapted assessment prepared by teacher and LSE. If an exam paper is not issued by the Department it cannot be considered as an official exam mark.
<b>Researcher</b>	Thanks a lot. I think we have covered everything. Is there anything you would like to add?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Yes, earlier you asked me about the parents. I feel that the mentality of the parents is that mainstream is considered for primary but in secondary they will be all out for resource centres.
<b>Researcher</b>	At what age do you observe this? From the beginning of secondary schooling or later on e.g. in Grade 9?
<b>HOD Inc.</b>	Parents usually have their vision till year 6 to be spent in the primary but after that they don't consider mainstream. The parents of students with PMLD feel safer to send them to resource centre. Sometimes they opt to send them to Resource Centre due to longer school hours. I had a case who was more appropriate to receive his education in mainstream because he was going to have even an autism room however the mother insisted on having him in Resource Centres. I did not agree with her decision and it is something that affect my conscience. When I suggest and actually transfer someone to Resource Centre is a big responsibility as you have five years of schooling involved.
<b>Researcher</b>	Thanks a lot I think we mentioned all relevant information

## APPENDIX 0: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF LSES

Adolf's LSE transcription

<b>Researcher</b>	We will discuss and compare the teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom and the assessment issue that arose yesterday in class. What are the challenges related to assessments and exams of students especially in English and Maltese?
<b>LSE</b>	In the classroom we focus on hands on but then in the exams..... There are the assessments of an entire school year where we support them throughout.
<b>Researcher</b>	Would they have a percentage of it?
<b>LSE</b>	Yes but then during the exam, it is a one-time thing and it is not good for them.
<b>Researcher</b>	We were mentioning the exam paper? What about it? Maybe its structure?
<b>LSE</b>	The exam paper is not ideal for these students. First of all, the font is too small when they need a larger font. If it is stapled it is not good for them as they need to see the paper with text next to each other especially during the comprehension tasks.
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes I observed them turning the page to follow the text.
<b>LSE</b>	Yes if they are next to each other they manage it but if they are behind they don't. It will not occur to him to turn the page and find the answer.
<b>Researcher</b>	And with regards to how much the worksheet or text looks cluttered, what is their reaction? As yesterday, in class I saw one of the students giving up when he saw a lot of text on the paper.
<b>LSE</b>	When there is a lot of reading and writing may be difficult for a student like the one, I support. He prefers more matching, one-word answers and the like.
<b>Researcher</b>	And in this manner, they match with the style of learning happening during the school year?
<b>LSE</b>	During the scholastic year they do not write at length so they feel it difficult when they have to do it in exam.
<b>Researcher</b>	To what extent do they manage long writing? Is it because they struggle in it or because they give up immediately?
<b>LSE</b>	It is hard for them. In the exams they are on their own unlike the classroom whereby we are helping them. In the exam he gestures like this (holding head) and he is overwhelmed.
<b>Researcher</b>	And what about the English orals?
<b>LSE</b>	If it were for other CCP students who are normal in inverted commas, they would do them and most probably unlike our students, the Maltese will be easier than English. However for these students, who are a bit non-verbal it is hard due to speaking challenges.
<b>Researcher</b>	Is there a possible system that allows these students to be exempted from exams or do they have to sit for exams just like the rest of the class?
<b>LSE</b>	As far as I know it has to be done. This is like you are diabetic and still giving me sugar. For them it is very hard.
<b>Researcher</b>	How would be ratio of assessment and exams, 60 and 40 percent?
<b>LSE</b>	The higher percentage belongs to the assessment and that is the reason why they pass these exams as they gain a lot of marks from assessments.
<b>Researcher</b>	At least, it reflects how they are doing during the scholastic year.
<b>LSE</b>	Even the fact that during the exams they have to be quiet and they cannot talk is hard for them.



<b>Researcher</b>	Do they normally have access arrangements in the exams as in the case of Aidan?
<b>LSE</b>	Reader on request
<b>Researcher</b>	Thus he is granted a reader depending whether he wants and whether he asks for . Does he usually ask for the reader support or not?
<b>LSE</b>	He will not ask or else will say help me however in the exam one cannot give him the kind of support he needs. He would need someone to explain, read and elaborate, paraphrasing, using varied voices in reading and stressing certain words. These strategies cannot be used in the exam. I hate being in this situation with all the students as I would want to help them but I cannot. This happens especially if he is my student.
<b>Researcher</b>	Do you support your own students or other students?
<b>LSE</b>	Normally, it is the other students. Not sure what will happen this type due to the nature of their difficulties
<b>Researcher</b>	One positive aspect about your class is that you all got used to all of the students in the class. .
<b>LSE</b>	Yes, we can shift between us and we won't be with our same students. Such students in our class need to be prepared if an LSE is going to change. They need to be ready for working with an LSE e.g. in Adolf's case when I have time off, another LSE from our class support him. However, if someone new is supporting him, he would close up and he won't be comfortable talking as he got used to being with me.

#### Andrew's LSE transcription

<b>Researcher</b>	I would like some feedback on the teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom and later on when these students are going for exams. What is happening in Aiden's case and what challenges are you envisaging in the way the exam paper is made and the whole process as is.
<b>LSE</b>	In general what I can say is that everyone discuss about our class and how low their levels are and how different it is as a class. What I focus most of is the needs of the student I support. If we know that his level is low why do we keep insisting on learning fractions in maths when even as a concept is difficult for him to memorise and then moving on to more hard subjects such as probability.
<b>Researcher</b>	So it is more related to whether a topic is functional for them?
<b>LSE</b>	They don't have functional topics i.e. none of the topics focus on independent or social skills.
<b>Researcher</b>	Does this apply to English and Maltese as well?
<b>LSE</b>	Yes, to be honest it applies to all subjects. I do believe that students in the CCP class this year need more self help skills rather than academic skills. I know they are coming to school for the academics however they still need these functional skills.
<b>Researcher</b>	And what do you think with regards to literacy and the lessons carried out during the school year? Do you think they are functional enough to prepare them for life skills, how to write email, how to read, how to follow a recipe etc.
<b>LSE</b>	It looks like reading is fine, they all manage to read however they might not be understanding what they are reading. They might even not be able to listen to

	themselves reading. As a skill it is useless for the student to be able to read and then cannot understand what he is reading. Especially when he reads a page, you ask him questions and is unable to answer you. Adaptations during lessons, as you could see in the observations, are helpful especially when there are pictures to match with. However in the exam this does not feature.
<b>Researcher</b>	So in your opinion this is a challenge that you envisage?
<b>LSE</b>	Furthermore, even the font on the exam paper. There are usually a lot of pages. When my student sees 10 pages in an exam he panics and freaks out. He is used to doing forty minutes as maximum in the lesson and he would have around 1 or 2 pages only.
<b>Researcher</b>	So even the fact that there is a lot of information on the exam paper will probably affect them considering they are used to the usual adaptations?
<b>LSE</b>	In the case of the student, I support yes it will affect him. Even a lot of writing tasks in one page affects him or a lot of exercises in one page
<b>Researcher</b>	And with regards to the colour of the paper?
<b>LSE</b>	No the colour of the paper does not affect them. They need to have pictures in the exam paper as they are very visual.
<b>Researcher</b>	That's it . It's true and it helps their understanding
<b>LSE</b>	Yes especially because we have a lot of students with autism in the class.
<b>Researcher</b>	It will help as it is a good strategy.
<b>LSE</b>	Unfortunately the syllabus is there and the teacher has to implement it.
<b>Researcher</b>	Yes and that's because of the exams.
<b>LSE</b>	Exams are based on the syllabus so the teacher cannot possibly decide to do other things. She has to cover the syllabus.
<b>Researcher</b>	Thanks so much for your time.

