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Children's experiences of impairment and support in school: a social model approach.

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ABSTRACT

The inclusion of children and young people with impairments and difficulties into mainstream schools is one of the central international policy issues in school education. One important facet of the inclusion question is children's own perspective on their special educational provision. The New Code of Practice 2001 asks for the ascertainable views of a child with of Statement of Special Educational Need to be taken into account for the annual review of support and provision.

This qualitative study details my work as researcher practitioner in accessing and understanding the perspectives of children with a Statement of Special Educational Need in one school during one academic year. The first two chapters review literature. Chapter One looks at disability through a social model and considers the social climate that sets the scene. Chapter two looks at literature to inform the methodology for 'giving a child a voice' and strategies involved in listening to children. The third chapter looks at the methodology used in this research and chapter four considers the data.

Chapter five concludes the thesis by revisiting the social model of impairment and considers lessons learned. This thesis argues that in this study the very process and structures set up to support the children with a Statement accentuated and maintained the difference. There is a need to change the social setting and environment for the school community to learn how to include <u>every child</u> not just focus on the child with a perceived impairment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

What is the research question?

The main purpose for my research was to attempt to understand what it sometimes *feels* like for a child with impairment in the primary school where I am the Headteacher. The research examines the widely documented assumption that pupil's perspectives will reflect a tension between positive aspects such as wanting and appreciating help and negative aspects such as wanting to avoid stigmatisation. (ILEA 1986, Cheston 1994, Lewis 1995, Padeliadu and Zigmond 1996, Norwich 1997) This tension relates to positive and negative personal evaluations of 'difference'.

Aims of this research therefore in relation to this were;
1.   To examine how pupils with a Statement of Special Need in a mainstream primary school perceive their special provision and to find out whether their perspectives includes positive and negative aspects.
2.   To examine how pupils make sense of their own experiences and identify the balance between positive and negative aspects.

I am the Headteacher of the Primary School where the research took place. It is important to note at the outset that the study was in part an opportunity to improve and develop my own practice in talking to children. The thesis takes the form of a qualitative case study by a practitioner researcher focusing on children in one school during one academic year. There was not the intention to 'talk about' the children but an attempt to give the children a voice. Taking account of Senge's (1990) advice, that we never directly experience the consequences of many of our most important decisions, I wanted to learn from the children about their experiences in school. Embedded in this search for the 'insider perspective', was a search for new knowledge about listening to children with Special Educational Needs. Borrowing a phrase from Denzin et al (1998) the research strategies became "both the tool and the object".

The claim to new knowledge is not to offer an objective view of a child with Special Educational Needs but a subjective, personal, rich and detailed view from 'an insider perspective' (Moore et al 2000). As Oliver reminds us 'an insider perspective' could refer in school to that of the teachers, parents, policy makers or the children. In this study 'insider perspective' initially referred to the children with a Statement of Special Need. However as I listened to these children and their friends I realised that the experiences of everyone in school were inextricably linked and the 'insider perspective' involved the collective experiences of the school. As Oliver points out

> ... *insider perspectives are essential to our attempts to grapple with any social phenomena.* (Moore 2000:7)

The social phenomena involved everyone in school. As I listened to children about their experiences 'of difference' in school, I found that the tensions did not come from impairments but from the policies, practices and cultures of the school.

As Denzin et al (1998:87) reminds us, for a fieldworker

> *"the case study is both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning".*

This action research, or research action sets out to advance the practical research agenda of the process of learning about the case, of really listening to children and it is also an opportunity to challenge 'top down' school improvement, putting the roots of change back in the classroom. Oliver (Moore 2000) champions the researcher who listens to the 'insider perspective' of vulnerable individuals or group.

Also then this research sets out to advance the social model as a framework for inclusion. . Kuhn (Moore 2000) refers to 'knowledge paradigms' in relation to the support of children with Special Educational Needs and in his work he describes how knowledge paradigms replace one another. They do not evolve but change through an accumulation of anomalies, which become so great that

eventually they force a shift to an entirely new paradigm. It is useful to consider the conflicting paradigms of Special Education and inclusion in this way. There has not been a gradual evolution from the traditions and practices of very separate provision for children with Special Educational Needs to inclusion for all children in the local school. By listening to the children this thesis argues powerfully for a need to move from the medical deficit model of looking at impairment to looking at impairment through the social model.

Rationale

For the 2001 Code of Practice and *Every Child Matters* to be more than rhetoric, new insights into children's thinking must be explored and new skills and research strategies developed. The children with Special Needs should be offered a broad and balanced curriculum and the Code of Practice also stipulates that

> *all children should be involved in making decisions where possible*
> *right from the start of their education (DfES, 2001:3.6)*

and should be 'involved in their I.E.P.s (Individual Educational Programmes) and assessment of provision'. The importance of enabling pupil participation in meeting special educational needs is now a key chapter in the Code of Practice. It is also a human right, as the Code of Practice recognises by referring to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.

> *Children who are capable of forming views, have a right to receive*
> *and make known information, to express an opinion and to have that*
> *opinion taken into account in any matters affecting them. The views*
> *of the child should be given due weight, according to the age,*
> *maturity and capability of the child. DfES (2001:33)*

The public view might be that it is fair and morally correct to involve the child in the consultation process. Private concerns may be different.

In reviewing recent work on student voice, Fielding (2001) warns that whilst teachers may hear what students say, they do not cross the bridge to *listening actively* to what they mean. There appears to be a view that young children, especially children with Special Needs, are not able or do not have sufficient experience or knowledge to be involved in any decision making about their

education. This view of children may come from good intentions and a genuine concern for a child's well being. Adults may genuinely feel they are acting in the best interest of the child by speaking for, not listening to, the child with Special Educational Needs.

My study started with the hypothesis that children do have a view and that it is possible to access their views but there was recognition that it is often problematic. I understand that it is often difficult to generate or understand a response from young children. Immature language skills or poor articulation make shared meaning difficult and the problem lies in how to access a child's views. The study does not set out explicitly to challenge the hypothesis that children have a view about their education but through the study the view is implicitly challenged.

In practice during my everyday life I hear colleagues respond to the new Code of Practice with general support. However, often when the principle of including a child's view is discussed, an individual child is named as either not 'likely to have a view' or 'not able to articulate his /her views'. However, when I accompany children on educational visits, or sit with them informally at lunchtime, they often comment on the way supply staff and lunchtime supervisors manage children and they discuss lessons.

It is important to note that as I use the Excellence Model for School Improvement Planning an aspect of work already undertaken includes the views of children. I have used questionnaires with children to learn about school issues but I find group meetings most valuable. A child is nominated from each class to be on a school counsel and I find the children's views very helpful. They advise me on school repairs and maintenance from the 'consumer perspective' and they also talk about curriculum issues. The context and the setting for the conversations with a young child significantly influence the willingness to talk about personal feelings. It is these observations that lead me to believe that children do have views about their school experience.

I recognise that it is more difficult to access the views of very young children, children with communication difficulties or children with social or emotional difficulties. These children have views but the difficulty lies in accessing and understanding their perspectives. It feels to me that this is my problem to overcome and not the children's. There has been a history of research, which has focused on the 'difficulties' and 'differences' of children and adults who have Special Needs. 'Differences' have traditionally been viewed as a deficit and Oliver (1990:5) argues that one of the consequences of developing an understanding from a medical / deficit perspective is to understand all difficulties solely in relation to proposed treatments. Much of the research involving children has been used to understand long term influences such as teaching strategies, the long-term impact of being in care or domestic violence

By looking at disability through a social model I aim to understand the experiences of the children with a Statement of Special Needs in school and learn from them. Very little research has focused on views and opinions from an 'insider perspective of a child'. This is a study of 'the here and now' for the children and for this reason the fieldwork occurred during one academic year.

Every Child Matters

The drive to develop skills in accessing the views of children has now escalated following the publication of *Every Child Matters*, a publication presented to Parliament in 2003, in response to the death of Victoria Climbié. The document stresses the need for all professionals working with children to listen closely to what they have to say. Children with emotional, behavioural or physical difficulties have been found to be most at risk of harm or abuse. The pace of developments in inclusive practice and listening to what children have to say has rapidly moved from 'a good idea' to a key area for training and development. In the *Every Child Matters* document four areas for improvement are identified. A skill in listening to children, particularly vulnerable children, is high on the Government's agenda.

Research for new insights into 'giving a child a voice' may be paralleled with the feminist challenge to rules and practice. Since the Human Rights Act of 1989, which empowers children in law to be included in decisions making about their own lives such as care orders and custody orders, there has been a move towards including the voice of the child. The recent Special Needs Code of Conduct 2001 specifically asks for the views of the child to be taken into account and *Every Child Matters* identifies listening to children as a key area for staff training. However just as in the case of equal opportunities, legal guidelines and personal values of the people in positions of power, may present conflicting paradigms in the translation of law into practice.

> *"The increase in violation of the rules of conduct leads to anomie...The anomic period provides a time for the emergence of new substantive rules of conduct."(Walum 1978:60)*

This quotation is taken from an article which discusses some of the effects of feminist resistance to the 'taken as given' polite male practices. The resistance sets up a disturbance, which is resolved or pushed towards resolution, by the development of new-shared meanings.

Since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, there has been a continuous flow of new initiatives and directives for what should be taught, how and when. One of the effects of the educational expansion has created a climate where OFSTED, the DfES, the QCA, research and universities monopolise the creation of what is considered legitimate educational knowledge. Practitioner research challenges the trend in schools to accept directives from outside the classroom. Much of the published works about inclusion and inclusive practice comes from Universities or the Government. This piece of research may also be seen as a resistance to 'taken as given' imperious pedagogy and an attempt to put the roots for curriculum development back in the classroom.

The study then is a search for strategies to access the experiences of the children and how they feel about their education in a mainstream school. In the 1980's I undertook a piece of action research into issues of racism in the

school where I worked. I had wanted to gain greater understanding of my own management skills with bilingual support staff and classroom assistants. From this previous research I gained insights into the ways racism was reproduced in the curriculum and in my own practice. The content of this earlier research was reported in another unpublished paper (Twelvetree 1989) but the tensions of action research re- emerged through this study.

If we imagine the research arena as a field in which to borrow a phrase from Heidegger, we create an empty space, a litchtung or clearing in which meaning can take place. (Reason1988: 81) Practitioner research is a methodology for personal/professional living. We reshape our practice in empty spaces of our own choosing for our own purposes and what is created is marked by attitude change as a response to deeper understanding. Practitioner research placed me in the research context or 'empty space' with the question 'What is it that I am really doing?'(Devereux 1967)

Just as in my previous research I had to accept that racism was not coming 'from a nasty person out there' but I had to own the problems, so the resulting data in this research had an impact on the professional, personal and private self. The research began as a piece of empirical research, an enquiry carried out in order to understand. As a traveller on a research journey I became changed by the knowledge and experiences of research and the paper takes the form of action research.

This research took place in a Local Authority Primary School in England between September 2002 until October 2003, keeping the fieldwork within one academic year. Hillfoot School is a small Church of England Primary School with one class of thirty children in each year group. As a Church school there is no catchment area and the children come from a wide range of socio- economic backgrounds. The school does not have a Nursery so for many children the school is the first formal educational setting. When I took up my post as Headteacher six years ago there were no children in school with a Statement of Educational Special Need. Over the last few years there has been a change in Government and Local Authority policies and practice

regarding inclusion. There has been a marked decrease in the % of pupils with a Statement of Special Need who has been placed in a Special School.

% Of pupils in Sheffield, aged 5-15 years, with a Statement in Special Schools				
1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
41.63	32.12	31.37	29.99	28.94

In the school where I work, the number of children with a Statement has risen from none to five in three years and there are also a significant number of children who have Special Educational Needs but without a Statement. They are all at the younger end of the school. There are children with medical, physical and emotional/behavioural Special Needs and these children have had an impact on teaching, resources and staffing. Six years ago there was one part time Childcare Assistant for the Reception Class and there are now more Classroom Assistants than teaching staff. This change is not peculiar to this school but is typical throughout the city. There is a social change with an increased expectation that all children, whatever their Special Needs, should be given the opportunity of mainstream education if this is the wish of the parents. The children in this piece of research have all come straight into school. None of the children have changed schools and so they are not in a position to compare their educational provision with another setting.

My interest in inclusion

My interest in inclusion was aroused by a series of events. Following the Government's drive to raise standards and for the development of inclusive schools, as shown above, there has been a rapid increase in the number of children with Special Needs in the school and there has also been a rapid and significant rise in the number of teaching assistants. Some assistants are appointed to raise standards and some are appointed to support inclusion. In our school, which has had a tradition of achieving high standards in literacy and numeracy, the teachers are now expected to teach children that challenge their teaching styles and expectations. For some of the teachers and support staff this is the first time that they have been expected work with children who

would in the past have attended a Special School and this occurs at the same time as a Government drive to raise standards. Many schools in the city mirror this rapid change of staffing and pupil profile. 'Standards' and 'inclusion' seem to be incommensurable paradigms.

Earlier last year I visited Tanzania where there are no Special Schools. I visited Lerangwe Primary School in Moshi and spoke to the Headteacher, who welcomed all children irrespective of their physical, emotional or educational needs. As Mr Mbwila said 'Where else would they go?' I had thought that perhaps inclusion was accepted by Mr Mbwila because there was not the same public accountability and competitive culture. It could also be because the children were from the Chagga tribe who lives according to the principles of *ujamaa*, sharing a culture of group support and mutual responsibility. It could have been because there is a growing expectation that all children are entitled to an education and that the development of the country depends on an educated population. President Mwalimu has encouraged the people to believe that the improved economy of the country starts by educating all children.

Mr Mbwila's response could have been because there were no Special Schools. This is due to limited public money not because of a commitment to inclusion. It is very difficult for a visitor to understand the culture and values of another country but the total acceptance of all children was striking. As Plato says, 'our behaviour will reflect the principles of that city and no other'(Pring R 2000).

A teacher from Seattle visited Sheffield as part of an Education Action Zone Project. He looked around and asked 'Where are all the special children?' (Mawson 2001:2) In Seattle there are no Special Schools. In America over the last twenty years, federal and state statutes have played a dominant role in the education of all students and particularly those with disabilities. There are clear expectations that all children should have access to the general curriculum. There is increased accountability for the performance of all pupils and there is a move away from categorising and labelling children with disabilities. Funding for children 'needing extra services' is provided to raise

standards of all the children, not particularly the child with a disability. The focus is placed on the service, not 'the child with a problem.'

Mr Mbwila and the teacher from Seattle both accepted inclusion, yet each from his own standpoint. Their views challenged my own thinking about inclusion and this triggered the research. The Green paper: *Meeting the Challenge of Change* signals a projected increase in the number of classroom assistants supporting pupils in mainstream schools to raise standards and inclusion of all pupils. Latest estimates of numbers of supporters in mainstream schools have now reached more than 80,000. The Government has promised an extra 20,000 full time posts by 2002. British Primary schools are going through a period of change and development, aiming to be more inclusive. This has the potential for both progress and crisis.