## APPENDIX P: OBSERVATION FIELD NOTES

OBSERVATIONAL FIELD NOTES			
YEAR GROUP	9		
NUMBER OF STUDENTS	1		
OBSERVED			
STUDENT NAME	Ian		
TYPE OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY	Mild intellectual disability		
NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS	3		
DETAIL OF OBSERVATIONS	2 <sup>nd</sup> May 2022	09.15-09.55am	Maltese
	3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2022	10.35-11.15am	English
	6 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	08.35-09.15am	English
LOCATION	All were held in main class.		
FIELDNOTE NO.	OBSERVATION	PERSONAL THOUGHTS	
FIELD NOTE1	I am in the classroom waiting for the Maltese teacher to come in class and start the lesson. She enters the room and I go to introduce myself and explain that I will be observing the classroom with particular interest in Ian. She explains the difficulties related to Ian's behaviour in the lesson and discuss how he is not usually engaged. She warns me that he will be quite and barely answers if the lesson of today does not interest him. She also explains that he participates only when he is engaged in a lesson.	Deficit mindset of teacher about her student. Teacher perception of student ability has a direct affect on student learning.	
FIELD NOTE2	The teacher gives out a passage to the students and gives them two minutes to read in their heart. She goes near Ian and marks some sentences with a highlighter. The LSE turns around to inform me that she does that so he does not get confused or lose place where he has to read. Some students are asked to read their part. It is Ian's turn and he	Use of visual aids as accommodations. Teacher re reads text instead of using other strategies to check understanding such as summarising the text, asking knowledge level or basic questions.	

	is reading fluently, with varied intonation and quite fast. All students have a turn and then teacher explains that she will re-read it for them to make sure that they understand it.	
<b>FIELD NOTE3</b>	The teacher guides the students to read questions of comprehension task. Teacher speaks to Ian and tells him to use full sentences rather than giving short answers. Teacher is trying to use higher order thinking skills with Ian and the question was What do you think will happen if he invites you? Ian is unable to answer it so teacher gives him two options to choose from and he answers. The teacher also emphasis the importance of getting the highest marks possible in the comprehension task and getting them, all correct.	The teacher was shown not to use any growth mindset in the context of this activity as the final mark was more important to her. This placed the student in a position where the expectation for him was very high and it showed that it discouraged him as he started looking down and facial expression was sad.
<b>FIELD NOTE4</b>	The lesson is around half way and it is being observed that the tone used continuously is direct, strict and unfriendly and students in the class rarely engage with her and speak to her or make conversation. I notice that for the large part of the lesson, Ian is slouching forward on the table and his legs are continuously moving showing nervousness or agitation. Furthermore, unless he needs to write he places hands in pocket.	Possibly due to this atmosphere, Ian is mostly slouching forward on the table. His legs are continuously
<b>FIELD NOTES</b>	In the last 15 minutes of the lesson, the teacher uploads a scene on the interactive whiteboard. It shows a scene close to a lake with activities going on e.g., swinging, fishing, people doing picnic etc. She explains that the activity will involve talking about the picture shown. Teacher asks them to close their eyes and visualise things that they can see, hear and smell in such a place. She asks the students for phrases and then she also asks Ian. He says (in Maltese) – went to get fish. She acknowledges the effort but probes further until he says the word ‘fishing’. She wants him to say something more about the bucket but Ian does not reply so she starts the sentence and he continues it ‘The bucket is empty or _____.	Used visualisation to build basic and advanced understanding in oral language use. She also used descriptions and guided them to think how things feel, look and what can be heard to describe the actions.  Downward scaffolding is used as teacher used cloze prompt.
<b>FIELD NOTE6</b>	Ian is swinging on the chair and not looking at lesson being explained by English teacher. LSE turns to him and tells him to stop the	To focus on activity, especially in the explanation bit he does only some effort on his own

	swinging for the third time but he ignores her comments completely whilst looking around the class.	and the rest of the times he needed assistance to focus on the activity when persistence in attending is required.
<b>FIELD NOTE7</b>	<p>Teacher introduces the lesson and informs that today's lesson is a continuation of the text read and now its time to do comprehension of 'Rules of the road'. She explains that topic should interest them as all of the students ride bicycles.</p> <p>When the text is read there is a word which seems to be difficult for them – 'pedestrian' and she explains it in simpler terms -people walking in the street and links it to 'piedi' (feet) which she tells them it is something that they have learnt in Italian as well.</p>	<p>Whilst other students mentioned some of their experiences, Ian never mentioned any connecting material to previous experiences even though he uses bikes quite a lot outside of school – no indication of elaboration on cognitive engagement behaviours.</p> <p>Objectives of the lesson are relevant to the students in terms of level and topic as well as age suitability i.e., road safety when riding bicycles.</p>
<b>FIELD NOTE8</b>	<p>The teacher reads out one of the comprehension questions and Ian lifts hand up to give the answer. He answers the question but not in the detail required, he provides a more generic answer to the question. The teacher acknowledges his answer however express a better way to answer the question of the comprehension. She complements him on his answer and explained that she wants more from him as his verbal expression is very good. She suggests that he should speak louder in class so teacher and peers can hear him better.</p>	<p>He recognised errors with the teacher's prompts however there was no relevant questioning or probing further or asking any relevant questions.</p> <p>Social and emotional inclusive marker present as teacher celebrated student success in terms of his good spoken English</p>
<b>FIELD NOTE9</b>	<p>There is good eye contact with teacher, it happens frequent during the comprehension task and he feels comfortable to give answers in front of his peers. When he answers a question, he looks at his LSE for reassurance and when she says 'it is fine' he looks ready to focus on his work again.</p>	<p>He does eye contact and engages when he needs reassurance otherwise, he tends to keep looking downwards and rarely looks at LSE indicating displeasure in interacting with her.</p> <p>He doesn't look upset but lacks real interest and looks bored and expressionless in various occasions during the English lesson however when compared with the Maltese lessons the affective</p>

		engagement in English is much higher.
<b>FIELD NOTE10</b>	The teacher moves on to another exercise where rules will be written. She is writing all the rules on the board so that they can choose from them as a word bank. During the explanation of this exercises lan is fidgeting and moving on the chair. The LSE is prompting him to listen to the instructions of the exercise rather than writing the rules in the empty spaces. lan is not waiting for the teacher to explain the rules, he turns around the sheet and starts writing the rules in the blank spaces without paying attention to guidance.	Task engagement showing he is on task but does not wait for instructions. Shows cognitive engagement in the task and is able to correct right material and completes task.
<b>FIELD NOTE11</b>	lan is finalising exercise of rules and LSE is narrating that she used to drive the bicycle as well. lan immediately turns to her and jokingly tells her that he wants to see a photo of her on the bike. The teacher is going around the class now to check the individual work of the students and asks them about their work. Desks in the room are separate and every student is sitting on his own or besides the LSE.	No evidence of cooperative learning or peers working together and arrangements of tables and chairs do not encourage or evidence group work. Seating is more arranged in a traditional manner rather than for peer learning. In fact, this is evidence by the continuous chatting going on in the class resulting in some students not paying attention to the lesson. Flexible seating is completely absent in the classroom and no visual supports are particularly being used except for material uploaded on interactive white board. Teacher attempting to solicit participation from all the students in class including lan as she is going around the classroom and stops by every student even to check their understanding.
<b>FIELD NOTE12</b>	The teacher starts the lesson by explaining that today they will do a song which is very much at heart for her. It talks about road	Task engagement behaviour shows that he is on task most of the time, he is able to

---

safety and a sheet is being given to all of the students including Ian. The teacher provides two versions to different students, there is one type of worksheet with a word bank and another one without it. The teacher is explaining that the song is emotional for her as she thinks about her brother who died in a motorcycle when she was younger. Ian like other students is listening closely as the story interests him. He is with head upwards looking and making eye contact with the teacher. The song on a sheet that Ian has in front of him has missing slots and word bank is evident on the sheet. The song is Jeans on [David Dundas - Jeans On - YouTube](#).

LSE asks him if he understood everything and he ignores her and waits eagerly for the song to start. He finishes all the exercise correctly independently.

The blanks are all filled and a student asks the meaning of 'tiger in the tank' as mentioned in the song. The teacher explains that it is a metaphor and that it refers to the fuel and the sound it does when driving. She asks students to all act the sound of a motorbike when it is driving or when they drive their bicycle and asks them to place their hands as if they are driving and they all realise that the sound they do is like a tiger roaring.

perform task quickly and keeps focused.

Evidence of student joy in the classroom especially when music was played and the song game was done – all were in high spirits and even teacher joy was evident and even teacher was enthusiastic during the activity.

Evidence of differentiated work prepared by teacher with worksheet being either with word bank or without according to their level.

Resources used include multiple modalities including auditory and visual modes.

She does inferences and discuss something not explicitly stated or obvious such as when she discussed the metaphor of tiger in the tank. She also links to the personal experience and connects to the prior knowledge

e.g., when they drive their bikes in the street.

She also uses strategy to act out a vocabulary word which is difficult for students.

---

**FIELD  
NOTE13**

The teacher starts an activity of creative writing and she asks them to read the vocabulary she gives them as possible points for sentence construction. One of the words is rush hour traffic and three children are asking what this means. Teacher gives definition of the term. The bell rings showing a change of lesson and the teachers asks students to help in activities such as closing windows, collecting work etc.

Down time work is not needed but activities presented throughout the English lessons were short and quite varied keeping the class engaged in the tasks. Brain breaks were not evident but by the end of the lesson majority of students were going out for bathroom breaks possibly due to the need to move around.

---

---

**OBSERVATIONAL FIELD NOTES**

---

**YEAR GROUP** 11

---

**NUMBER OF STUDENTS** 2

---

**OBSERVED**

---

**STUDENT NAME** Nora & Adam

---

**TYPE OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY** Mild intellectual disability and Moderate Intellectual Disability

---

**NUMBER OF** 6

---

**OBSERVATIONS**

---

<b>DETAIL OF OBSERVATIONS</b>			
	27 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	11.15-11.55	Maltese
	27 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	11.55-12.35	Maltese
	28 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	12.35-13.15	English
	28 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	13.15-13.55	English
	29 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	09.55-10.35	English
	3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2022	13.15-13.55	Maltese

---

**LOCATION** All were held in main class.

---

<b>FIELDNOTE NO.</b>	<b>OBSERVATION</b>	<b>PERSONAL THOUGHTS</b>
----------------------	--------------------	--------------------------

---

<b>FIELD NOTE14</b>	The teacher started the Maltese lesson and explained that on the day he was going to continue the lesson previously started the week before. She explained that they will be doing a spelling activity with cards. The teacher first asks for volunteers of who would like to start. Both Nora and Adam are very engaged in the lesson. They are both very attentive. The teacher gives the word 'qrun' to Adam meaning horns and Nora associates the word goat with it and her attempt is acknowledged.	Both Adam and Nora are on task throughout the lesson and they are attending without interrupting. Predominantly watching teacher and following all explanation. Teacher is really positive and energetic and shows he is enjoying the game. He is even excited to be doing these games with them and this excitement is transferred to the students. Nora is intensively interested and interacts with both teacher and LSE.
---------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---



<b>FIELD NOTE15</b>	<p>The Maltese teacher communicates with them that he will present a challenge for them but all students respond with cheerful vocalisations. They are interested in this challenge and the game format of the lesson is being enjoyed by Nora and Adam. Adam is asking to have his turn first and left his seat and moves in the front part of the class. The teacher observes their reaction and suggests that the game is turned into a quiz. Students are asked to choose a number between 20 and 30 and the card numbered will be given and spelled. Adam is hesitating to say a number between 20 and 30 and teacher is providing hints and help him reason it out until he says number 23. Adam has his turn and Nora has a turn after him. During their turn and spelling of words the teacher is praising their effort and encouraging them when they are unable to recall the next letter sound. Teacher also asks peers to help out when one of the students cannot recall a letter.</p>	<p>Scaffolding being used with Adam. Working with peers to solve problem Healthy competition and all cheerful when it is done Scaffolding used until the student was able to manage the riddle himself. Core concepts of written expression including correct letter formation and discussion on letter name correspondence during writing activities.  Classroom discussion moves from peer to peer and the teacher allows them to respond to peer thinking instead of between teacher and student only.</p>
<b>FIELD NOTE16</b>	<p>The teacher gives them about three trials each to learn the game and then informs them that they have to group in twos as now the game will be done in small groups. Students are allowed to move around and to choose their partner. He asks them to read words in Maltese and then these need to be spelled with flashcards. The teacher asks Adam two short questions however he gets no answer from him. The teacher then changes his questions to yes/no answer and Adam responds. Questions are also addressed to Nora and she answers all his questions e.g. How is the mountain? In the last turn, Nora loses the game together with her partner. She was sad to lose and teacher together with LSE explain that everyone is good at something and she will try hard for the next round. She suggests to the teacher to change the rule of the game and time how much they take rather than setting a timer.</p>	<p>Nora is fully focused when it's her turn and even when it's her partner's turn. Nora is able to speak up her mind as she suggests changes to a game and she feels safe enough to share her view with the educator.  Student voices are heard specifically and express themselves quite frequently in the class. They are also encouraging to express their emotions and explain how they are feeling.</p>
<b>FIELD NOTE17</b>	<p>The second Maltese lesson is to be observed and students are waiting for the teacher to arrive. They are already all excited and they</p>	<p>He presented very clear objectives i.e., identifying the letters needed to create</p>

	<p>discuss the games that he might prepare for them. Teacher arrives carrying a box of buzzers and their eyes lit up. He explains that today's lesson will build up on the one done the day before with a particular focus on writing of words.</p>	<p>words in Maltese and he explained it in language which they understood.</p>
<b>FIELD NOTE18</b>	<p>The teacher gives them a buzzer and he inform them that an explanation on an object is going to be given and they have to guess the item. One of the words given is 'muntanja' (mountain) but they cannot guess it so teachers use gestures to support understanding. Adam guesses the word. Another word is given and students indicate that it challenging and teacher encourages peer support rather than supporting them himself. It is time to write the words on the white board now and teacher is using strategies of segmenting the word into different sounds. Adam is writing a word and writes the wrong letter. Teacher asks him to monitor himself and his work until he finds his own mistake in the word. Answers to different vocabulary is acknowledged even if it is not the appropriate answer and then they are guided to do right answer.</p>	<p>Advanced language concepts used to support language development together with literacy.</p> <p>Success is celebrated and a growth mindset is applied by the teacher – he is more interested in the process rather than getting the answer right.</p> <p>Teacher training them into checking their own work.</p>
<b>FIELD NOTE19</b>	<p>The third observation is an English lesson and students are waiting for the teacher to come. All seem to be looking forward for the lesson. Students have freedom to sit</p> <p>where and next to where they want. The teacher comes in starts chatting informally with them on their Easter holidays. She is eliciting phrases from them e.g. I watched movies, I read English books etc. Nora and Adam feel at ease and they uttered sentences about their holiday activity.</p>	<p>Seating arrangement flexible in the classroom</p> <p>Link to the nature of learning in secondary schooling</p> <p>Through her discussions, teacher supporting verbal language development. Attempting to elicit language from all students or those with stronger speaking skills.</p>
<b>FIELD NOTE20</b>	<p>The teacher asks the students to take out the English booklet and she explains that they will talk about the Tower of London. She explains about the background of this tower however most of the faces in class are looking blank. She approaches her laptop and googles it to show them how the tower looks like. The teacher starts the comprehension and starts</p>	<p>Supplementing them with background information</p> <p>Down Scaffolding</p>