Borrowing a strategy from Ainscow (2000) action research in other countries and in different contexts is included in this study to aid understanding of the local context. The familiar became strange, the strange familiar. This in-depth look at inclusive practice revealed strange exclusive barriers. The totally inclusive attitude of Mr Mbwila was thought to be strange but in all studies of good inclusive practice, a total commitment to inclusion was the key common factor. The paper does not set out to provide general truths but to focus on one small primary school. It is not an argument for or against inclusion but a study of what is, not what should be.

'Doing' research may conjure up visions more to do with the search for truth 'out there', rather than the social construction of reality here. It is perhaps this position of 'I/thou' rather than 'I/it' or 'I/me' that is the most demanding position of a researcher. It was when I moved from the distant researcher position to the closer position, putting the personal self under the research gaze that new meanings emerged.

The next two chapters form stepping stones on the research journey as I move from looking at what is happening 'out there' to an in-depth investigation into reality here. Chapter one presents an overview of the development and

changing social views towards 'impairment' and 'difference'. It starts by learning more about 'the case' and sets the scene for a paradigm shift from the medical/ deficit model supporting children with Special Educational Needs to social model for inclusive education.

The second chapter looks at 'the process of learning about the case'. It may seem unusual to have two chapters reviewing literature in a piece of action research of this scale however I believe it is important. I want to present a social model of disability with a clear picture of the rapid changes in inclusive policy and practice. The move towards a social model of disability has heightened interest in accessing the views of children, particularly vulnerable children or children who do not readily communicate. This research began by learning about both the tools and the object and chapter two takes an in-depth look at the process of learning about 'the case'. Adult decisions about inclusion and the views of the children who have ' inclusion done to them', present potentially conflicting paradigms. These tensions and disturbances set the scene for new meanings to emerge

CHAPTER 1

LEARNING ABOUT THE CASE

1.1 Inclusion

The achievement of an inclusive education system is a major challenge facing countries throughout the world. In Britain, two words seem to stand out from the Governments education agenda, 'standards' and 'inclusion'. Whilst both concepts are laudable they bring with them tensions, challenges and potentially opposing goals. This has the potential for both progress and crisis.

Inclusion is an active, not a passive process, as Corbett et al (2000) suggests.

> *Inclusive education is an unabashed announcement, a public and political declaration and celebration of difference. It requires continual proactive responsiveness to foster an inclusive educational culture. Armstrong et al 2000:134*

There have been three dominant paradigms in inclusive education (Skidmore 2003). Each paradigm draws on distinct theoretical frameworks to explain complex phenomena. The psycho- medical paradigm emphasises that special needs arise out of the deficits in the individual. The sociological paradigm emphasises that special needs arise from the reproduction of structural inequalities in society through sorting and tracking, and the organisational paradigm is based on the belief that problems of inclusion arise from deficiencies in the way schools are organised.

Inclusion is not primarily concerned with children with impairments or with learners categorised as 'having special educational needs'. Within Britain and internationally such a view

> *"obscures excluding pressures based on wealth, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class and attainment. Booth (Armstrong et al 2000:79)*

In response to the Bullock Report (DES 1977) and the Swann Report (Schools Council 1985) there was 'positive discrimination' of staffing to encourage pupils learning English as an additional language. Childcare assistants were appointed to schools where there was a significant proportion of pupils who

used English as an additional language. Additional staffing is now placed in Educational Action Zones, areas of high unemployment or social deprivation.

In Britain the Code of Practice on the assessment and identification of Special Educational Needs (D f EE 1994) has had a significant impact on inclusion. The subsequent 1993 Educational Reform Act substantially changes the context in which state schools have to operate. The Special Needs Code of Practice 2002 provides practical advice to Local Authorities, maintained schools (State Funded) and others to carry out their statutory duties to identify, assess and make provision for children's Special Educational Needs. The first code of practice came in to effect in 1994 and following consultation between LEAs schools, and voluntary bodies, the health and social services. In 1999 the code was revised and the new Code of Practice came into effect from 1st January 2002. From that date LEAs, schools, early education settings, and those who help them, including health and social services must have regard to it. Part of the code amends the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to prohibit all schools from discrimination against children with impairments in their admission arrangements.

Children have a special educational need if they have a learning difficulty that calls for special educational provision to be made for them. Children are considered to have a learning difficulty if they have

- a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of the children at the same age
- have an impairment which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in school

Children must not be regarded as having special educational needs solely because the language or form of language of their home is different from the language in which they will be taught.

In each school there must be a teacher, a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) who has the overall responsibility to ensure that the Code

of Practice is followed and that <u>all children</u> have their needs met. Each teacher is responsible for the teaching and planning to meet the needs of all pupils in his/her class. Children who need *additional or different* provision by the school, from the differentiated curriculum plan are considered to be 'on school action'. Where children need help from outside agencies and other profession bodies the school must respond by providing 'school action plus'. For a very few children the help given to a child through 'school action plus' is not sufficient to enable the pupil to make adequate progress. It will then be necessary for the school, in consultation with the parents, and external agencies involved, to ask the authority to make a statutory assessment. Following a formal assessment, the Local Authority will issue a 'Statement of Special Need' which will outline how the child's needs will be met. This Statement will include the number of hours of additional or different support and funding which will be given for the child's needs to be met.

The SENCO supports and guides class teachers and is the link person for parents and other professionals who may support a child from outside the school such as the health or social services.

- The Code of Practice establishes a set of procedures involving other agencies such as health and social services.
- It changed the consumer's rights and choices.
- It accentuated accountability and value for money.

Consumer 'rights and choices' and 'value for money' may be conflicting aims and a source of conflicting paradigms. It is not clear in the Code of Practice who ' the consumer' is, whether this refers to the parent of a child with Special Needs, the child with Special Needs, all parents or all children. Each party may have a different choice and believe they have particular rights.

The tensions between 'accentuated accountability' and 'value for money' are also problematic in interpreting the Act. The processes used to ensure accountably in the type of support and level of support a child receives, diverts money away from the provision. The balance between accountability and

value for money is a constant source of tension between the parties involved. Changing the provision for children with Special Educational Needs does not achieve inclusion but a change is needed in all aspect of education and social policy.

In the last few decades, the view of Special Education has gradually changed in western societies. Instead of segregating students with Special Needs in special classes in mainstream schools, the ideology of inclusive education is about fitting schools to meet the needs of children. The educational system is responsible for including a large diversity of pupils and to provide for a differentiated and appropriate education for all.

There is still a wide range of interpretation of the implication for admitting all children into mainstream schools. Children may be integrated or accommodated in the school but through grouping, setting or by the use of support staff they are still excluded from full access to the school curriculum. This is evident in a Reception Class where the curriculum guidelines, 'Early learning goals' by the QCA are followed. Learning objectives include

- Work as part of a group or class, taking turns and sharing fairly.
- Form good relationships with adults and peers.

The teaching assistants may be used to take children with learning or behaviour difficulties out of the classroom. This excludes all children from accessing the curriculum. The children with challenging behaviour are excluded from being part of a class. The other children are not given strategies to negotiate and they are not encouraged to be mutually supportive or tolerant of diversity. The explicit curriculum is to encourage the children to be sociable and mix with each other. The hidden curriculum or what Hargreaves refers to as the 'paracurriculum' is that the children are taught that it is acceptable to exclude some children, particularly those who look or behave differently. (Finch et al 1980)

Special Needs has been influenced by various ideologies, which means that there are many ways of understanding how the teaching could be realised. The knowledge traditions, values and attitudes in society influence the educational system. Traditionally special education has focused more on the individual functional disorders of pupils with special needs. The trend is now towards a more comprehensive, contextual and ecological approach.

Yet the ideology of inclusion still seems to be a major challenge in many countries. (Clark, Dyson, Millward & Skidmore1997, Haug 1999, Hughes, Shumm & Vaughn 1996. Flem & Keller 2000). The teacher traditionally has expected to organise and plan for the children. The purpose of any support staff used to be to help the class teacher, often with administrative tasks and general classroom duties such as cleaning paint pots and keeping books tidy. Now the focus is towards the learning needs of the children. As Black-Hawkins (1999) warns, inclusion and exclusion are semantically, linked as antonyms, but in her experience teachers rarely made the connection.

Inclusion is an ideal but little thought may be given to the 'nitty-gritty' mechanics and views and values of the people directly involved. Whilst teachers may publicly support the ideal that all pupils of whatever intellectual or physical ability should be included into mainstream education, private concerns may be different.

Support for inclusion is now perhaps the strongest ever but tensions arise from different understandings of the inclusion process and from different value systems. Inclusion also means different things for different children and some children present varying degrees of challenge to the teachers. Physical problems may be addressed by the building of ramps and rails but these does not necessary challenge a teacher's classroom practice. Physical problems are visible to everyone and teachers may feel that their professionalism is not challenged.

> *There is often an emphasis on including children with physical and sensory disabilities rather than those who are more challenging. (Corbett 2001:55)*

Behaviour and learning difficulties present a far greater challenge. There is always the private and public concern that the educational outcomes or behaviour of the child is a consequence of poor teaching. It is children who challenge a teacher's professionalism and classroom practice who are more difficult to include. Autistic children and children who have social or emotional difficulties challenge the teacher in many ways. With Performance Management and teaching assistants the teacher may feel she is failing in a public space.

Experienced teachers find that their skills and belief of what is 'good practice' are challenged. Performance management and school league tables put a public gaze on the educational outcomes of all the children. The non-competitive ethos of inclusion as self-development exists alongside competitive excellence through testing and league tables.

Social Inclusion requires a school to identify pupils who are under achieving and ensure that all children are included into the full life of the school. A main-stream teacher may be expected to teach children who are travellers, asylum seekers, children who use English as an additional language, looked after children, sick children, summer born children and some children who in the past, would have been in Special Schools. The class may also include children from minority ethnic and faith groups.

OfSTED's guide for inspectors asks three key questions about Social Inclusion.

1. Do all the pupils get a fair deal at school?
2. How well does the school recognise and overcome barriers to learning?
3. Do the school's values and culture embrace inclusion?

Williams (1975) has suggested that 'culture' is one of the most complicated words in the English language, partly because it has a history of shifting meanings and partly because it is used to cover concepts in several distinct disciplines. The popular usage of culture tends to identify 'high' or minority taste culture, in particular certain kinds of music, literature and art. This use of culture is often associated with the upper classes. Culture as used by

sociologists and anthropologists means everything that is made such as tools technology, language, attitudes and values. Culture refers to strategies a society has developed to live together and it is from this that the curriculum is selected.

> *Culture...is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, custom and other capabilities and habits required by members of a society. Tylor 1924: (Hofstede 1994:203)*

The anthropological and sociological definitions of culture may lead to two different methods of cultural analysis. The first would take the form of data collection and classification whereas the second would be more concerned with interpretation of a culture.

The calls for inclusive schools are limited by a framework, which appeals to 'equal opportunities'. Inclusive schooling does not only appeal to the rights of disabled children, but also challenges what constitutes 'normal.' There has been a long history of research 'about' children but there is now a development of work, which aims to give the child a voice.

As Thomas (2001) points out 'inclusion' has become something of an international buzzword. It is difficult to trace its provenance or the growth in its use over the last two decades but it is now *de rigeur* for mission statements, political speeches and policy documents. It has become a cliché, with an assumption that everyone who is open minded and right thinking should support inclusion.

1.2 Changing attitudes to 'difference'

Sociologists have been researching into issues related to impairment for a long time. Parsons in 1951 argued that medicine was used as a mechanism for social control. His work influenced several works, which focused on aspects of the lives of people with impairments. There was work on stigma, the role of professionals (Ilich *et al* in 1977) and research looking at impairment and poverty (Townsend 1979). There have also been large-scale studies looking at

impairment within the general population (Harris 1971, Martin *et al.1988)*. All these studies made important contributions to contemporary thinking about impairment and difference. They were all in part rooted in thinking that impairment, whether physical, sensory or intellectual is the main cause of 'disability', with the 'disability' in turn causing economic and political difficulties. It was the impairment that was seen as the problem not the attitudes of society towards it. Scheff (1966) and Edgerton (1967) seriously questioned society's attitudes to mental illness but his insights did not extend to physical difficulties.

A significant change came through research taken by people who had impairment (Drieger 1989, Campbell and Oliver 1996, Charlton 1998). In 1976 UPIAS (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation) redefined disability and they made the distinction between biological and social disadvantages. Impairment is a physical condition whereas disability is imposed by society by segregation and disadvantage. Oliver (1983) used the phrase 'a social model of disability'

Over the following decade researchers who had impairments, wrote about experiences of oppression and exclusion (Oliver et al 1988, Morris 1989 and Barnes 1990). This was paralleled by emancipatory work by black and feminist researchers and there was a growth of critical social research, not *about*, but by oppressed groups. Emancipatory disability research is about the empowerment of people with impairment. The aim of this research is to transform, to remove barriers and to change values and thinking. It focuses on the economic, environmental and cultural barriers encountered by people viewed by others as having some sort of impairment. This model does not ignore the need for medical or therapeutic treatments but challenges barriers to education, health and social support through negative attitudes.

Historically, medical academics and scientists dominated disability research and the aim was to present an objective view founded on 'realist ontology' in the belief that there is a 'reality out there'. There is now recognition that there are differences between 'natural' and 'social' worlds. Natural worlds have

universal characteristics whereas time, place, culture and context, influences social worlds. The aim of emancipatory research is to offer a subjective view but the claim is to present 'reality', the personal reality of discrimination and disadvantage.

Oliver (1992) used the term 'emancipatory' disability research, which referred to what was then, a radical new approach to researching disability issues. Whilst most of the following literature was supportive of the principles underpinning the emancipatory research paradigm there are still debates about the desirability or effectiveness of inclusive education.

Disabled researchers such as Campbell and Oliver (1996) reported on the under funding, lack of faith of the policy makers and active opposition on the part of traditional voluntary organisations. Historically equal opportunity legislation, in relation to different groups, has developed along different pathways, with the Equal Pay Act 1970,Race Relations Act 1976, and 1983 and the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995. Each Act refers to a particular group of people but the struggle is to protect everyone from discrimination and exclusion. The move now is towards an inclusive society rather than focus on specific groups.

People with 'autism' have not traditionally been part of the wider disability movement and many people who are labelled 'autistic' by professionals and academics do not accept the label 'disabled' themselves. I am sensitive to this and respect their view however for my study I have included children who are diagnosed as being autistic. The focus of the study is on understanding the experiences of children who have a Statement of Special Needs and the barriers they face, not the 'impairment'. People with autism may not want to feel part of larger group but they do experience discrimination and exclusion. In a report published by the National Autistic Society *Inclusion and Autism: is it working? (2000),* it was found that schools are still failing to support and understand the specific needs of children diagnosed as 'autistic'. Children labelled 'autistic' make the biggest single group of children excluded from school; twenty times higher than the National average. The majority of

children with a label of autism are found in Special schools or units. Where I work there is more concern and anxiety for including children with autism then any other.

The aim of my research is to listen to the experiences of children and not to focus on their impairment but I do want to consider the particular issues for children diagnosed as 'autistic'. These children may not have an 'impairment' but their primary difficulties are in relation to understanding a confusing social world. They are disabled or excluded as a response to their 'way of being' and behaviours. Aylott (2003) argues that people with a label of autism need to be part of the disability movement debate.

Leo Kanner first published, in 1943, a study of eleven children who presented certain behaviours. Hans Asperger wrote about four children in 1944 and his work led to more research throughout the world. His work was not translated into English until the 1970s when Wing and Gould (1979) drew upon Aspberger's (1944) work to support their work on children with a label of autism. They concluded that there were children with 'severe autism' and they were those with ' mild autism'. Children who presented Kanner's autism developed into adulthood presenting with Asperger's Syndrome. Certain behaviours were identified that fall in the 'autistic spectrum'
• An impairment to interact socially

• A communication disorder

• Certain bizarre behaviours

• Bizarre responses to sensory stimuli

• Impairment in the use of imaginary play
Wing and Gould in the development of the understanding of the behaviours of autism set up criteria for assessment and diagnosis of autism as 'impairment'. Their work developed and framed what is known as Wing's 'Triad of Impairments (1988): impairments of social interaction, communication and imagination.

The impairments in understanding verbal communication slows down a person's ability to understand or respond in a social situation. This can lead to people seeming to be 'non-compliant' or 'demand avoiding'. Autism has a history of being considered from a deficit/impairment perspective. This sharply contradicts developments in the wider disability movement, which has dispensed with the medical/ impairment model and has advocated for an understanding of impairment from within a social model.

1.3 Understanding disability through a social model

A social model represented a radical change in conventional thinking about impairment and dependency. A 'social model' is a way of understanding impairment. It focuses on the disadvantages and discrimination created by a society's responses to difference and impairment, particularly the economic, environmental and cultural barriers encountered by people. These include inaccessible education, information and communication systems, working environments, benefits, discriminatory health and social support services, transport and devaluing disabled people through negative images in the media, films, television and newspapers.

The social model directly challenges the traditional assumptions of the 'medical model', with impairment as a problem to be put right, rather than a difference. This thesis will argue that there is a need to challenge the traditional medical model if we are to more accurately understand disability. If we continue to see 'difference' as deficit, difficulty or abnormality, accepting the person has the problem, there is no need to change the environments and social settings, which limit and disable.

The British Disability movement challenged the dominance of the medical model by proposing a social model alternative. The social model has been defined as

> *The social model of disability represents nothing more complicated than a focus on the economic, environmental and cultural barriers encountered by people viewed by others as having some form of impairment. (Barnes 2003)*

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The definition of the social model is based upon differentiating 'impairment ' from 'disability'. The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) defined this as follows:

Impairment- *a term that refers to the lacking part of or all of a limb or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body*

Disability- *the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairment and this excludes them from the mainstream of social activities (UPIAS 1976:3-4*

The term 'disabled people' rather than the term 'people with disabilities' is the preferred term set out by UPIAS. The British Council for Disabled People has forged a collective identity for people with a range of physical and sensory impairments. People with learning or emotional difficulties have not been included in the social model until recently. There are groups representing people with learning difficulties who do not accept the term 'impaired'. However for this thesis I have included children who have been judged by professionals to be   autistic in the social model. I understand that the children in this study did not identify with the term impairment, disability or defects but they did experience difference and they gave examples of barriers and exclusion.

1.4 Changing attitudes to children

There are many parallels to changing attitudes to 'impairment' and changing attitudes to children. There has been a tradition in most countries that adults and children with impairments have been amongst marginalised groups and excluded from decision making, even decisions which relate directly to their own lives. Another parallel is the recognition of the 'natural' and 'social' worlds that influence a person's development. There is the natural aspect of child development with children throughout the world growing and developing through similar physical stages. However the social world has a huge impact how a child is cared for by parents and the society in which he/she lives. The

immaturity of children is a biological fact of life but the ways in which this immaturity is understood and made meaningful is a fact of culture.

In Great Britain over the last century legislation relating specifically to children has emerged. For example the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Protection of Children Act 1889 made explicit that cruelty to children would be viewed as a criminal act and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) was established in 1890. In 1948 the first Children's Act was implemented and this emphasised the importance of keeping families together. The Act aimed to protect children within a framework where adults, parents or professionals, dominated the decision making.

In 1959 the United Nations issued a Declaration of the Rights of the Child which focuses on care and protection of children in terms of nutrition, medical attention, education as well as their rights to be protected from exploitation. However the legislation perpetuated to deficit model of childhood and children were seen as the property of their parents and as passive recipients of decision making about their lives.

It can be argued that to be human confers 'personhood' and absolute rights, should not be circumscribed by age, ability, nationality, gender or any other characteristic. The Discrimination Act of 1996 and Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 assert the rights of vulnerable groups. Such organisations see discrete groups but this overlooks complex and compound disadvantage and discrimination, which can also be compounded by other factors such as poverty. Children have a long tradition of being 'marginalised' or 'cared for'. The traditional 'deficit/ physical' model of viewing a child, focuses on the 'immaturity of the child', rather than looking at the world of a child through a social model. The challenge becomes exacerbated when a child also has impairment.

1.5 Special Needs and mainstream schooling

At the turn of the century, there was strong feeling in Britain that in the newly developed 'council schools' (1904) that 'imbeciles' or 'unworthy' children should not be admitted. This was not viewed as 'an exclusion' but the child with impairment had no right to be in a mainstream school. Theorists such as Herbert Spencer and Darwin promoted the 'scientific' idea that the weak or 'mentally and physically handicapped' children should not be allowed to mix with 'normal children'. While eugenic views are not accepted now it is important to remember how prevalent this view was and how strongly it was felt. The dominance of the medical model within special needs has been criticised by many writers (Clark, Dyson and Millward 1998) but supporters of the social model argue that the general public has not accepted it.

In 1913 Cyril Burt was appointed in London as the first educational psychologist He developed a system for measuring mental ability or 'intelligence'. Whilst Burt's findings were found to be fraudulent, the notion of 'inherited intelligence' was accepted by the general public. The idea that intelligence is inherited, that some children should not be allowed in a mainstream school and that some children can legitimately be excluded from society has persisted in custom and practice if not stated explicitly. Thomas et al (2001) found in a survey that 54% of headteachers and 33% teachers still thought that more children should attend special schools.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 amends the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995. There is new emphasis in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice on the rights of the child with special needs being involved in decisions. This gives people who have traditionally been discriminated and excluded an opportunity to challenge the status quo. This chapter presents the social setting with a drive for schools and society to be more inclusive and to move to a social model for looking at impairment. I have explored how impairment and difference have been theorised with each theory having a model/approach underpinning it. This chapter proposes a paradigm shift to move away from positive research methods in impairment

and to move towards people with disabilities to have 'a voice'. The following chapter is the next step on the research journey to enable the children in the school where I work to have a voice. I recognise that the children I intend to learn more about are complex individuals who do not readily communicate and for this reason I have given time and thought into researching ' the process of learning about the case.'

CHAPTER 2.

THE PROCESS OF LEARNING ABOUT THE CASE.

2.1 Learning to talk and not 'talk about'

This chapter looks at literature, which has guided and informed the methodology used in my thesis and the following chapter focuses on my practice. As Walker (Hollingsworth 1997) warns, there should not be a great divide between theory and action, between educational research and practice. This is particularly true in action research. Stenhouse (1975) champions the teacher researcher who aims to 'talk', instead of 'talk about' life in the classroom. He reminds us that there are tensions between the roles of teacher and researcher.

My fieldwork took place in one school during one academic year and it was as Stake describes, a case study "of the particularity and complexity of a single case."(Bassey 1999:1). As Cohen *et. al* (1980:107) explain, in a case study, the researcher probes deeply and analyses intensively the "multifarious phenomena" that constitutes the focus of the study. This case study is a "bounded system", (Cresswell 1998:37) bound by data, which has been collected within one year, and bound by the data being collected in one school. The interviews and what the children have to say are central to the study. The multifarious phenomena include comments by parents, teachers, children and personal reflections. There are advantages and disadvantages for an educationalist attempting to analyse her own society. There are strengths and weaknesses with a researcher working 'in her own back yard'. There is less chance of misinterpreting or being misled by data but things may be overlooked or taken for granted when it should be questioned.

There are arguments of whether a researcher can ever give an account of the views of another without the voice of the researcher coming through. Devereux (1967) refers to problem for researchers where there is a perceived distance between the researcher and the problem. He refers to the problem of

seeing 'I/it', instead of seeing the problem as I/me. The practitioner must exploit her subjectivity and see herself as her most important research instrument as she attempts to speak about the problem of her practice (Devereux 1967, Nixon 1981, Pollard 1985, Whitehead 1989). Interviewing requires careful analysis of the strategies involved which facilitate the learning outcome. To solve a research question, there must also be personal reflection, not only a reflection on the data generated. The research will influence the interviewer's views and thinking.

Stenhouse's (1975) 'I/me' aspect of human interaction in interviews identifies the practitioner as more than a research instrument. She is also the research problem, in her ability or inability to 'read' the context correctly. Group or individual interviews are strategies and their strengths and weaknesses are determined by the skill of the interviewer. The research question should determine the type of interview that is most appropriate, as a skilled craft person chooses the best tool for the job. Woven into the issue of 'what is the research question ', is the close-up 'I/me' question of 'What is it that I am really doing?'

There is always a moral dilemma of the controlling role of the interviewer and I must acknowledge that my role of Headteacher is likely to have influenced what a child said and did. However the children could also be influenced because I was an adult or an unfamiliar person. It is likely that being female and of the same ethnic group as the children and speaking in the same accent and dialect helped to 'build bridges' of communication.

As Oakley 1969 (May 1993) points out, this is not necessarily a weakness in the research but must be taken into account when reflecting on the information given. As Altheide and Johnson point out

> "a key part of the ethnographic ethic is how we account for ourselves. Good ethnographies show the hand of the ethnographer."
> Denzin. and Lincoln .1998:30.

No matter how determined a researcher is to present an objective view, what is included or excluded in research at some point is a personal selection by the researcher and influenced by her values and cultural background. This is not a weakness but it is important for the researcher to be explicit about her position both to the reader and most importantly to herself. Fontana and Frey (Denzin and Lincoln 1998) point out that the controlling role of the interviewer must not be overlooked. Whilst focusing on the interviewee the influences of the interviewer may be overlooked. The age, sex, social classes, form of dress, ethnic group, religion, are just a few characteristics of an interviewer that may influence an informant's response. Stenhouse (1975) "pointed to the need to see the 'cap' interviewers were wearing. "(P18).

2:2 The cap that the researcher is wearing

The nature of subjectivity on the research product is regarded as either a source of concern, which must be acknowledged and controlled, or as an asset to be exploited. A valuable strategy for self-development is personal reflection and self-evaluation. This research is subjective in nature and the subjectivity is part of the learning process for self and school improvement. The subjectivity should not be seen as a weakness but an empowerment of the researcher to look at her practice, to reflect and to develop her own solutions. An aspect of practitioner research is attitude change therefore the researcher must exploit her subjectivity and see herself as her most important research instrument as she attempts to speak the problem of her practice. The research problem is part of the lived experience of the practitioner; she has perhaps owned it for years. (Devereux 1967) Just as my views on my practices regarding racism were challenged in a previous study (Twelvetree 1989), over the two-year period for this research my own views on inclusion changed.

This action research puts my ability to access the views of children who do not readily choose to communicate in a public space. Cresswell (1998) highlights a particularly disturbing aspect of action research for the researcher. The problems that emerge do not belong to some 'other' but must be owned by the researcher. By placing the educational lives of the pupils where I work in the

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public gaze in the form of this dissertation I am also putting my own practice and my own education as a practitioner and researcher in the public arena.

My focus changed from the *knowledge to be gained* to an *understanding* of the children's lives in school. I changed the focus from improving my practice in *talking to* children to *listening* to children. This study did not start as a vehicle for school improvement but as I have said in the previous chapter it became both a strategy for personal development both in understanding the feelings and experiences of young children and in accessing these views. The research began as theoretical research but through the field study it was difficult to separate out my position of practitioner and researcher. As Noffke (2002:2) warns, action research lies between personal and professional development. (Armstrong et al 2004) The literature search influenced my thinking and the nature of my research changed from being theoretical to a piece of action research.

'Action research' is used as a general term to describe processes of planning, transforming and evaluation which does not predetermine outcomes or describe the unexpected (Armstrong (2004). Bassey (1999) defines action research as an enquiry carried out in order to understand, evaluate and change. My position of practitioner/ researcher presents conflicting paradigms and as Walker observed, in research

> *Academic and social life, theory and practice, work and family are not really so different buts constantly interrupt one another, often in complex ways.* (Hollingsworth 1997:136)

The fieldwork influenced change in systems and practice, but it also affected personal change. Walker was aware in South Africa of the gross disparities in social and educational justice and what was actually happening in her own organisation. Walker in her personal account of transgressing boundaries in everyday and academic discourses recalls the tensions between professional action and our own personal ideologies. (Hollingsworth 1997) What are even more disturbing in action research are the tensions and conflicting paradigms of our personal ideology and our own practice. The impact of my own practice

involving inclusive practices set up disturbances and tensions at personal, professional and institutional levels.

As Susan Noffke explains, action research means 'becoming practically critical' in and through

> *a continuous process of clarification of our vision in the areas of social justice, of recognising the constraints on practice, and of developing the capabilities necessary to realise those visions, while holding onto all three as problematic. Hollingsworth 1997:137)*

The creation of knowledge by researchers remains for the most part in the control of the academics in institutions and higher education as a neat example of intellectual assimilation. Action research has been used as a means of imposing policy change but in contrast it is also seen as a vehicle to challenge 'top down' policy making. (Armstrong et al 2004) Barthes (1973) suggests that the distance between the two positions, research by institutions and practitioner research, can be conveyed by two images. A researcher can be likened to a woodcutter going into a forest to study the trees. A practitioner researcher is 'the tree' and therefore is able to speak and not 'speak about' problems.

Top-down versus bottom –up methodologies may be loosely characterised by the distance between the observer and the observed. Practitioner research puts the practitioner at the centre of the research context with the question "What am I really doing?" If I use Dilthey's concept of a person as an 'I/me' relationship (Campbell 1988), 'I' the inner self and 'me' the professional self, then methodologically, Stenhouse (1975) provides a rich source of reflection about case study as a method to understand social situations. Case study, Stenhouse (1975) suggests, offers the researcher a specific I/me role. ' I ' as the case study of self, and 'me' as a case study of an issue to be explored.