---

the sentence for them and they have to fill in the blank e.g. If it is haunted, we see \_\_\_\_\_ and they have to say ghosts. The next question is about the House of Parliament and Adam does not know the answer. The teacher gives him choices to choose from and it helps him to get to the answer. She links it to the Maltese situation to which they are more familiar and explains that Maltese politicians work in Valletta. During this time Nora was slouching forward looking disinterested. The teacher calls her name, jokes with her and Nora is focused again on the task.

---

**FIELD  
NOTE21**

The next questions that follow are about Madame Tussaud and Adam is very much into it as from the pictures that the teacher is showing them, he recognises Prince, Queen, Donald Trump and Beyonce. Nora suggests that she sings 'I was there'. The teacher realises how engaged they are when this topic is being discussed and she finds more VIPs on the internet and Nora enjoys naming them. Then it was time to start reading and Nora volunteers to start as it is something she seems to enjoy. All of them are fluent readers in class. Text was about Madame Tussaud and teachers asks them with whom they want to take a photo if they go there. Nora chooses singers and Adam chooses football players. When Donald Trump was named, one student comments that he is racist as a politician.

Teacher found things related to their personal interests. Expanded on the questions presented in the comprehension tasks. Students fully engaged till the end. Student voices are heard very frequently as they were asked to give their choices of favourite things and are able to voice their opinions freely.

**FIELD  
NOTE22**

The teacher starts the book Streets of London of Cherry Gilchrist. She introduces the book and explains that landmarks of London will be mentioned in this book. She finds landmarks of London on the white board. All students' volunteers to read and the teacher is happy to give them a turn each. There are sentences which are harder than others and the teacher paraphrases these parts in order to help their understanding. To check understanding she asks questions e.g., what happened? The teacher starts a sentence and the students continue it e.g. She was helped and now she was going to help \_\_\_\_\_. Teacher is

---

Downward scaffolding. Lessons relevant to them as it is on travelling to a place that most of them already went.

probing with further questions, who, why etc. She asks them to describe a character. Nora explains that even though she was her friends but she was still being very mean. In the text there is the word 'advert' and students don't know what it means. Teacher explained the word and shows them examples of adverts. After this she also checks with the students that they know the meaning of other vocabulary and explains the word 'studio'.

<b>FIELD NOTE23</b>	The activity that follows is a comprehension task on the chapter from Streets of London. The teacher is showing and explains explicitly how to use the book to find the correct answers such as finding the right paragraph and highlighting information. The students attempt to answer a question and together with the teacher they formulate the answer. She writes it on the Interactive White board however does not allow them time to write it themselves but instead they just copy it. She asks questions to lead them to answers as well and when the answer was supposed to be 'no money' she asks them What happens when you don't have any job? Adam manages to understand what the answer is and he volunteers to give the full answer before they copy it on the board.	Explicit teaching on doing comprehension tasks. Supports them in syntactic development of sentences.
---------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

#### OBSERVATIONAL FIELD NOTES

<b>YEAR GROUP</b>	10		
<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS OBSERVED</b>	5		
<b>STUDENT NAME</b>	Adolf, Andrew, Simon, Shane, Zaya.		
<b>TYPE OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY</b>	Mild intellectual disability, Moderate Intellectual Disability, Moderate Intellectual Disability, Moderate Intellectual Disability, Mild intellectual disability respectively.		
<b>NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS</b>	12 observations		
<b>DETAIL OF OBSERVATIONS</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> May 2022	11.15-12.35	Maltese
	2 <sup>nd</sup> May 2022	12.35-13.15	English
	3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2022	09.15-09.55	English
	3 <sup>rd</sup> May 2022	13.15-13.55	English
	5 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	10.35-11.15	English
	5 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	12.35-13.15	Maltese
	6 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	09.55-10.35	Maltese

	9 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	11.15-12.35	English
	9 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	12.35-13.15	Maltese
	10 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	09.15-09.55	English
	11 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	09.15-09.55	English
	12 <sup>th</sup> May 2022	10.35-11.15	English
<b>LOCATION</b>	All were held in main class except one lesson held in the school grounds		

<b>FIELDNOTE NO.</b>	<b>OBSERVATION</b>	<b>PERSONAL THOUGHTS</b>
<b>FIELD NOTE24</b>	<p>The teacher introduces a poem called 'Il-Farfett' – the butterfly and is explaining that they will read it and then act it out. The teacher gives a role each and Adolf has the part where he has to catch the butterfly. They are acting action words such as 'fly' 'catch' etc and they are enjoying it and ask teacher to do it again. Poem is presented on white board and teacher explains that after poem eight questions will follow. Question sheet provided to students is adapted with enlarged print and bigger spaces to write. They do poem acting two times. They sit down and start the questions. Simon sits down but takes a long time to settle and start task and then starts task. He finds all the answers from the poem. Teacher explains and guides LSEs to read questions to students and they have to find the answers as this will be part of a continuous assessment. During the comprehension task students have problems understanding words such as 'strofa' (paragraph) 'vers' (line) and teacher explains this by showing them on the white board. Adolf's LSE is paraphrasing the questions for him and he answers them correctly.</p>	<p>Acting out poem – vocabulary and language instruction</p> <p>Accommodations related to worksheet being used e.g., enlarged print</p>
<b>FIELD NOTE25</b>	<p>LSEs starting discussing between themselves about the fact that the students are prompt dependent and their worries regarding examination concessions. After the activity is finished the teacher gives them a movement break. Students get out of their seats and</p>	<p>Examination concessions and exam structure different to what the students can handle in class.</p> <p>Movement breaks</p>

	follow action songs of YMCA and Cha Cha Slide. The visuals in the songs are being followed all of them manage to imitate and dance with song.	
<b>FIELD NOTE26</b>	The Maltese lesson is about to start and the LSEs are asking the teacher what they will be doing during that lesson. She explains that today she was going to do letter writing. Teacher then starts describing the activity to the students. She gives a choice to the students whether they want to write email, letter or SMS to contact their friends or parents. The students all opted for email writing. The lesson is still going to be held on paper even though an email is to be written.	Lack of use of technology – IT lab could be used and typing encouraged
<b>FIELD NOTE27</b>	The teacher guides the students how to start an email with Dear..... She guides them on the greetings that they can use. The body of the email is a cloze passage and students have to find word from the word bank at the bottom of the sheet. All the students are focused on the lesson and fully engaging in the task at hand. Adolf is asking to go to the bathroom and teacher is eliciting a proper question to be given permission. Teacher identifies some functional words which are important for their life especially when communicating with others. These include Grazzi (Thankyou), Ghaziza (dear), tkellimni (talk to me), hbieb (friends). When it is time to write these words, she gives them the opportunity to volunteer and try writing these words on interactive white board. They all look forward to having a turn and using the IWB. She explains that the words are challenging to write but encourages them to spell them and take the risk and try to write them.	Functional skills in literacy targeted Eliciting sentences for verbal language.  Challenging work but supported by teacher
<b>FIELD NOTE28</b>	The English lesson is starting and teachers comes in class and explains instantly that they will be working on a blank sheet and the column should have who/when/where. Students and supported by LSEs prepare these sheets and the teacher is going round to ensure that everyone has understood accordingly. The English teacher then	The use of who/when/where as questioning skills  Uses visual organiser to teach concepts of when / what/who.