There will always be different starting points to practitioner problem solution in terms of personal background, experience and context. The more sensitive the problem, the more challenging for the practitioner it may be for attitude

change. The investigation into interviewing children in my school was not concerned with nasty people out there but <u>me.</u> The person who owns the problem lives with the results of its solution. She starts from where she is, and exploits her own tacit knowledge, acquired from perhaps years of lived experience in classrooms.

I undertook this action research into the views of children but I also had to try to look at my own practice and values as objectively as possible. After mistakes and false starts I had to turn the researcher's gaze on myself. As Burgess advised, I needed to develop 'self conscious awareness' and to feel involved and detached at the same time.

> *"One lives in two different worlds of thought at the same time"*
> *Burgess 1982: 1*

I felt like the character in the James Joyce story who

> *" lived at a little distance from his body regarding his own*
> *actions with doubtful side glances (Joyce 1956: 106)*

2:3 Positionality

Positionality refers to the experiences, attitudes, ethnic background, role, status, gender, age and appearance of the researcher, which consciously or unconsciously has an impact upon the research. The style and strategies I used to explore 'the research issue' were influenced by my way of looking at social reality and my epistemological standpoint. There are differing views of how knowledge can be acquired and how it can be communicated to others.

There is a positivist view that the nature of knowledge is something hard, real and can be described and understood by rigorous research. An opposing, anti-positivist view is "that knowledge is of a softer, more subjective, spiritual or even transcendental kind, based on experience and insight of a unique and essentially personal nature." (Burrell and Morgan: Cohen and Manion 1980:6) These two assumptions, of whether knowledge is something that can be

acquired or is something that has to be personally experienced, influenced how I went about the research.

Kvale (1996) uses two metaphors to describe the epistemological perspectives of researchers. He suggests the researcher can act as 'a miner' and use interviewing to uncover hidden facts and experiences. In 'the miner' metaphor, knowledge is seen as buried treasure and the researcher is a miner who unearths valuable metal. Some miners search for objective facts to be quantified, while others dig for deeper meanings and understandings. This standpoint sees knowledge hidden and waiting to be discovered by the researcher. The raw material is then worked on and presented as a refined and polished product.

The 'traveller' metaphor describes the interviewer travelling on a journey, gathering information throughout the research process and providing a report at the end. These two metaphors reveal two philosophical approaches to the interviewing process. The distinction is important at the research design stage. For this research I was a 'traveller' on a journey leaving a tale to be told at the end. I explored unknown territory and learnt about people and their lived world. I asked questions and tried to become immersed in the local culture. As Kvale warned I not only discovered new knowledge on the journey I became changed by the experience.

The issue of positionality and researching in my own school can not be considered as a single issue and was a strand, which ran through the research plan, the writing of the thesis and owning the problem. There are always problems for researchers exploring their own ' back yard' (Cresswell 1998: 114) both in trying to be objective and owning the problems that emerge.

2:4 Case Study

Bassey (1999) describes three different categories of case study, theoretical research, and evaluative research and action research. I intend the study to be action research with the purpose to develop my own understanding and skills

in accessing the perspectives of pupils at my school. At the initial stages of the research there was not an intention to evaluate the findings or to use the information in curriculum change or staff development, although this subsequently happened. As Denzin et al (1998) warned, the careful analysis of the strategies involved personal reflection, not only a reflection on the data generated but on my own practice and this influenced my views and thinking. As Oakley (1981) points out " there is no intimacy without reciprocity " (Denzin et al 1998: p65).

As Burgess (1982) warned the interviews with the children were a learning situation in which I had to understand my own actions and activities as well as those of the children I was studying. Robson (1993) suggests 'real world enquiries' (i.e. a field enquiry rather than research undertaken in laboratory conditions with control groups) tend to have an emphasis on solving problems rather than just gaining knowledge. At the initial point of the research, any problem solving surrounds the research methodology and not to solve problems in the type of support offered to children.

This research is qualitative and focuses on the particular. There is no intention to present a formula, which can be used or the results replicated. On the contrary the fieldwork represents the attempts of the interviewer to respond and encourage each child to communicate. My thesis gives a detailed picture of the particular research issue and it also involves the presentation of ideas, experiences, descriptions and personal views.

Interviewing is a strategy often used in qualitative research because there is an emphasis on richness of information focusing on the uniqueness and special attributes of a person, their beliefs or how they live. Fontana and Frey (1998) quote Malinowski who says the interviewer interested in qualitative data "immerses himself in the native culture, lets it soak in by his mere interaction with the natives and of 'being there."(Denzin and Lincoln 1998 p56)

This is an important aspect of qualitative research and initially I made the mistake of focusing on the research strategy, that is the interviews, instead of

the children themselves. I did not spend sufficient time immersing myself in the native culture, such as watching the children, observing how they related to other adults and other children. I have many years experience of talking to children but I am not as experienced in talking to children with emotional or physical difficulties in communication. I have interviewed children in school but my past experience has been with children who were disposed to talk. I have also used interviewing for a variety of purposes with adults. I was unprepared for how much more time was needed to learn about the children whom I wished to learn about, than I had experienced previously.

2:5 The paradigmatic perspective

Morse (Denzin and Lincoln 1998) advises that in qualitative research, after deciding on the research question and the epistemological standpoint, the second step is to consider the paradigmatic perspective. Three 'postures' are identified as underlying qualitative research. Morse (Denzin and Lincoln 1998) suggests theory driven, concept driven and reform or problem -focused ideas are the underlying purpose of the research project.

The style and strategies a researcher uses to explore 'the research issue' will be influenced by her way of looking at social reality and her epistemological standpoint. Morse (Denzin and Lincoln 1998) advises that in qualitative research, after deciding on the research question and the epistemological standpoint, the second step is to consider the paradigmatic perspective

This research set out to solve a problem for the researcher, not in the provision for the children, but in accessing their views. However as the research developed, issues and problems emerged relating to institutional reform. This is a problem-solving piece of research. setting out to discover new knowledge in interviewing children. Initially the problems seemed to be centred in the challenges presented to a researcher trying to communicate with children who did not appear readily disposed to communicate. However through the research it emerged that the children were communicating and communicating very powerfully. It was the interviewer who was not listening. Through the

research the problems which emerged were from the tensions of a practitioner researcher researching in her own back yard and reflecting on her own practice.

Brahm Norwich (2001) undertook research into the views of pupils with moderate learning difficulties on their provision and themselves and he set out to challenge his assumptions. I did not consciously start with a hypothesis or theory to prove or disprove although I was aware of being influenced and changed in my thinking during my visits abroad, through the literature search and the fieldwork.

2:6 More than just talking to people

Through this research I wanted to develop my own professional practice in interviewing children, particularly children who do not readily want to talk or be sociable. Gorden (1987:23) reminds us that interviewing is more than just talking to people. For the literature review I have not explored a wide range of strategies to access the views of children such as using a video, looking at children's drawings or role-play. I have particularly focused on individual and group interviews. I have also considered the epistemological position of interviewing, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses in relation to my research.

Asking questions and getting answers may involve the written word or the spoken word. Interviewing is particularly useful when we want to understand our fellow human beings rather than know about them and this is the essence of my study, to understand the children's lived world, not talk about it. Gorden (1987:11) describes interviewing as " most valuable when we are interested in knowing people's beliefs attitudes, values, knowledge or any other subjective orientation or mental content." In social research, interviews "yield rich insights into people's experiences, opinions, aspirations, attitudes and feelings" (May 1993:109).

The methods of generating and maintaining conversations with people on a specific topic, or range of topics and the interpretations which social researchers make of the resulting data, constitute the fundamentals of interviews and interviewing. (May 1993: 109) It was the skill needed to 'generate conversations' which at the initial planning stage of the research I had undervalued. Although the purpose of the research was to access the views of children who do not readily communicate for physical or emotional reasons initially I planned strategies to maintain conversations with young children and I did not prepare carefully enough for 'getting in' to a conversation.

I also found that it was far more difficult to maintain a conversation on a specific topic and keep the respondent focused on the research issue. The children would talk but it was difficult to keep the interview focused. May (1993) refers to these two aspects, 'generating and maintaining' as the fundamentals of interviewing and this seemed far harder with children than adults.

There are many different types of interviews, from 'selection' interviews, staff appraisal, and telephone interviews, talking to the media and educational research. These may be individual or group interviews. In education research, it is likely that the research issue requires a combination of styles of interview. There are different styles and techniques in interviews for different purposes. For example there are structured interviews, unstructured interviews, individual interviews, group interviews, and focus group interviews. Interviewing has a wide variety of forms and many uses, however as Minichiello (1990:194) advises "Whatever the motivation, research begins by asking a question."

There is rightly concern about the ethical aspects of interviewing children (:Moore, Beazeley and Hargie 1998: Lewis et al 2000). Concerns have revolved particularly around

- access and gatekeepers
- consent and assent,

- confidentiality,
- anonymity and secrecy,
- ownership
- social responsibility

The children involved in this research would have been interviewed anyway, as part of the Annual Review but the difference is using the interviews for my research thesis. I found the work by Hart (1995) valuable to guide my thinking around the issues of 'using ', 'involving', 'including' and 'working alongside' children. Hart (1995) considered the various degrees of pupil participation and the balance of power in the communication. He identifies eight levels of participation in a piece of research or project starting with manipulation, decoration, then tokenism. On the ladder to participation Hart claims these first three steps are at a non- participatory stage, whereas the next five steps move forewords in degrees of participation. The children may be assigned but not informed, or consulted and informed. The consultation process moves towards the goal of the children understanding and sharing decisions about the research project. I found the work by Hart (1995) valuable in resolving personal tensions of aiming to gain better understanding of the children and of interviewing and personal doubts of using the children for my own purpose.

In this research a great deal of time was wasted by not getting the second stage correct. Although I had read a great deal about the mistakes of seeing children with Special Needs as some 'generalised other' I did not put enough preparation into learning about the individual children and how to 'gain access to private interpretations of social reality that individuals hold'. (Minichiello 1990:93) My preparation focused on interviewing as a research strategy and the focus of the preparation should have been to learn more about the children.

There are a number of choices a researcher needs to make in relation to the degree of structure and control before and throughout the interview process. There are structured interviews where the order and sequence of the questions are carefully planned and no deviations are made. Fontana and Frey define a structured interview as

> *" a situation in which an interviewer asks each respondent a series of established questions with a limited set of response categories........an infrequent open-ended question may be used " (Denzin and Lincoln 1998:52)*

In a structured interview there is little flexibility in the way the questions are asked or answered. Working with the children I found I had to be very flexible, not only with the order of questions, but the setting, time of day and strategies to record the data. The interviewer must not get involved with long explanations about the study as this may lead the responses. The respondent must not be interrupted or someone else must not answer or interpret for them. The interviewer must not disagree with the respondent or improvise by adding different questions or changing the words. Through the planning of the research I did not consider that a rigid structure would be appropriate when working with children and as the research progressed I gained confidence to be even more flexible than I had predicted.

Fontana *et al* reminds us that

> *"It is not enough to understand the mechanics of interviewing: it is also important to understand the respondent's world and forces that might stimulate or retard responses"*
> *(Kahn & Cannell 195, Denzin & Lincoln 1998: 53).*

I regret that initially, I did not heed this advice and I did not consider the respondent's world sufficiently.

- For my interviews with children then I planned to use unstructured interviews. Minichiello (1990) suggest a range of open -ended types of questions that provide a framework to understand a respondent's worldview.
- 'Descriptive questions' allow an interview to talk about places or people in a non-threatening way.
- 'Structural questions' encourage the respondent to talk about activities they have been involved in and what achievements they have made.
- 'Opinion or value questions' are very valuable in qualitative research and case studies, but they are not likely to be as revealing at the beginning of the

interview. The respondent may be less likely to disclose values and personal opinions early on in the interview.

• 'Knowledge questions' are also useful but rely on the interviewee having both subject knowledge and some knowledge of the respondent. If for example a steel worker was being interviewed and the interviewee did not understand any of the jargon or specialist language of the steel trade then the respondent will be less likely to open up to deeper feelings and knowledge. The interviewee would also need to know that the respondent has the specialist knowledge. Asking a question that is too complex or too specialised will not encourage a respondent to feel at ease.

Unstructured interviews require open- ended questions. The questions can be asked in any order and be re-phrased. Unstructured interviews are valuable for group and individual interviews and lend themselves to qualitative research. In an unstructured interview the questions can be asked in any order but Kvale (1996) advises that the questions should form a funnel to close in to the central issue. The first questions or preambles are to encourage the respondent to feel at ease, to talk freely and to be open. In the preamble there must also be a clarification of the rules of the interview. An ethical framework must be agreed and honoured. The informant needs to know who will have access to the information and who will own the data. To encourage an interviewee to offer genuine feelings and beliefs they must be confident about the ethics and confidentiality of the situation. The interviewer must be flexible, objective, empathetic, persuasive, and good listener. (Denzin and Lincoln 1998:55)

As a researcher researching in my 'own back yard' I had to consider the issues around making contact with the children I wished to interview. Cresswell (1998) observes that interviewing people who are known and who share the same social circles present different issues to interviewing strangers. There are times such as on an aeroplane where people will discuss personal and private issues because they know they will not meet again.

> *We talked with the intimacy and abandon of two people who felt at ease with each other and who would never see each other again. (Harvey 1983:6)*

The information given to a stranger, out of context, can not be checked or later used in any way. It is very important, when interviewing people who are personally known to the researcher to explain the ethics and degree of confidentiality. It must be clear who owns the information given and who will have access to it.

2:7 Interviewing children

There are particular issues and problems, which surround research with children and this will be particularly significant for me at work and as a researcher. Dockrell et al (Lewis et al 2000) outlined some particular difficulties in interviewing very young children. They found that children are eager to please adults and this makes them develop strategies to please rather than to answer truthfully. They observed children with partial hearing continue to reply to adults after the volume on the tapes had dropped below their hearing ceiling. They also found children seemed compelled to give an answer even when the question seems 'a nonsense question' such as 'Is red bigger than yellow?' They found that it was also more difficult to keep the child focused on the interview questions. This was an aspect of interviewing which I found particularly challenging. Children were likely to be interested in the interviewer and the setting, not the questions being asked. Adults can influence the ideas, attitudes and behaviour of young children without intending or being aware of it.

However, unlike the children observed by Dockrell et al (Lewis 2000) the children who I interviewed were not 'eager to please'. Being an adult, a teacher or Headteacher had no impact on two of the children and initially they refused to co-operate at all. Contrary to me being in a 'position of power', the children were in a significant position of power, choosing whether to communicate or co-operate in any way.

In the past research with children, by academics and classroom practitioners, tended to focus on the child's language, cognitive development, behaviour,

activities or achievement. These studies take an objective view of children or childhood. There is very little research into the subjective views of the child and this research generally is located in Secondary Schools (Rudduck J et al 1996 and Coleman et al 1998). The research tends to focus on children for adult agendas, such as raising achievement in reading (Beresford1997) or school improvement (Norwich 1998.) My own experience of interviewing children for the Excellence Model has been for the purpose of school improvement

Significant research by Piaget (1932) encouraged a view that all children go through the same stages of cognitive development. The pace of progress through the stages may vary but the sequence was claimed to be universal. Donaldson (1978) argued that Piaget's research was flawed because he did not take the child's linguistic skills into account. Piaget's experiments were too far removed from a practical reality therefore the children misunderstood the question, not the concept. Donaldson was able to show that Piaget's experiments made situational demands on children's perceptions, verbal comprehension, memory and social understanding which served to mask the very reasoning processes they were designed to reveal.

Donaldson's work was significant, not just because she challenged academic thinking about cognitive development. She also heightened the awareness of the particular challenge of interviewing children. She claimed that the children's responses to Piaget were not 'mistakes' but ingenious attempts to create sensible meanings for what seemed to them a nonsensical situation and context.

Bronfenbrenner (1978) argued against using 'test conditions' or 'laboratory style' research with children .He argued against this on moral and academic grounds. He disagreed with contemporary research by Bowlby (Christenson 2000:18) on separation of children from adults. He thought the research was morally unacceptable as well as providing unreliable data. Bronfenbrenner believed that the unrealistic context of the research significantly influenced the responses by children. This view was supported by research by Tizard (1986)

who believed children were more willing to respond to questioning in their own home or very familiar settings.

The complexity of the range of images, representations, codes and constructs of childhood led Jenks (1996:32) to refer to 'childhoods' rather than childhood. There is an increasing international concern for the rights and public responsibility towards the rights of groups who in the past have been marginalised. There is a growing expectation that the 'seldom heard voices' (Moore 2000) of children and adults with physical, mental, social, emotional difficulties should be heard. This heightened interest in the views of a child arose partly from a growing concern within western society for minor's rights and partly as the result of a focus on consumers' rights which in education represented those of children as well as parents.

There is also an increase in the expectation and intention to include the views of children 'as consumers' in school improvement planning. There is a growing body of literature in Britain involving the views of children. These pieces of research all reflect the value and authenticity of the student voice in providing information on how schools could improve. Not only was this voice 'astute and articulate' (Smees and Thomas 1998) but it made a positive contribution to school improvement.

It is not only the views of older pupils that have been involved in recent studies concerning school improvement. Boyd and Reeves (1996) included the views of young children in research concerning the ethos of a school. Beresford (1997) researched the reading habits of young children. Flutter et al (1998) and Morris (1999) all included the views of young children in their research concerning the working habits of children. There has been relatively less research in accessing the views of children about themselves as learners. The purpose of research involving children has mainly focused on the views of children about school policies and practice, not about how children perceive themselves in school.

The notion of self-concept is very complex and multidimensional (Kaplan 1980; Naess 1986; Bandura 1986 Marsh 1993). In his review of research within the field of self-concept Skaalvick(1997) found that children build up a hierarchy of desirable attributes and skills. For example children who thought they were successful at mathematics and English used this judgement to feel positive about other areas of the curriculum. This self-perception of children is interwoven with the culture and values of the society in which the child lives. Skaalvick points out the importance of academic and emotional self-concept for the individual's self esteem. He suggests two types of reference are used. External comparisons refer to judgements a child makes of their own skills and abilities in comparison with that of a peer. Internal comparisons refer to ways a child compares his/her own abilities in one aspect to an achievement in another. Skaalvik explored the relationship between external and internal comparisons for a child's self esteem. He found that that very young children develop a self-concept based on comparisons with external skills and attributes.

Skaalvik's work has implications for strategies to support an individual child's needs in school. The grouping and segregating to support a child can actually be damaging self-esteem and giving a message of low expectation. Skaalvick used questionnaires and interviews to learn from the children how they perceived their competencies in school. He then compared the results between actual achievement and the children's self-concept. His research focused on the child's perception about his/her skills and testable attainments not feelings or views about themselves at a personal level. His research is valuable in knowledge gained about a child's self-perception but also in the rigour used in his research to learn about the children's views and attitudes.

There has been a growing interest in strategies to listen to children but over the last two years the climate has changed from 'it being a good idea' to a Government led requirement for any professionals working with children. The new Code of Practice 2001 and *Every Child Matters* asked for the views of children to be sought. A large research project by Clarke (2001) refers to a 'pedagogy of listening'. She acknowledged that talking to young children can

be problematic and she identified key strategies, which form a framework for listening.

She refers to a 'mosaic approach' which allows professionals to select a range of strategies.

- Multi-method

This refers to the variety of ways a child may choose to communicate, using drawings, gesture, or pointing to pictures or images.

- Participatory

The child is seen as the expert in their lived world and the adult adopts the role of listener and learner.

- Reflexive.

Clarke involved and included other children, which created an environment where meanings and understandings can be checked.

- Adaptable

It is important when working with children to have research questions and framework which can be adjusted and changed for a wide variety of settings.

- Focus on lived experience

Clarke found that when listening to children, particularly children with social or emotional difficulties, the focus of the interview must change from the knowledge gained to the experience of ' being there'.

- Embedded into practice.

These strategies for listening to children should not only be employed for assessment and evaluation but should be built into everyday practice. The work by Clarke significantly influenced my approach and research methodology and recognises the significant difference of 'interviewing' to 'listening'.The work led me to

> *Want to hear the answers, I could not myself invent.* (Paley 1998: Clarke 2001:8)

Loxley (1997) listened to children with significant learning delay and he examined whether there is any commonality of experiences in different cultures, patterns of resistance replicated across cultures, in relation to inclusion in schools. His research was quantitative in nature. He aimed to take

an overview of international literature concerning special needs policies and inclusion. Loxley points out that policy analysis within educational research is a well-established field, however conducting such analysis within special needs and inclusive policies is less well developed.

The research by Loxley et al (1997), drawing data from 62 papers, provided a useful framework to pick out issues of democratisation, resources, customer centredness, excessive proceduralism, systematic dualism and professionalisation. The small field of data makes for difficulties in obtaining data to enable meaningful comparisons however the work by Loxley et al raised my awareness of issues and provided a valuable framework in which to consider my research data in the concluding chapter.

The calls for inclusive schools are limited by a framework, which appeals to 'equal opportunities'. Inclusive schooling does not only appeal to the rights of disabled children, but also challenges what constitutes 'normal.' There has been a long history of research 'about' children but there is now a development of work, which aims to give the child a voice.

Interviewing is particularly difficult when working with young children. It is very difficult for children to understand the implications of confidentiality. Children have not developed the social conditioning of responding to people in role but they take people at face value. Young children do not automatically behave in a deferential way because of my position in school and the young children did not automatically reply because of my position as Headteacher. In this research all the children with a Statement have difficulties in relating to others in some way. It requires someone skilled in communicating with them to enable a response. It is unlikely that the children would be more open with a stranger, as communication requires skill and knowledge.

Building a rapport with children takes far more research and planning than when interviewing adults. As Fine (Denzin and Lincoln 1998) stresses the importance for an interviewer to reduce the differences between 'the self' and 'other'. The researcher needs to 'build bridges' in relationships to aid the

understanding of the "other's" world- view. Fine uses the analogy of the hyphen in the 'self-other' situation. He uses the image of the hyphen as the barrier between the interviewee and the researcher. He advocates the need to 'work the hyphen' in order to reduce the distance in mutual understanding and meaningful communication. The researcher must try to understand the context in which the interviewee speaks and not to see them as "the other".

For the Code of Practice to become a reality then this aspect of stranger or familiar adult presents opposing paradigms. A child must be in a position where they can speak openly and honestly about the support which they receive but the adults in school who are likely to know them best are also the adults offering their support.

It is this stage that I found significantly different when interviewing the children with Special Needs. When I had interviewed adults or children in a school counsel I had planned the question, who to interview, the setting and the questions. When I followed this research plan with children it did not work. I had to spend more time watching the children, looking at their friendship groups and their social behaviour. Creating a climate where communication would take place with young children involved a great deal more negotiation, research, watching and reflecting.

2.8 The interview setting

Altheide and Johnson (Denzin and Lincoln .1998) point out the need to give thought to the setting for an interview. For a one–to-one interview, a room must not be overwhelming in size or too enclosed, particularly if the interviewee is a different gender to the researcher. The lighting should be planned and direct sunlight avoided in the eyes of the interviewee. There must also be a feeling of confidentiality and therefore visitors and telephone calls to the room must be diverted.

Again this was an aspect of interviewing which was markedly different with young children and an aspect, which I had to be flexible and take the child's

wishes into account. I asked a friend where a child would most likely feel comfortable and I checked this out with the individual child. For this reason I did not choose a venue for interviews but negotiated with the child. I did make sure that the interview setting was comfortable and ensured that we were not disturbed. If the children were not comfortable then there were no responses at all. Part of the background research about the children was for information about the context and settings, which would encourage the children to speak, whether in the school garden, on a bench outside or in the library. Researching the best interview setting for each child was a significant factor in the success of the interview.

It was also important to consider the best time of day for each child. Some children related better to adults in a morning but not perhaps immediately after a playtime. Some children were not as communicative towards the end of a week. Timing was an important aspect of the setting.

2.9 Recording the data

Kvale (1996:160) advises that "methods of recording interviews for documentation and later analysis, include audio-tape recording, videotape recording, note taking and remembering." Kvale (1996) points out that the most common form of recording interviews today is the tape recorder. The interviewer can then concentrate on the words, tone, topic and dynamics. However I frequently found the use of an audiotape a barrier to communication. Two children were obviously uneasy by the presence of the audiocassette. They verbally gave permission for me to use the machine but looked very uneasy and therefore I turned it off and made notes after the interviews. One boy enjoyed the use of the tape recorder but it influenced his conversation as he went into role-play and I could not keep him focused on the interview agenda. The tape recorder presented a barrier to communication. Fontana and Fry (Denzin and Lincoln 1998) remind us that whatever form of recording is used, participation and observation go hand in hand. The recorder is only storing the words while the interviewer feels the atmosphere and all the

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senses are involved .The interviewer watches the informant, notices the nods, smiles and body language.

> *" The ethnographer, of course, would add that what one sees and directly experiences is also important"*
> *Altheide and Johnson (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 297)*

Contextual, taken for granted, tacit knowledge plays an important part in providing meaning. As Altheide and Johnson point out, capturing words is not enough and contextual meaning comes from" nods silences, humour, and naughty nuances. " (Denzin and Lincoln .1998: 297) Because of the nature of the interviews for this research it was not always possible to have a tape recorder with me and sometimes it seemed intrusive. I also had to take care to observe behaviour, consider the time of day or part of the week, the context and the group dynamics.

In the research plans I had expected most of the data to be in the form of transcripts from taped interviews. Diaries, running records and aide- memoirs played a greater part than anticipated. An important aspect or practitioner research was a diary to record not only the observed but also my feelings or what Wright Mills (1970:216) refers to as "fringe thoughts." The recording of my feelings and emotions in written form was a useful device to distance myself from what was happening and reflect and cross check.

Kvale (1996) points out that the presence of any form of data collection can influence the flow of conversation and effect what an informant is willing or not willing to say. This was evident when I tried to use the audiocassette with the children and I could see that the recording was causing stress and tension. Minichiello (1990) believes that rapport with another person is basically a matter of understanding their model of the world and communicating your understanding symmetrically. The interviewer should try and match perceptual language such as pitch, speech patterns and posture. This advice by Minichiello seemed appropriate for the children in the school counsel or for the children I asked for help and advice. It did not seem appropriate for the children with a Statement of Special Need. All the children have difficulties of

articulation and have unusual speech patterns. I did not want to match them, as I was concerned that it would seem as though I was mocking or patronising them. I did slow my questions down and I was conscious of using body language to emphasis meaning.

> *"The interaction in each interview directs the research process."*
> *(Minichiello 1990:p113)*

The unstructured interview takes on the appearance of a normal everyday conversation. However it is always a controlled conversation which is geared to the interviewers research interest. In an unstructured interview the interviewer and interviewee hold equal status, though usually the respondent does most of the talking. It is the informant's view that is sought. As Shutz says

> *"We need to understand how people think to understand why they behave in the way they do"* (Minichiello 1990: 94)

The questions are to gain understanding of things that can not be observed, such as how the person thinks, to gain deeper understanding of their values, or knowledge of life history.

Previous experiences of interviewing are also likely to influence the skill in which the interview is carried out. The influences are a two way process and the gender, status and attributes of the interviewee will also influence the interviewer, either consciously or unconsciously. The influences are not necessarily a weakness but must be taken into account as a significant factor in the data that is generated. As Bassey (1999) reminds us the interviewer is the co-producer and co-author of the resulting interview text.

The interviewer may consciously plan vocabulary or genre, dress and setting for the interview to encourage the respondent to feel at ease. Oakly (1976: May 1993)) found that woman interviewing women about health and personal problems was a strength as the respondents were at ease and gave open responses. The important issue is that the position of the interviewer and her

values must be considered as an important factor in the data provided by the interviewee.

The traditional role in interviewing is that the interviewer asks the questions. However Oakley (May 1993) found that in women to woman interviews the interviewees also asked questions. There was a reciprocal role of sharing of experiences. As May (1993) points out, consideration must also be given to the influence of traditional gender roles in interviews between men and women. It s important that the researcher takes these factors into account when evaluating the resulting data. The power relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is a factor that is likely to influence both parties.

May claims that there is an inevitable imbalance of power in the interview, as the interviewer controls the issues discussed. I don't think May (1993) had interviewed children, as I did not experience 'an inevitable imbalance of power'. He found that there are conscious and unconscious feelings of authority or subservience in social situations but these are learned behaviours and this proved a significant difference for me interviewing children.

Fontana and Frey warn that unconsciously, a researcher may 'want to hear' certain things and lead the respondent. Woods (Denzin et al 1998) researched into the subject choice for students at a Secondary School. Woods observed third year pupils being interviewed by the Headteacher about the subjects they would choose to study for the next two years. He observed that the pupils and parents from working class families were intimidated by the manner of the Headteacher and did not have the confidence to offer a personal choice. The Headteacher handled the pupils from middle class background in a different manner. This different approach encouraged personal views to be stated. The Headmaster did not have a prescribed set of questions but it was the context, behaviour and cultural expectations that made it formal or informal. The formality or informality, closeness and distance are as much about behaviour as the questions themselves, or whether in a group or individual interviews. This research by Woods highlights the reciprocal influences of the interviewee and interviewer. This was an important factor in the research findings as much

as the research strategy. Whilst being aware of gender and cultural issues and trends, it is important to treat people and situations as unique and not assume that an interviewee is typical of an age group, gender or cultural group. (Finch et al 1980)

2:10 Closing the interview

Minichiello (1990) also advises that careful thought must be given to the closure. A great deal of importance and significance is put on the relationship in a face –to- face interview. It is a very close and personal experience. It takes skill then to close the interview and ensure that the interviewee feels valued and respected. It might be necessary in the future to interview the respondent again. Therefore it is vital to finish the interview on good terms. At the beginning of the interview it is useful to give a time limit. This ensures that the interviewee has the expected time to spare. It also provides a framework to plan a closure. There are some questions, "clearing house questions", such as ' Is there anything else you would like to say?' that mark the end of an interview. It is also useful to summarise the interview. This checks for a shared understanding and shows the respondent that you have learned some new knowledge.