	<p>explains that the link that has to be done need to be:          Who- used with person          When- used with time          Where- used with place.</p>	
<b>FIELD NOTE29</b>	<p>Adolf needs support to place the word 'school' in the right column. The LSE has to scaffold and says 'school is a p.....' giving a verbal cue. He is then able to categorise words accordingly. Students are then given a set of words to cut and paste them in the correct column including time and place. Once this task is done, the teacher switches Twinkl on the interactive white board and she plays a game with them 'Make a sentence'</p>	Downward scaffolding
<b>FIELD NOTE30</b>	<p>The teacher explains that they will do speaking activity- having a conversation on things done at night and during the day using When – time. All students are paired with their LSE. Zaya asks question – When do you go to school? Aiden asks When do you wear pyjamas. They have pictures to help them ask questions related to them. They continue to practice these conversations with these questions. The activity also includes 'what' questions and Andrew is engaged in activity and LSEs asks 'What did you put on the pizza?' as this was a cooking activity which happened earlier in the day. Adolf mentions tomatoes. She continues with 'When are you going to eat it?' He replies – in the morning. Simon's LSE asks 'What do you do in the morning?' He says brush my teeth. He is encouraged to say a full sentence which he does – I brush my teeth in the morning. Adolf asks 'What do you have for lunch?' He replies to his same question – Chicken pizza as he just cooked one in the previous lesson. Teacher asks Shane about his brother who looks like him and he even answers with his name and surname.</p>	<p>Start with having adults as conversation partners and eventually move on to peer to peer conversations.          Higher ability to discuss things and answers questions about what happened recently</p>
<b>FIELD NOTE31</b>	<p>During the lesson, Adolf. 's alarm rings and it is a reminder to go to the bathroom. He is being prompted by the teacher to ask a question in full e.g., May I go to the bathroom? Andrew. asks the question –</p>	<p>Full sentence elicitation          Topics that are motivating for students will increase engagement.</p>

	<p>When do you go swimming? He answers Splash and Fun as he associates swimming with his favourite local water park. Considering it was one of his major interests the teacher further probes with another question – What do you like about Splash and Fun? Slides, bouncy castle, rides? He answers back, blue slide and bouncy castle. When teachers see him engaged, she asks more questions – What do you eat at Splash and fun? Andrew answers Galletti (Water biscuits) without waiting for options to be given. Teacher asks him Do like to swim somewhere else? He says No Inspire (NGO) as he doesn't like to swim there.</p>	<p>Talks about oral language during unplanned spontaneous activities.</p>
<p><b>FIELD NOTE32</b></p>	<p>Teacher and LSE ask questions to Adolf. Teachers asks 'When do you watch movies/computer games?' He replies in the evening. She also asks him 'When do you play with your tablet?' He replies in the afternoon. The teacher notices how engaged he is and how fast he answers the question and continue asking questions even if they are not in the pictures. The LSE asks him a question on the pizza making that happened earlier and answers by saying the steps he used to decorate the pizza. I was close by and he wants to show me photos of how he did it. He explains that first he does dough, cut chicken and then did mushrooms.</p>	<p>Answering of questions are more efficient when it is an activity that they enjoy. Provides support and encourage student in oral language practice during activity e.g., conversation with him about what he did.</p>
<p><b>FIELD NOTE33</b></p>	<p>The Maltese lesson is about to start and LSEs and students are listening to the teacher's explanation of what they will be doing today. One student asks the LSEs what lesson they will have today before teacher arrives but no one is aware of what will be covered during the lesson. Teacher switches on white board and opens an app called Octavo and she introduces a book called Daniel ipingi – Daniel is drawing. She links this story with the topic of hobbies. First all students are asked to read parts of the book each. When the story is read, they practice writing of action words. She helps Adolf to spell 'ipengi' (to draw). She guides Simon to spell 'jghum' (to swim) as there is a silent 'gh' making it a bit tricky. Adolf is spelling 'isuq' (drive) and she helps</p>	<p>No planning between teachers and LSEs and thus no adaptations</p> <p>Involve students in independent writing activities in which the teacher controls the pen but models the writing process e.g., spelling.</p>



	him to spell the word and guides him in writing it.	
<b>FIELD NOTE34</b>	Lesson is extended to start discussing hobbies and action words related to them. Shane writes his hobby 'football' and he is guided to write it and spell it in Maltese. Another story is read named 'Claire u Luca' and Shane read 'Luca ihobb isajjar. Luca qed isajjar pizza mal-mama.' (Luca likes cooking and he is cooking a pizza with his mum) He reads it well and LSE asks him to explain the ingredients he used to do his pizza. Shane mentions green peppers. The other students got interested and teacher extended the writing activity to writing ingredients on the board. Andrew named tomatoes and he gets up from his seat and writes it on the board. Whilst he was going to write it, the teacher was about to start helping him how to spell it but LSE tells student that this is a word that he knows how to write on his own and he doesn't need any help.	Teacher talks and engages students in writing activities linked to topics of interest  Here teacher attempts to elicit language from all students and not just from those who volunteer.
<b>FIELD NOTE35</b>	In a Maltese lesson, students have to do a dialogue and also write words in Maltese. Students have to explain what they normally do throughout the day. They had to spell vocabulary related to the dialogue e.g., at seven, cereals etc. Teacher pairs students in twos and they have to carry out a short dialogue between them. Teacher and LSEs are supporting questions formulation and answering these questions in a grammatically good phrase or sentence. After this, the teacher gives them a cloze passage which is in the form of a dialogue however explains that this activity is slightly more challenging as they have to guess the correct word,	Engaging students in conversations that involve student and teaching taking multiple turns about a conversational topic.
<b>FIELD NOTE36</b>	The English lesson starts and the teacher shows them a character on an English Past paper. She asks Andrew to guess the age of the character. He does not respond and teacher uses his experience and tells him Adolf is fourteen years old in order for him to use the sentence as a model. Shane is able to read the text on his own and answers the questions accordingly. Some students start becoming fidgety and teacher asks what is	More evident behaviours such as being on task for some time, but gets distracted, fidgety and does not perform task readily.  Accommodations for exams or lack of them.

happening. Adolf's LSE explains that they are this way as they are training for the exam. They discuss that the concessions for exams include extra time, reader and prompter. The discussion further continues with LSEs saying that the pages of the English exam is usually stapled and students might need to separate the pages as otherwise they have to turn the page to find the answer and copy it in the right place. They also mention that no highlighting is allowed during exams. One LSE mentions the lack of large fonts of the text presented in the paper. She mentions that her student writes in large print and does not have enough space to write on the exam paper usually. The activity proves to be difficult for them and students look quite stressed and bored. The teacher explains that the exam will be 40% and assessment is 60%. Lesson seems to be too overwhelming for all the students in class.