As Minichiello (1990) says,

"One of the most significant factors in closing an interview is knowing when to stop" (p133)

He also suggests non-verbal clues to the respondent that the interviewee is coming to a close. The interview should not come to a sudden end and both parties should feel the meeting was satisfying and complete.

2:11 The transcript

After the interview the data is analysed but as Kvale points out, it is the interview that is the primary evidence .The transcript is an aide memoir. The recording confirms what was said but the words are de-contextualised.

The transcripts are the artificial construction from an oral to written mode of communication. (Kvale 1996:163)

Kvale (1996) likens a transcript to a map, where there is no true objective transformation. There is always a degree of interpretation and the type of information sought is highlighted. The use of the interview tape will be influenced by the original research question. The words, the level of articulation, the strength of feeling, the emotion, are all aspects of the interview. Kvale (1996) suggests that the analysis focus on either the letter of the interview or the spirit of the interview. There are moral dilemmas of whether to record the interview using Standard English or as a literal transcript of how the interviewee or group speaks. As Kvale (1996) explained the interviewer may choose to record the interview exactly as it is spoken to give a feeling of authenticity. However the interviewee might find it patronising or offensive to see their manner of speaking written down.

Writing out an individual interview is a very slow laborious process. It is difficult to capture the atmosphere and to describe the hesitations and silences, which have meaning. It is particularly difficult to transcribe a group interview. It is difficult to be sure who is speaking and to catch the cross talk that is quietly spoken to a neighbour. (Kvale 1996)

The data may be recorded as an exact transcript of the interview or a summary of the views and statements. As Kvale (1996) says the style of the transcript depends on the purpose. There are computer programmes that aid the data analysis for qualitative or quantitative research. It is useful and ethical to allow the interviewee to read the transcript and analysis. The purpose of research is to find new knowledge. Misunderstandings and misinterpretations all form part of the study. It does not mean that the original transcript was wrong but a stage in finding the truth. As Kvale says, there is a move from" true meaning to relational, unfolding meaning." (Kvale 1996: 226)

Also an aspect of practitioner research is personal reflection. I did not only have to record what was said but other aspects of the children's personality, which emerged through the interviews and also recorded how I felt.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IS IT THAT I REALLY WANT TO KNOW?

3.1 The first step

The first step in practitioner research is to ask the 'close up' I/me question of 'What is it that I really want to know?' Why is the question being asked and who is the research for? This study grew out of a genuine wish to hear what children have to say and a personal search to improve my own practice in interviewing children. The study will subsequently be considered in these three areas, the data, a return to the social model for disability and lessons learned for the researcher.

It is a qualitative case study written by a researcher practitioner and it has its roots firmly in the classroom. It is focused on the particular and there is no intention to present transferable formats for other classroom practitioners or to suggest that the children interviewed are representative of any group. This paper is written first of all as a tool for personal development and includes personal reflection both as a practitioner and as a private self. However what I say may be relateable and of use to other teachers. It hopefully may empower other teachers to resist the taken as given ' top down' drive for change but give others the confidence to keep classroom knowledge rooted in the classroom.

In my search for the views of the children and strategies to access their knowledge I had to develop a self-conscious awareness of what I was doing and I developed a self-conscious awareness of personal change. I also became aware of the impact of my research on other colleagues, parents, pupils and professionals. At times when I felt overwhelmed by the research project and disappointed by mistakes and false starts I was aware that the parents of the children in school were interested in the research. Children and parents became actively involved in the study, asking me frequently about the progress of the research. I was reminded of a phrase of Foucault quoted by Dreyfus.

People know what thy do: they frequently know why they do it: what they do, what they do it but what they don't know is what they do does. (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982:187)

At the start of the action research I was particularly concerned about the ethical issues of involving children in the research. The children were to be informed that I was interested in their views and experiences in school. I felt the children were in a very difficult position regarding giving or withholding consent to being involved in my research. In reality the concept of 'withholding consent' took on a different meaning when the children refused to speak to me at all.

Any preconceived ideas on the imbalance of power were immediately challenged. The children's views on their provision and experiences would be sought as part of their statutory rights but I was concerned that the 'interface between research and practice' was invisible to a young child. Following guidelines for the ethical code of conduct in research involving the children, I intended to talk informally to all the children explaining and introducing my research. Two of the children completely refused to communicate with me and several had learned responses, which presented a barrier to communication.

In my literature search in interviewing children there had been an emphasis on the imbalance of power. My personal experience seemed to turn this on its head. Issues of the children being manipulated or exploited did not arise as two of the children refused to co-operate in any way. The search for truth is a huge challenge for the researcher developing strategies to access children's views and feelings. The ethical framework must always be followed, causing pain or distress to no one. The children are the experts in their life experiences and my challenge was to access their knowledge. Listening is not a passive activity but requires conscious effort and concentration.

One of the intellectual virtues embodied in the process of carrying our research is the pursuit of truth. (Lewis 2000: 111)

In my research proposal there were six pupils in school with a Statement but one child transferred to a Special School. I had planned to ask the Special Needs Co-ordinator to divide the six children into two groups of three (one child subsequently left.) I planned to trial interviews with three individual children, reflecting on the context, pace, vocabulary and questions. These interviews would be followed up by a further three individual interviews which would become the in-depth focus of the study.

There has been a history of research, which has focused on the 'difficulties', and 'differences' of children and adults who have Special Needs. Very little research has focused on their views and opinions from an 'insider perspective of the child.' Much of the research involving children has been used to understand long term influences such as teaching strategies, the long-term impact of being in care or domestic violence. This is a study of 'the here and now' for the children and for this reason the fieldwork occurred during one academic year.

3.2 False starts and fresh starts

Initially for this research and through my research proposal and planning, I naively thought that I could plan interviews, carry them out and then review the data, but this was not the case. I made many false starts and revised plans throughout this research. However I think it is important not to think of the changes as mistakes but as valuable stages of the research journey. The strength of action research is the ability to reflect, refine and develop. New knowledge emerges, not just about the research issue but about the researcher as she accepts that she is part of the research problem. If I return to the image of research as a journey, getting lost does not end the journey but plans to refine and redefine the search have to be developed.

My early plans focused on the interview and any concerns revolved around ethical issues of children in research. I worried because the children were likely to be in a very difficult position regarding giving or withholding consent. I then considered observing the teacher or support assistant as they

interviewed children for the research. I thought that I might be more successful if the learning support assistants or class teachers interviewed the children but for several reasons I rejected this idea. A significant drive for the research was to develop my own practice and therefore it seemed defeatist to accept my own failure to communicate with these children and observe interviews as a third party.

I also thought it was important that the class teacher or learning support assistant did not hold the interviews for another reason. The study was to discover ways of accessing the views of children for their annual review. If children are really unhappy or distressed by the quality, type or nature of support they are receiving it could be difficult for a child to say this to the person giving the support. It would also be unlikely that the person offering the support would take an objective view of a child's negative comments.

It could be argued that this would also be a concern for me researching in my own place of work. It must be recognised that this is a subjective look ' at my own back yard'. I have tried to analyse the data as objectively as possible and to really listen to what the children have to say but just I was concerned about the class teacher's possible bias I have to acknowledge mine. However the purpose of the study was for me to learn from the children and my own practice.

I believe that children must have the opportunity to offer their views to an adult other than the teacher and learning support assistant. I recognise that older children may find it difficult to speak to me openly about a member of staff or about the support they are being offered but I do not believe my professional role and position significantly effected the young children. On the other hand they were significantly influenced by my position of 'adult', 'stranger' and by unfamiliar settings.

The social phenomena in the school research setting are very complex. Age, cultural background, roles and relationships and personal confidence all influence a respondents willingness or confidence to speak I believe the very

young children were less responsive because my role of 'stranger' and 'adult' than my role of headteacher but I can not really be sure. The children were more responsive when they were allowed to come with a friend. I considered asking the children to come with a support assistant but I thought that the power balance was more equal with two or more children. Also I was aware that school staff were conscious of my position of authority and I was concerned that the presence of a support assistant may restrict a child's freedom to say how they really feel about the support received. As Lewis et al (2000) warns, adults can influence what a child says without being aware of it. These issues must be recognised and considered throughout the study.

It is difficult to be sure of the extent of the influences of researcher, stranger, adult or headteacher on what the children said or did not say. The stress that I imposed on a friend by asking her to come and talk to me caused tensions personally and in both my position of researcher and headteacher. I was also aware of the tension imposed on the support staff and parents who were explicitly tense about my position within the school.

Using my previous experience of interviews and literature searches I expected to interview process to be linear in nature, from the research question to identifying children, planning the setting and questions through to analysing the resulting data. Metzler suggests stages in interviewing, ranging from establishing the purpose of the interview and why the particular respondent is selected, through to the conclusion of the interview. The second stage of the process is conducting background research and setting the scene. (Anonymous 2000) Initially I had taken this to refer to research in the issue to be explored, perhaps the medical conditions of the children or interview techniques and strategies. It was each child that I needed to know more about. It was this stage of the research that had to be explored and revised. Whilst at a superficial level I 'knew' the children were not readily communicative I had undervalued the skills and value of preparing myself to communicate with them.

I did not give enough thought to the research setting in which the children would feel most comfortable, not just the physical space but time of day or

part of the week, with a friend or alone. I needed to know more about the children, not in the sense of medical information or attainment scores, but about their interests and personalities. I have taught very young children, children with immature speech and children for whom English was a second language but the problems of relating to young children with social or emotional difficulties presented a personal challenge.

I observed the children communicating with friends and staff. I saw that they could speak but did not always choose to speak. From the initial research proposal it was the second stage of the research process, 'the getting in' that had to be significantly developed and given more attention. In addition to pupil observations, I interviewed friends and peers to learn strategies ' to get in'. I saw that friends were able to start and maintain a conversation with the children and I needed to learn from them.

I asked the class teacher to identify a friend who would help in the research. I asked a child named by the teacher if he would help me but he replied that another child knew him better. I asked the boy himself to choose a friend to come and talk with him and he chose the same as his friend had suggested. The friend gave suggestions for behaviour management and the choice of venue for an interview. I checked with both boys that they were comfortable talking to us in the library. I asked if I could use an audio tape recorder and both boys agreed. I made notes immediately after the interview. I had twice gone to the class teacher or SENCO for them to act as gatekeeper but children appeared to be a better gatekeeper.

The interview was recorded by audiocassette and notes were taken as an aide-memoir for issues and feelings. The tape recordings are one form of data, and the transcript forms an 'interpretation' of what was said. It is important to remember that people, particularly children communicate in a myriad of ways. In addition to what was said there was a wealth of information about feelings, emotions and social understanding of the children. Anyone else listening to the tapes may not interpret the hesitation pauses or searches for the correct words in the same manner but I do not feel this is a weakness of the transcripts and

notes. However in my notes I have tried to record the tensions and frustrations during the interviews. The subjective nature of the records is explicit and they are overtly 'an opinion'.

However, greater than the changes in the research strategies, was the impact on the personal changes as practitioner researcher. Initially I expected to learn about the children's experiences in school. In addition to the knowledge gained, the experiences of listening influenced how I felt about the children. Increasingly through the research process I was aware of a personal change and my position changed from interviewing /observing others to turning the researcher's gaze on myself.

It was this stage of 'getting in ' which was significantly different when interviewing young children instead of adults. I had to take greater care with body language and signs of stress or tension. I realised that I needed to watch and listen far more than with adults. As Fine (Denizen et al 1998) advised, I had to learn how to 'work the hyphen'. I needed to build into the research process far greater knowledge of 'getting in' and how to build bridges of communication. Giarelli and Chamblis remind us that the word 'research' literally means 'to go round again' (1988:32) and I needed to do just that.

3.3 The research plan- 'plan A'

Because of the age of the children and literacy skills I planned to use interviews in preference to empirical questionnaires, diaries or logs. I planned to use audiotapes and transcripts with notes to record moods and feelings, however the school diary and running records were also kept. Transcripts only captured the words and miss tensions, feelings and body language. Also audiotapes in a classroom are often unsatisfactory as all the classroom noise is picked up. Notes and personal reflections were also to be recorded as children, parents, and teachers became involved in the research. My research developed to a whole school interest in the data collection and what the children had to say.

The data collection then involved

- Audiotapes

- Running records

- Notes as an aide memoir after interviews

- Notes from children , adults who contributed views or findings

- School diary

- Log – for personal reflection

Part of an annual review for a Statement of Special Need, involves the pupil's view on the support that he/she receives. This is a new development and there is no structure or process in place in the school where I work for how the pupil's view is accessed. It is more likely that the process for an annual review would be conducted by the Special Needs Co-ordinator and not the Headteacher. However this research was undertaken to develop my own skills and to access the views of children through interviewing. I felt that it was important to investigate and explore strategies that could guide policy and practice for the future although this was not the driving force behind the research project.

Whilst I believe that there is a real need to learn more about accessing the views of children the personal tensions between Headteacher and researcher were significant and a constant moral dilemma. In a professional capacity I have often talked to children whether for assessment purposes or for issues concerning pupil welfare but throughout this research I have been conscious that the pupil interviews were serving the interest of my thesis. Whilst I firmly believe that the pursuit of new knowledge in interviewing children is worthy of research there was an uncomfortable awareness of using the children for my own interest. The pupils would perhaps be involved in some process anyway, as part of the Annual Review but the difference for this research is the reporting and publication of the thesis.

During the fieldwork I sensed a moral dilemma of taking the child or children out of lesson time. The National Curriculum and school curriculum forms a

strong structure to a school day and I felt uneasy about taking a child away from his or her entitlement. The fieldwork also drew my attention to the number and frequency of support staff employed by the school and by the local authority who work with the children with Special Needs. I had seen the support on the school timetable but not fully realised the implications for me as researcher. I did not want to take the children's time when they had support planned. The children's entitlement to the National Curriculum, support in school and the additional support from outside agencies formed a glass wall between the children and myself. I could see them but it was very difficult to get near them.

Also until the fieldwork began I had not appreciated how often the children with a Statement were absent from school. Several times when I planned to talk to them they were absent because of a hospital visit, physiotherapy, speech therapy or they were absent due to poor health. When the children were in school there seemed to be even more pressure to leave them to get full benefit from their time in school. I am not a free agent able to dip in and out of classrooms or children's lives. Any interview had to be balanced in benefits and disadvantages for the child as well as fitting into my commitments and I always sensed conflicting paradigms. For the planning of the fieldwork I had to remember that the children's lives were not a clean slate for me to write on. As Minichiello (1990) advised the lives of the interviewees must be considered as well as the interviewers.