<p><b>FIELD NOTE37</b></p>	<p>Teacher also starts explaining about the language oral exam for the CCP class and describes that it will consist of doing an informal conversation, role play and picture interpretation and she is expressing her worry that this is too hard for the class in general as they all have verbal challenges. Teacher looks discouraged and express her frustration with the LSEs and Students that she feels powerless in front of this situation.</p>	<p>Oral examinations and questioning techniques used.</p>
<p><b>FIELD NOTE38</b></p>	<p>Teacher starts the Maltese lesson and informs them that they will do a past paper. They will work on a text called 'Is-Sajf ta tfuliti' (my childhood summer) Teacher starts with asking them about their summer and how they spend it. Students are all engaged and names activities e.g., swimming, playing games. Teacher then moves on to explain story after they read it. She reads the word 'tonhor' (snore) and to check meaning asks them to do the action.</p>	<p>Links to personal experience. Uses actions and simple vocabulary to explain vocabulary which is hard for students.</p>
<p><b>FIELD NOTE39</b></p>	<p>When they start the question-and-answer part students starts moving around on their seat, Andrew lies down on the desk showing he is uninterested, Shane looks at the ceiling</p>	<p>Facial expressions – frustrated, tantrums- not indicating positive expressions.</p>

	<p>on the side, as if he is lost in his thoughts, Simon is getting agitated and doing vocalisations as if a tantrum is about to start. The lack of engagement in this part of the lesson is evident and the LSEs explain to the teacher that they were doing past papers for the last three lessons and they seem a bit tired. One student, Andrew, did not show any indication of interest to read the statements and writes them all true instead of checking which are true and which are false.</p>	<p>Lacking interest in the task – looking bored.</p>
<b>FIELD NOTE40</b>	<p>The English lesson is going to start and teacher comes into the room and asks them to prepare their pencil cases. She has experienced a lesson doing past paper the day before and she suggests they go outside in the school grounds to do the past paper. They sit on the benches and have freedom to choose their places. They are doing grammar activity and then a writing task. The teacher goes round the benches and checks the work thoroughly supporting them enough as she is aware that these papers are hard for them. Zaya asks for help to write a word and the teacher supports her to spell and write it appropriately.</p>	<p>Outdoor learning – flexible placement Teacher provides one to one support as well and monitors work closely.</p>
<b>FIELD NOTE41</b>	<p>Adolf starts working on the writing task where he has to formulate a sentence. He is writing an email and he has to write a sentence about his age. LSE supports him to formulate sentence verbally and then writing it. The writing task is about themselves so he is guided to write about his facial features. Shane is still working on the grammar task and he had a question about what is going to happen on Saturday. He could not locate answer so what guided to find and match the same word 'Saturday' to identify from where he has to get answer.</p>	<p>Links made to child's personal experience or prior knowledge. Text-highlighting is a strategy known to improve comprehension of printed text</p>
<b>FIELD NOTE42</b>	<p>In one of the English tasks the students have a question on a task which asks them to find two more words that mean 'big'. The students are finding this hard so LSEs highlights parts and asks students to look into the sentences highlighted to find the words which are meant to be 'huge &amp; large'</p>	<p>Use of synonyms</p>

<b>FIELD NOTE43</b>	In an English comprehension task, Andrew needs to have text highlighted in order to locate answer. Adolf is guided to read his text to monitor if the sentence he formulates and is writing is actually correct. One of the sentences he is writing is 'the people are laughing at the boys' Adolf's LSE asks him a question. 'How does he feel? Happy or sad?	Highlighting text Paraphrasing of questions
<b>FIELD NOTE44</b>	Adolf is ready from the comprehension task and teacher guides LSE to find a scene picture on the mobile and work on a picture interpretation task to practice more for exam oral.	Plan for activities so there is no idle time.
<b>FIELD NOTE45</b>	LSE is showing student a park scene with families doing different activities and is asking questions e.g., what is happening? Where are they? How are they feeling? Adolf looks blank when these questions are asked. She changes the kind of questions and he responds immediately. Are there animals? Yes, there is a dog What is the girl doing? She is playing with the ball How is the boy feeling? He is happy She asks him to mention some food to which he doesn't reply and blocks again. She modifies question and he answers What food can you see? I can see a banana, watermelon What fruit is red? Watermelon What are they holding in their hand? A phone What colour is the phone? Grey What colour is the girl's dress – red. Teacher clearly remarks that in the exam questions can be repeated but paraphrasing the sentences will not be allowed.	Adaptation to the question asked. Questioning hierarchy

## APPENDIX Q: TABLES WITH CODES FOR LSES, SMT AND PARENTS

INTERVIEWS WITH LSEs	
Students with intellectual disability and Autism	CCP class profile Grade 10
Cognitive levels lower than CCP	
Students in other CCP class are normal	
Functional skills are more needed than academic skills	Curriculum covered- functional skills and hands on.
No functional topics covered	
Exams In ICT the same as students in tracks	
English used as language for other subjects	
Syllabus covered due to exams	Curriculum Covered - Academic skills
No exemptions from exams	
Exams – as one time thing	
Assessment : exam ratio	
Number of pages in exam paper	Structure and features of examination papers
Small fonts	
Comprehension and questions back to front	
Too many writing tasks in a page	
Papers are stapled	
Social stories and visuals to calm down	
Extra sheets due to large handwriting	
Font type-easily readable	
Length of exam paper- attention sustained	
Visuals in the exam to support understanding	
No highlighting of text is accepted	During exam concessions and support provided
Paraphrasing not allowed	
Prompting levels accepted, others are not	
Reader on request but might not be able to request	
Students need to be prepared for different LSE in exam	
Student not comfortable talking to a new LSE	
Anxiety during exam- not even word bank is managed	
Anxiety causing students not to think and reason	
Writing tool – pen vs pencil	
Writing convention e.g. when line finishes	
Open ended questions and answers	Cognitive level of tasks.
Why questions or give a reason for your answers creates difficulty for students	
Visuals improve cognitive level	
A high load of reading and writing is discouraging	

---

Preference of one word answers and matching activities

---

In class never practiced writing at length

---

Multiple choice questions

---

Using word bank

---

Underline the answers

---

Questions where answers are a choice of visuals

---

Reading is fluent but lacking comprehension.

---

Oral is better if with pictures or visuals

---

**Oral examinations in literacy**

Repetition of greeting if someone asks him to greet

---

Limited in generating ideas

---

Difficulty voicing their thoughts

---

Difficulty in expressing themselves verbally

---

Some students are non verbal

---

If not attentive revert to info dumping or retell a story they know.

---

---

#### **INTERVIEWS WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM**

---

Students with intellectual disability have more condition than Intellectual disability

---

**CCP class profile Grade 10**

Year 10 students have level below CCP

---

No functional skills and hands on in CCP but only in Prince's trust

---

**Curriculum covered- functional skills and hands on.**

No liaison between literacy teachers and other subject teachers

---

Teachers don't focus on functional skills because of exams

---

Hands on require more time and preparation so it is not done

---

Chalk and talk is faster so used mostly to finish syllabus

---

Replacement of knowledge subjects and instead lessons of Prince's trust added as school recognises importance of functional skills

---

Prince's trust a breath of fresh air for students

---

Resource Centres better option as they do hands on.

---

Teachers in secondary reluctant to teach CCP  
CCP is harder to teach Track 3 for high achievers.

---

**Teachers in CCP and their role in literacy learning**

---

---

Teachers have rotation system in school so they all have a turn 'Social Justice'

---

Teachers ask not to teach CCP

---

Unfair that same teachers teach the best kids

---

If teachers don't adapt, they have to ensure that LSEs are

---

Some teachers still use a system one size fits all.