> *It is important to remember that informants are not clean slates, but*
> *rather individuals involved in everyday living (p20)*

While it is entitlement for a child with a Statement to have his/her view about their experiences in school taken into account, as Lewis (2000) points out, there is a difference between research and observations and/or interviews, which occur within a professional context. As a Headteacher researcher I was very aware of the 'ethical interface between what is practice and what is research.' (Lewis et al 2000: 5).

During my literature research I had read but not heeded the warnings of the student at Trobe University

"I always thought in depth interviewing would be really easy until I got there." (Minichiello et al 1990:6)

I had not expected interviewing the children to be so challenging. I have worked for many years in Nurseries and Infants schools and I had not anticipated that I would have any difficulties. I do not think that it was my position of Headteacher, which was the barrier to communication, but the position of 'stranger'.

Unlike the children observed by Dockrell et al the children who I interviewed were not 'eager to please' (Lewis et al 2000). Being an adult, a teacher or Headteacher had no impact on two of the children and they refused to co-operate at all. Contrary to me being in a 'position of power', the children were in a significant position of power, choosing whether to communicate or co-operate in any way.

Allen refers to the challenges of presenting the views of another as the 'complex power knowledge knot' (1999:1) and this is particularly complex when an adult interviews a child. There is also a great deal written about the imbalance of power in the adult/child relationship and the influence of the researcher on the responses given. There is a general assumption however that a child will reply to an adult. This was not my experience.

Gathering background knowledge and understanding of a child prior to interviewing proved vital for a successful interview. Systematic observations are useful but time consuming and it was difficult to assimilate a rounded picture. Friends and peers of children provide a rich picture, showing understanding and knowledge as we exchanged traditional roles. I was the learner and the children were the teachers. For the important stage of 'getting in' to an interview with a child, I learned more from interviews of friends and peers than running records. In my literature search I read that a camera was a useful vehicle for children to communicate their world in a visual way.

Photographs of familiar settings are also useful for generating a conversation. I took some photographs of school scenes such as an assembly time, lunchtime and the playground

The children showed insight into the best venue for an interview with a specific child.

> *I think your office...because she might go to David. In your office you can shut the door.*

> *He would be better with someone who really knows him.*

> *He's shy, ask him to bring a friend.*

> *Don't try in the classroom. He will mess about in front of the others.*

> *Definitely your office. You can make her look at you- like face you- in the classroom she pretends to daydream.*

In addition to advice about the venue the friends were sensitive to the manner that an adults invited children to talk.

> *Don't go into the classroom and ask them to come out. He will ignore you.*

The friends were aware that the children did not like being made to feel different. The strategies that adults employed to help and support the children with impairment were an isolating and embarrassing experience.

> *It's not the teacher she hates. It's being embarrassed in front of her friends. Talk to her at playtime and don't come into the classroom. It's embarrassing to be made to feel different.*

The notion of 'difference' was an issue that emerged over and over again and seemed a far greater concern than impairment. The children accepted impairments but they felt uncomfortable with the strategies used by adults to 'help' them. The feeling of being 'different, was created by the policies and practices in school, not the impairment. The children were sensitive to feelings of embarrassment and hurt. There were several instances when the friends explained the children's behaviour showing sensitivity and understanding. They observed that the children with a Statement 'pretend' to not understand or reply a visiting professional so that they would go away.

I could not distance myself from this mistake making but I had to acknowledge that I had made the same mistakes. Initially I had understood the children's silence as a lack of communication whereas the children were communicating very powerfully. In a school context where children are expected to be polite to adults the children had learned that a strategy to reduce the amount of time being singled out and made to feel difference is to remain silent. From the friends I realised that the silence was not a passive act but a powerful strategy to resist exclusive practices and to minimise the time being made to feel different.

It was the 'experience' aspect of interviewing that I was unprepared for. My feelings were mixed and as the interviews took me out of my 'comfort zone' as both teacher and learner, the experience 'was unsettling and disturbing' (Armstrong et al 2004: 74). I felt privileged to be listening to the peers and friends. I do not believe that the friends were offering ' a rosy picture' of the children because they acknowledged their difficulties as well. I felt they were advising me of an aspect of their character I might have missed and they were correct.

The children offered advice on behaviour management. They were all assertive in their approach.

> *Tell him to shut up.*
> *Tell her to look at you.*

Toby explained that Harry talked about his own interests. He said

Just tell him to stop- like say- like I say. I don't want you to talk about Harry Potter anymore- you just have to say it.

I asked Charlotte for advice about talking to Amy.

> *She pretends sometimes – she pretends she hasn't heard – or she pretends not to understand.*
> *Don't let her choose- make her look at you – and insist.*

Also I had misunderstood the social role that Hugh played. When I observed him, I had thought that he was 'a loner' or 'an isolate'. The children told me that he was at the centre of all their games.

I think he has a really good imagination .He has all the ideas. We run about but he has the ideas. We go back to him and he has lots of ideas and we go back to him.

I had thought Hugh was alone in the yard whereas, he was actually at the centre of the boys' game.

I thought carefully about the children with a Statement of Special Need in the school and all of the children had friends and appeared to be liked by the other children. The children did not have specific speech or language difficulties. The challenge lay in the child's emotional state or physical difficulties that hindered the children's social skills. When I observed them in the playground or classroom they were not isolates. The children who had maturity levels, which were significantly different to the rest of the class, played and talked easily to their peers. The children's peers were skilled at communicating with them.

I borrowed a strategy from Warren (ed. Moore 2000) who found that children were useful facilitators in encouraging a response from other children. This view is supported by work by Dunn (ed. Moore 2000). She found siblings were helpful in understanding cues and body language. They prompted the interviewees and understood meanings that had been lost on adults. In many research projects that involve young children, understanding immature speech and checking for understanding is a problem. For this reason I used individual interviews of friends or peers to find out more about the children. I had to acknowledge that these friends or peers were the experts in communication with the children and I must learn from them.

3.4 The revised research plan and methodology -Plan B

This action research involved interviewing and the subsequent data collection was primarily to not just know but understand the perspective of children in school who have a Statement of Special Need.

- *Who do I want to find out about?*

All the children, three boys and two girls, with a Statement of Special Need in the school, are in the study. One of the problems of undertaking a research project with a small number of children in a school is that children may be ill, move schools or transfer to another educational setting. Initially I had planned to have an equal mix of boys and girls but one child left the school.

When I wrote to the parents about my research I expected some parents to withdraw their child from the research and I had expected the parents' consent to act as the selection process. In reality all the parents supported the research project and no parent asked for their child to be excluded from my studies. The parents of the pupils where I work are mostly professional, confident adults and I believe that they would not feel intimidated by my authority in school and would feel able to exclude their child from the research. I also believe they would understand the short term and long term implications for the public document. I feel this is a great mark of trust from the parents but rather than soothing any feelings of exploiting my position in school for the purposes of research, it heightened the tensions.

I wanted to select children who "are reasonably representative, as typical as possible"(Burgess 1982:80). Judgement sampling of this sort is most likely to succeed if the interviewee has an informed knowledge of the wider community that the group is representative, which is why I asked the Special Needs Co-ordinator to act as a gatekeeper. All the children with a Statement were to be involved in the study directly or indirectly. I asked the Special Needs Co-ordinator to group the children into two groups of three. The groups of children were to be typical; representative of our children with a Statement .I wanted three children to practice and check out the robustness of the methodology and the other three children would be the main focus of the research. The children with a Statement are mainly at the younger end of school.

In the initial research proposal I had planned to trial the interviews with three children and then focus on a different three. In reality the interviews were like stepping-stones and each interview was a "conditional platform of understanding". This phrase is borrowed from Oakshott (1975:6/7) who describes the learning process in action research. The researcher uses what she learns to inform future qualitative action. Each interview was an experience on which to gain greater understanding both of children and of interviewing the children.

- *Setting the scene- learning how to 'get in'*

As I watched the children with a Statement talking and playing with friends I decided to interview the friends. This may seem like an obvious next step but in a school it is not the conventional role for the Headteacher to be learning from the children. I asked the class teacher to identify a child who would have the knowledge I needed. I spoke to the chosen children in the playground and explained why I needed their help. I stressed that I did not know the answer and that the children were more likely to know than any adult in school. It was important for the children to understand this for two reasons. They would feel empowered to share the knowledge they had about their friends and also it made it clear that this was quite different to the usual school convention of question and answering. Often in school a teacher asks a question and already knows the answer and the children are expected to give the teacher an expected response. I wanted the children to share their knowledge and not tell me what they thought I wanted to hear.

I arranged with them when they would be prepared to come and talk to me. I explained about my research as much as I thought they could understand. I gave them the opportunity to accept the invitation or name someone else. I asked the children about

1.   Where would be the best place for an interview?
2.   Would the particular child be influenced / bothered by the use of an audiotape, or bothered by notes being taken?
3.   I asked for advice about behaviour strategies.

4.   I asked for information about the children, which I could use to check for shared understandings.

5.   I asked for advice on interests /hobbies etc.

I held three individual unstructured interviews with these nominated children. The interviews were held in my office. One child did not like the audiotape recorder being used so I asked if I could take notes. Listening to the friends or peers provided useful information for the subsequent interviews, both about the children and about strategies to engage a conversation.

3.5 The revised plan

1.Observing the children in the classroom and around school.
2.Talking to friends about accessing views
3.a) Inviting the child to be interviewed with a friend and/or   b) Inviting a child to be interviewed
4. Use the tape to check for meanings and further understanding Follow up interviews to check understandings
5.Go through my notes for the child to verify/ check my understanding

*   *The interview questions*

Norwich (2001) had designed a framework to explore the perspectives of pupils with moderate learning difficulties about their special education provision. I planned to borrow the questions used by Norwich for the interviews with a friend and an interviewee or an interviewee alone. As unstructured interviews the questions would not necessarily be asked in the same order but used as a framework on which to build.

Norwich interviewed 101 pupils (50 from special schools and 51 from mainstream schools) and his research formed part of a wider picture of enquiry. My fieldwork involved a very small number of children. The use of

the questions developed by Norwich (2001) is a strategy to put the fieldwork in a social context. The aim of my research is to present a rich picture of the particular and not the general.

- *The interview*

Although on two occasions there were two children present the format and structure was still that of an individual interview. It was made clear to both children that I was interviewing one of them in particular and one child was there as a friend to check for my misunderstandings. There was a reversal of traditional roles because the friend was there to support and guide me. The children were the experts and I needed to learn from them. All the interviews then were planned as individual interviews although sometimes there was more than one child present. I interviewed five children, two girls and three boys. One girl and two boys had a friend with them but they were all individual interviews. The finds were there to support or check for meanings. I used the questions used by Norwich (2001) as a structure. However each interview was a very individual experience as I responded to the children, how they behaved and how they responded. I do not believe this is a weakness of the interviews but strength of qualitative research is that the researcher can use her skills to explore issues and build a relationship that encourages an interviewee to respond.

The five interviews were each held in a different setting, depending on each child. I asked where friends thought that they would be more at ease and I checked this out with the individual child. I was flexible about the time of day and part of the week. I took into account lessons or experiences, which would be missed, while I interviewed the child. I considered support time that would be missed and times, which the children wanted to come to talk to me. These times had to be balanced against time that I had available to listen to them.

Again I stressed at the beginning of the interview that I wanted to learn from the children and I did not know the answers. I wanted the children to feel confident to share their knowledge and not feel I had a preconceived idea or expectation of what they might say.

- *Data collection*

I planned to record the interviews on audiotape and make notes of the 'nods, silences, humour and naughty nuances' (Denzin et al 1999:297). I did not plan to use two- way mirrors, puppets or visual prompt cards (Measelle et al 1993) or video recorders. One of the aims of the research was to develop my own skills in interviewing young children. I wanted to develop skills and expertise, which would realistically be used for a child's Special Needs annual review in a main stream school.

- *Ethical framework*

The school and the children have been given a pseudonym and every effort has been made to protect the identity of individuals. There is a concern however that in a qualitative study the number of individuals involved in the study is small. If a reader knows the school to which the study refers than it may be possible to connect pseudonyms to real people.

- *Keeping a record*

I did not take notes during the interviews as I thought that this seemed intimidating. I used the tape recordings as a reminder, but only if the children were happy for me to use an audiocassette. I wrote notes as soon after the interviews as possible to keep a record of what was said and also the atmosphere, the subtle facial expressions and fleeting mood changes.

Running alongside the tapes, and field notes I kept a diary of events, fleeting moments and incidents. I also kept personal evaluations and reflections.

The interviews were transcribed and notes put at the side as aide memoirs but what was actually said seemed a small part of the interview. The relationship that enabled communication to take place was both tense and rewarding. During each interview I sensed a very fragile situation that could be spoiled by my errors at any time.

- *Analysing the data.*

The cumulative data, the tapes, transcripts, diaries, journals and running records were collected over one academic year. Running in parallel to issues

raised by all the children and comments made by parents and teachers, I kept notes of my feelings. There were many lessons to be learned, not just about what the children said but about their characters, personalities. I also learned about my own practice. I also learned about the social dynamics of research in school. The research developed when the project became shared with the children, parents and teachers. As others in school started to share ownership of the research the project moved from a hesitant start to interest and enthusiasm from the children, parents and staff. The research moved from belonging to me to belonging to the school.

I read and re-read the notes but I found it most useful to listen to the tapes not read and re-read the transcripts. The transcripts seem ' flat' and lacked to warmth and humour of the research. Just as transcripts do not include the warmth and atmosphere of an interview, the notes do not easily convey the 'experience' of being there for the interviewer. I did not want to loose the vitally and warmth of their personalities in the written word and for this reason I decided to include photographs of the children in the thesis. The photographs are an attempt to emphasise ' the sparkle ' of these children. I want to present to the reader the children who were interesting individuals. They are typical children, though not representative, each with individual personalities, with strengths and weakness. I do not want their differences to imply deviance or deficit but for the reader to see 'ordinary ' children.

A letter went out to <u>all parents</u> explaining that I wanted to take photographs for my study. Any parent who did not want a child photographed could let me know. I believe the parents would have felt confident enough to withdraw a child from any photographs if they wanted. I spoke to the children about taking photographs and they were all involved in the setting and style of photograph. I know that the validity of photographs could be challenged as photographs can be 'staged' and the children were encouraged to 'stage' the photographs.The children chose the image they wanted to show in my thesis. There were private and public concerns about their understanding or ability to give or withhold consent. Whilst the children gave consent to the photographs and were even encouraged to be involved in the planning, there is an ethical

dilemma. It is not likely that the children could really understand the implications for them of being photographed for my study. Also children do not understand the present day adult concerns to protect children from inappropriate use of photographs. This caused a dilemma for me at a personal and professional level and also as a researcher.