---

Students who have physical needs are suffering in MS – RC is better for them

---

**Mainstream schooling [MS] Vs Resource Centre [RC]**

---

They still follow a curriculum in RC

---

Physio is not available in MS so RC is better

---

Some teachers mentioned in IEP that they are not willing to support severe students

---

Most teachers say students belong to LSE and refuse to attend IEP

---

Students go to RC if identified by NSSS and if there is place in RC

---

Conflicting conception – parents consider MS for Primary and RC for RC

---

Perceived as huge responsibility to suggest RC to parents

---

Parents of PMLD feel safer to take them to RC

---

School can suggest but cannot force parents to move kids to RC

---

School informs parents that in RC the children can get better service

---

CCP class is reserved for students who have literacy level of year 4 primary level

---

For some CCP is hard and not appropriate but they remain there and LSE adapts - literacy instruction is poor in that case

---

Never had requests to move students to RC from parents

---

Parents are in general resistant to sending children to RC even after end of form 5

---

Parents want them to do exams as they consider them mainstream kind but it is difficult to explain it to them

---

Reluctance to go to RC after secondary schooling

---

Severe students – below CCP – the school cannot cater for their needs

---

PT, OT and SLT in mainstream requested by parents – You cannot have both things!

---

---

Not affordable to have 2 LSEs doing physio or walk a child.

Pressure on parents if child is identified as benefitting from RC as otherwise they lose opportunity due to limited space in RC.

---

Learning outcome framework (LOF) solution to remove exams and allow exemptions. **Literacy exams**

LOF are formative and work they do during year will have weighting

Students do not sit for exam consequently no school leaving certificate

School does not receive soft copy of exams to adapt

Hard copies of exams given on the day they are received

Sitting for exams is how we stretch our students

We don't do adaptations but we are trying to get the best out of students

Examination department and knowledge of what students are in CCP is questionable

Relevance of certain topics and grammatical detail questioned

Functional skills make more sense than orthography and grammar

Only exams issued from department of exams can have official exam mark

The management decided that everyone has to sit for exams.

Setting up students for failure.

---

Adaptations depend on the character of LSE **Adaptations by LSEs.**

Adaptations issue of conscientious – whether one feels or is willing to support

Useless to adapt and then sit for an exam which is not adapted

Adaptations are not observed in class

Some do 'instant adaptations'

LSEs dragging to do adaptations

LSE needs teacher material to adapt

Exams beyond them so do we need to do adaptations?

Job description indicate adaptations are part of it – accountability

Exam results may be low and difficult to explain it to students.

---



---

No co-ordination between curriculum and exams

---

Easier to not do adaptations and follow teachers curriculum.

---

LSEs do outstanding work but no adaptations

---

I am not happy to see no adaptations

---

Not sure how much I should insist on LSEs doing adaptations.

---

---

#### INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS

---

Preference of English over Maltese to communicate

---

**Parents' experiences of fluency and preference of English or Maltese**

---

Maltese lessons are not enjoyed much

---

Parents question relevance of certain topics in English e.g. pronouns

---

Preference to learn independent skills involving literacy

---

Language task is too hard results in shutting down

---

ICT in English and thus is a favourite

---

If computer is used the language can be expressed in writing

---

Maltese comprehension of text is harder

---

Struggles even in verbal expression of language e.g. answering wh questions

---

Understanding in Maltese is good but they reply in English.

---

Positive overall

---

**Parents' experience of literacy and inclusion**

---

When LSE is not good issues arise

---

Talking about inclusion and practicing it is different

---

I believe in inclusion but I know this is segregation (CCP class)

---

Teachers unaware of needs of students in class -never consulted reports

---

CCP match with child's level but was a new concept

---

Support provided when required

---

Management requests things from parents and its as if they don't understand the condition.

---

Not trained enough to understand the needs of the students.

---

IEP is rushed and prioritisation was required on what to discuss

---

**IEP experience vis-à-vis literacy**

---

---

A lot of support provided in IEP

Explanation of where the child is and next steps.

Request to focus on certain skills and school follows these.

Continuous discussion on independence.

SMT not understanding parent and hurt her as they persist on teaching the child independence – priority since kinder

Use of pen reader worked for one student

Used to practice typing but don't use it anymore

Reaction was positive in online as work was done with computer and then add visuals and work is printed.

Typing instead of writing more efficient

Able to think more when typing than writing.

Computer use only allowed in ICT

Students are used to using Laptops or PCs in class since primary

Ability to create videos, add photos, find music appropriately – creativity on computer

Typing is also used to communicate needs

Communication boards and flashcards stopped being used to encourage speaking

Communication device to be used at school

Left without option to use MS word and type the work

Learning about the use of emails.

ICT not used to do exams even though handwriting is not good.

Parents wish to have computer incorporated in literacy

Proper use of Maltese keyboard and ability to use features such as (-) for articles and sounds in Maltese requiring a dot.

Told that laptops are not available.

Use of ICT is a strength in students.

Routine issues – used to doing homework in primary

HW is good source to know what is going on in the class

Less stressful for students

Parents wish and request it but never provided – Asst Head involved but in vain

Never had issues with HW before CCP

---

## Use of computer and ICT in Literacy Learning

## Literacy Homework experience

---

HW frustrates student

HW can support parents in helping children for exam

Good when SW is unfinished as it is done at home.

---

Unfair to give them exams not adapted

**Literacy exam experience**

Hinders my child and me as parent

Struggles in examinations

Exams not related to what they cover in class

Anxiety when he doesn't know somethings

Shy and needs time to warm up and ask help

Papers are too hard for his level

Panic attacks during exams but then does well

Difficulty in preparing for exams to start studying

Not enough marks in the exam and cannot choose media – if given option more inclined to learn English

Questionable if they know meaning of exams

Tension during exams – good that there is only annual

Trying exams is an achievement

Stress and headaches – tires them out.

---

Responds much better with games

**Parent perception of how they learn**

When someone shows him the concept is grasped

Asking him comprehension questions appropriate for his level

Support required in comprehension and compositions

Understand is at word and small phrases level

Needs time to process verbal information

Rewording of certain questions are required

Some sentences are too long to process in conversation

Use of simpler language to support understanding

Translating words in preferred language for understanding

Visual supports

Interactive lessons- use of charts, drawings

Outings

---

Use of IWB and videos

---

---

Repetition of concepts – tend to forget easily.

---

Repetition of functional skills in preparation for employment

---

Work presented as power points

---

ICT skills -basic office skills needed for life.

---

Parents not aware of what they cover in school

**Parent- School collaboration Academic skills**

---

Information at the end of the week from LSE

---

Never had past papers to do at home

---

Revision from books

---

Parent does work at home and not rely on the school

---

Workbooks and sheets if returned home would help

---

Revision of comprehension tasks at home

---

Contact with teacher only if there is an issue – contact only with LSEs

---

Detailed notes help more to check method used on booklet

---

When doing past papers at home they still need support from home

---

Sending links of material helps

---

Practicing requesting verbally in shops for independence – regular practice after school

**Parent school collaboration – Functional skills**

---

Using tuck shop as experience in the school

---

Training in family restaurant as possible job e.g. how to keep eye contact

---

Crossing the road and road safety skills

---

Managing house chores and cooking- Home economics mentioned as an important subject

---

Bus riding and using transport as skill

---

Worry of parents about hidden disability

---

Interaction with others in eventual job employment

---

Practicing of reading emails and writing them.

---

Importance of working on verbal skills

---

Learnt all from home and not from school

---

## APPENDIX R: CODING MAPS GENERATED

Chart 2 Student Interviews Coding Map

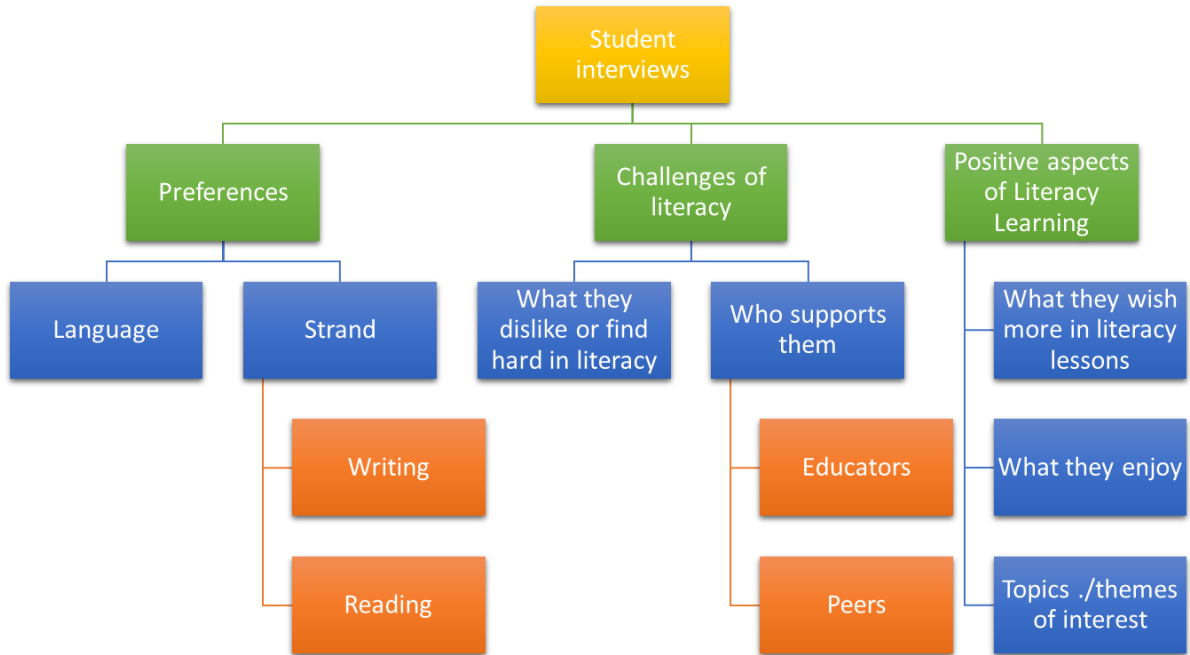


Chart 3 LSEs Interviews Coding Map

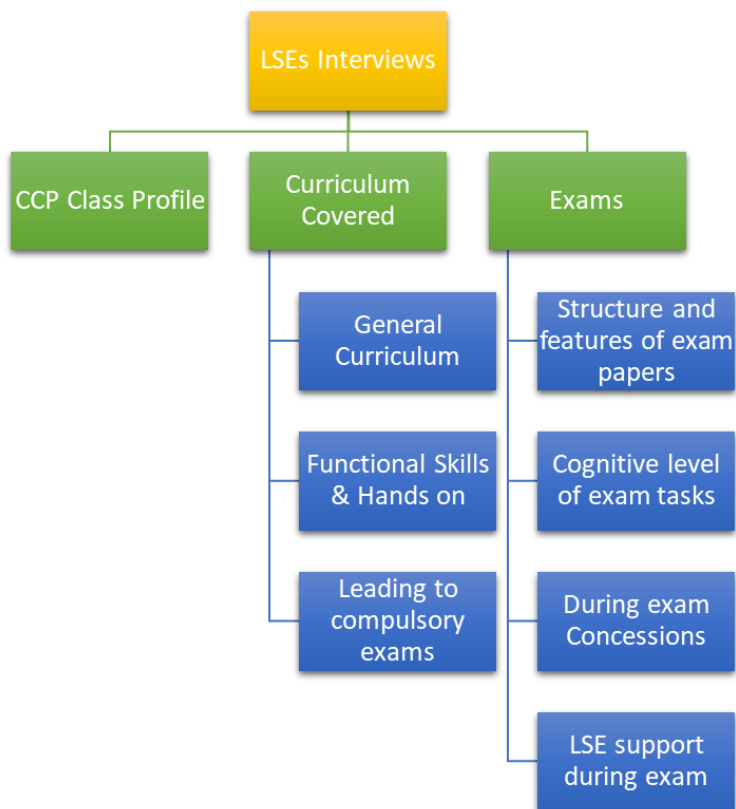


Chart 4 SMT Interviews Coding Map

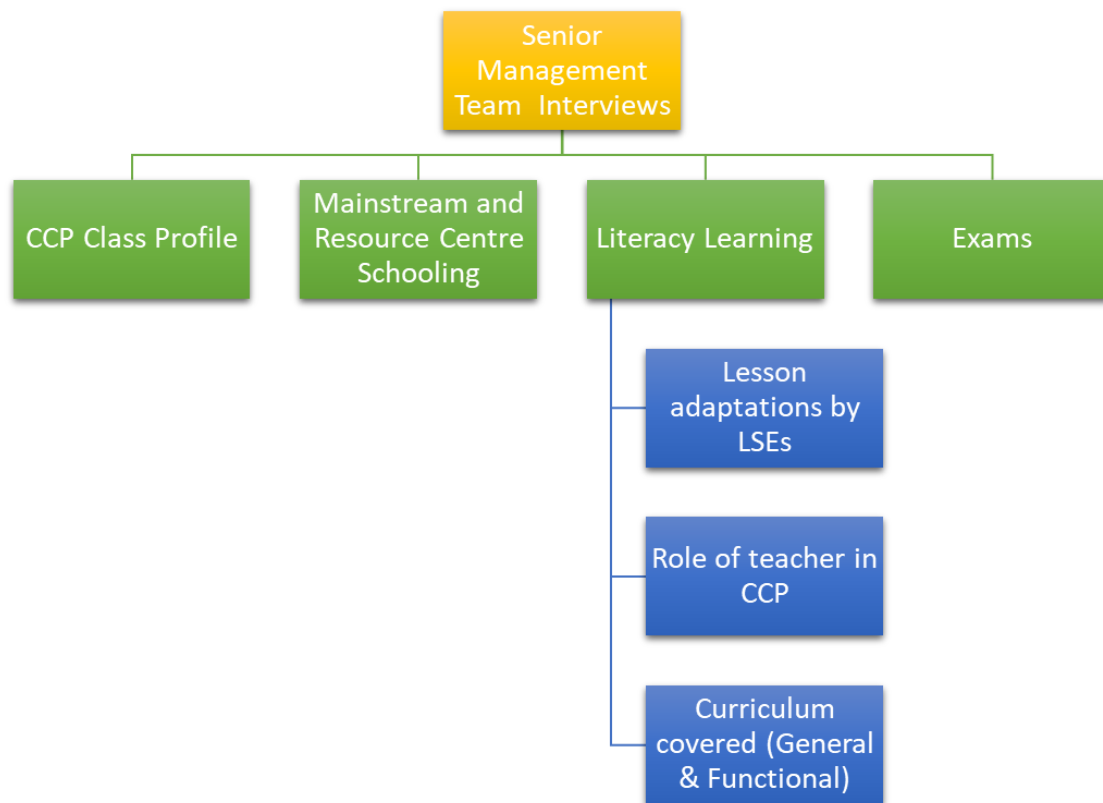


Chart 5 Parent Interviews Coding Map