I reflected on the ethical, moral and validity issues of using photographs. To include photographs or not was the cause of the greatest personal dilemma during the research. I wanted to protect the children from harm and exploitation but I also wanted to show how lively, interesting but also 'ordinary', these children were. Through the research my attitude to the children became changed and I reflected on the debates between professionals about the suitability of mainstream education. I wanted to share with the reader the tension of seeing the children and learning of their experiences of exclusion. The use of photographs of the children in part remains unresolved. I still have fleeting 'fringe thought', reflecting on the conflicting paradigms of protecting the children and their identity or attempting to capture aspects of the children's personality through a visual image. I returned several times to the guidelines of 'doing no harm' and I decided to include the photographs The intention of was to let the individual personalities of the children shine whilst also emphasising that these children are 'ordinary'.

3.5 Interviewing as a research strategy

Interviewing requires careful analysis of the strategies involved which facilitate the learning outcome. It is difficult to separate out an analysis of interviewing as a research strategy and an analysis of my own practice. The research process became not a systematic enquiry made public, but rather self-education made public. My research perspective moved from speaking about the problem to understanding that I am part of the problem.

The 'I/me' aspect of human interaction in interviews identifies the practitioner as more than a research instrument. She is also the research problem, in her inability to 'read' the context correctly. Individual interviews are strategies

and their strengths and weaknesses are determined by the skill of the interviewer. Whether for qualitative or quantitative research structured or unstructured, the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology rely on the skill of the interviewer.

The research question should determine the type of methodology that is most appropriate, as a skilled craft person chooses the best tool for the job. I chose interviewing, as it is valuable when we are interested in knowing about people's beliefs and attitudes, values and knowledge. Initially I understood 'interviewing' to involve planning questions, making an appointment and holding an interview. I now have a different understanding of the meaning of the interview process. Interviewing is not 'an event' with a clear beginning and end but takes a much more fluid form. The interview starts with the initial question being asked, as the interviewer researches, prepares and plans with written plans and several mental dress rehearsals. The knowledge gained from the interview is far more than the research questions. Knowledge about the interviewee emerges; his/her personality and character and what is said informs and influences the interviewer. After the interview the memories and experiences stay with both the interviewer and interviewee. A surprising aspect of the interviews was how much more that I learned than the responses to the interview questions. I learned about the children's kindness, humour and sensitivity.

A critical analysis then 'of interviewing' is challenging. For the five interviews children were interviewed in a library, in a corridor or in my room. Some children brought a friend and some came alone. I used an audiocassette for some interviews and I made note for others. On the contrary to a lack of structure or rigour these adaptations all point to the importance of careful planning and preparation with a willingness to adapt and <u>really listen</u>. The most important aspect of the interview is what the respondent has to say, not the venue or sequence of questions.

The interviews with a friend were not group interviews but it would be more accurate to refer to them as individual interviews with a friend present. The

focus of the question and the interview setting and format were all planned to access the views of the child with a Statement. I did not interview both children but the friend was there to check meanings and to support his/her friend.

I interviewed each of the three friends individually. I explained that I needed help to talk to the children and I asked where they would prefer to talk to me. I stressed that they were the ones with the experiences and knowledge and I needed to learn from them. I asked whether the friends objected to my use of an audio recorder. One girl did not want to be recorded so I wrote notes afterwards. Using the information gained from the friends I planned the interviews with the five children with a Statement, three children with a friend and two alone. One of the children' s interviews was planned but occurred at an unplanned moment.

I believe my first interviews were not successful for several reasons. I did not make the arrangements or appointment with the children but with adults. Using Hart's metaphor, I only went to ' manipulation', in the first stage of the pathway to participation. I did not make any attempt to involve the children, explain why I wanted to talk to them or ask when it would be most suitable for them to come to see me. In hindsight I am ashamed that I made this mistake after all the literature reviews on involving children and pupil participation.

Another reason was lack of research and preparation to find out about the children. I had understood 'preparation' to refer to the interview questions and the interview setting, but I needed to know more about the children. Listening to friends and peers was a very valuable step in the research process. The friends gave me advice about interview settings, format, and pupil behaviour management. The friends showed understanding, empathy and confidence. They were very knowledgeable about their peers.

I was surprised at the marked difference between interviewing adults and children and also the difference between talking to children and interviewing them. When adults accept an invitation for an interview there is an expectation

that the interviewer will control the agenda and steer the conversation. Initially I was surprised that the children would not talk to me but I had treated them with less respect than would have been for an adult. I had made the arrangements with the teachers, parents and classroom assistant, not the children.

After several interviews with children and the advice from Clarke (2001) I was prepared to use a variety of approaches depending on each individual child. I gained confidence to be flexible, adaptable and to treat each child as an expert in his/her world. The aim was to listen to what the children had to say, not stick rigidly to an interview format. I am sure that I would not have had the confidence to follow an interview in a corridor, with poor acoustics and another child joining us during the interview, without the experience of the previous interviews.

Each interview was a unique experience and I found the most important thing was to focus on making a relationship, not holding 'an interview'. The quality of the interviews depended on my ability and willingness to adapt, encourage and give as much respect to the children as I would an adult. I made an appointment with the children, I asked where they would prefer to talk to me and whether they would mind if I recorded the interview. I also stressed that the children were helping me and they could choose not to talk to me. I stressed that I did not already know the answer to my questions.

Initially I had planned to hold three trial interviews and then hold three more. In reality each interview was like a stepping stone on the research journey. The memories and experiences from each interview are used and built on. I found qualitative interviews particularly valuable for children as they allow the interviewer to be flexible, to respond to the individual, and to adapt. It would be incorrect to refer to changes as 'on the hoof' decisions as this implies lack of planning or experience, but there were many times when I used past experience to change the sequence of questions or format during the interview. As Armstrong reminds us, in action research there is not a set of instructions or technical requirements but a fluid approach, involving an

exploration of values and practices in which the focal participants are the main agents for changing the environments in which they are situated. Consultation and collaboration are key elements in the design of action research, or 'research action' (Armstrong et al 2004:4)

I could be argued that as the interviews are so different it is not possible to analyse them critically but I believe this is the strength of the research. The interviews were not a strategy 'to find out' but 'to experience.' The later interviews were successful because of my willingness to adapt, adjust and use my experience to encourage the children to talk. The unique qualities of the interviews are the strength of qualitative interviewing.

Just as the format for the research setting and format for the interview was adapted to suite the children; the data collection also was adjusted to suit the children. One of the most important skills when encouraging and maintaining communication with anyone, particularly a child, is eye contact. It could be argued that 'eye contact' is a European social convention but for the children that I interviewed this was the case. For this reason I dismissed the idea of taking notes. I worked hard at holding and maintaining a social relationship and then wrote up notes later.

The children were asked if they would mind if an audiocassette was used. They were also asked if I could take note. However I made changes from 'my reading of the situation' and not because of what the children said. James told me that he liked the tape recorder but it changed how he spoke and behaved. He spoke in role- play and it was not possible to keep him focused on the questions with a tape present whether turned on or off. It was possible to record James when his friend was with him as his friend influenced his behaviour. Two girls gave permission for me to use a cassette but I could see by their body language that they were not comfortable so I turned it off and took it out of the room.

An unexpected benefit of recording the children's interviews was the opportunity to share the research with the child, the parents and staff. When I

prepared a child to be interviewed for this research, the Care Assistant, the mother and father each separately came to see me. Whilst at a superficial level the visits were for social reasons, there was an underlying tension and anxiety. Whilst all the parents told me that they supported my research it also created obvious tensions. The tape recordings were a useful tool to share with parents. The mother of James was in school and she heard his voice in my room.

> *I thought he was in trouble. I heard his voice in your office. I wondered what he had done.*

I believe the strength of the interviews lay in a change in ownership of the interviews. After I had talked to the children and their friends they wanted the interviews to be successful too. Just as a child came to volunteer information, the children and parents became increasingly interested in the research. Children asked

> *Was the tape clear- did it work?*

The friends encouraged a positive response

> *Don't mess about – this is important.*

After an interview a boy said

> *How did we get on?*

CHAPTER 4

THE EXPERIENCE OF 'BEING THERE'.

4.1. The children introduce themselves.

There is an immediate dilemma in the introduction of the children to the reader. Who should provide the information to introduce the children to the reader, the teacher, parent, researcher or the child? Information about each child could be found in a Statement of Educational Need that describes his/her physical, medical and intellectual strengths and weaknesses. The information in a Statement is used by professionals to allocate additional funding for educational support and also is the basis on which the amount and type of support is given. The information included in a Statement then tends to focus on deficit and difference to the norm. Whilst the Statement provides a framework for a child to be included in a mainstream setting, it gives conflicting messages for example normal/special, able-bodied/ disabled which constructs individuals as 'the other half of an undesirable pair,' associated with Special Needs. (Marks1994: Allan 1999: 1)

With the explicit aim of giving the children 'a voice', the introduction of the children to the reader then poses conflicting paradigms. I do not intend to 'talk about' a child as this immediately challenges the view that the child is the expert in his/her lived experience. If this is the case then the child should present himself or herself to the reader. In this research, there is a determined effort to hold each child central to the study, and not to been drawn into seeing him/her as an object.

I will let the children introduce themselves to the reader. The children must not be viewed only as some " generalised other" (Allan 1999:12) such as 'a child with autism' or 'a partially sighted child', but seen as an interesting child with something to say, an expert in his/her knowledge of themselves. The views must not be seen as representative of any group. Bernard (1999) reminds us that children are not a homogenous group but they vary in age,

gender, abilities, cognitive functioning, social and emotional maturity, cultural experience and linguistic background (Frost et la 2000). My running records of initial observations only serve to point to problems for me as a researcher and to help the reader to get a sense 'of being there.'

4.2 Interesting children with something to say.

- *James*

I am seven years old and when I grow up I want to be Harry Potter.
I asked James if I could take a photograph of him. I expected the usual
' photo smile' but he immediately left the room. I followed him into the library and found James searching for a particular book. After a while he found the book he wanted and then found a particular page. So I want to draw the readers attention to this photograph. This is not a photograph of James but of James studying the planets -Mars in particular, the 7th largest planet, which is sometimes as far as 399 million kilometres from earth but it can be as little as 56 million.

When I observed James at playtimes he played in role. The boys played with James and joined in the role-play. Whenever I heard James talking to his friends the conversation was role-play. As I had found before, the conversations centred on Harry Potter, football and occasionally railways. This was as significant a barrier to communication as silence and presented a problem for me.

I asked James if he would like to take some photographs but he did not. I had wrongly assumed that because he really enjoyed using the cassette recorder that he would also enjoy the camera. In an attempt to reduce any pressure I offered to let him take a disposable camera home. I unwittingly imposed a stressful weekend on his family, as James would have nothing to do with the camera. His mother had suggested that he could play at being a newspaper reporter but James wanted to be Harry Potter.

- *Hugh*

> *"I am eight years old and I am going to be a weatherman when I grow up because the man on television only uses one arm to point to the map of Britain. I can only use one arm so I could be a weather man"*
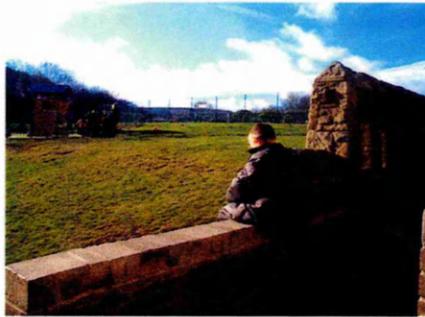
Hugh often sat on a school wall at playtimes, seemingly alone. Children came up to talk to him but they then ran off. Hugh spent most of the playtimes sitting alone apparently day dreaming but he did speak to any child who ran near to him.

November 7th: The only child who appears to be an isolate is H. - he sits on the wall frequently and daydreams. He doesn't look sad or lonely – but alone.

- *Amy*

> *My name is Amy and I am nine years old. I have a new brother. I like cutting and sticking and the colour lilac. I will draw you a picture of what I look like.*

I observed Amy in the playground and dining room. I watched from a distance to ensure that my presence did not change social dynamics. I observed that Amy played with children in her own class. Amy has been placed in a class lower than is usual for her chronological age. She is also academically assessed to function several years below her actual age yet she played with 'her class' friends not a child who was of the same age chronologically or

emotionally. The socialisation of school seemed to influence her choice of friends.

- *Catherine*

   "My name is Catherine and I doesn't like children who go to a different school and so I don't want to say anything"

I sat with Catherine for nearly fifteen minutes hoping to make a first step towards a working relationship. Catherine is six years old. It is this response from Catherine that points to the challenge for me as a researcher. None of the children have speech or language difficulties identified on their Statement but all the children present challenges for communication, each in their own way. They can all speak but do not readily communicate. In my literature search in interviewing children there had been an emphasis on the imbalance of power. My personal experience seemed to turn this on its head. Issues of the children being manipulated or exploited did not arise as two of the children refused to co-operate in any way. This was a distressing experience for Catherine but it was also distressing for me. I did not want to impose this stress and pressure on any child.

I showed my photographs to Catherine. She became very agitated as the scenes showed some children on the edge of the picture. I discussed this distress with Catherine's father who said that Catherine cuts the edges off their photographs at home. She finds a photograph with just a part of a person on the edge very disturbing. I used the photographs to generate a conversation with some children about aspects of school but I had to learn to be flexible, taking the personality of each child into account.

I watched Catherine playing out with her friends. Catherine only appeared to talk to girls and specifically girls of her owns age but she sat for ten minutes talking quietly after lunch in the hall. Most of the other children had gone and Catherine remained talking, taking turns and listening. As I watched, a lunchtime supervisor sat down and talked to the group. They all took turns to talk and listen. I now felt sure that Catherine was able to hold a conversation both with children and adults. Just as in previous research into racism in the classroom, in this research I had to own the problem. Other children and adults could hold a conversation with Catherine but I had failed. I had to turn the researchers gaze on myself. What do I have to do to communicate with Catherine?

- *Harry*

I asked Harry to describe himself to other children. Harry knew that he has to hold books right up to his face.

That's how all the class has to see me, with my books pressed right up to my face. I am seven years old and the only one in school who wears glasses. When I grow up I want to ride horses.

When I watched Harry outside he was running about on the hard surface. He appeared restricted in his choice of friends because he has to stay on the hard surfaced area around school. He did not run onto the school field with the other children. However he did play with other boys and girls from his class. He ran about and several other children were around him

I used running records of the observations of the children to discover whether the children appeared to be included into school and class friendship groups or whether they were isolates. I wanted to find out if the children did talk to

friends or adults in and around school. I did not prepare a timetable with specific times of the day or week but I prepared to note when or where I saw the children playing or talking. I did not make notes as the children were playing but wrote down notes as soon as possible. I was concerned that standing with a note pad would alter the social dynamics for the children. It could also be argued that my presence, whether as stranger, teacher, adult or Headteacher would alter the behaviour of the children. For this reason I observed the children from a distance.

A criticism could be that the running records do not present an objective view of the children but whatever was recorded was my own subjective observation. Croll (1986) reminds us that everybody observing the same scene would notice different things for different reasons. For running records the resulting data is a result of personal decision making about what or what is not going to be included. It is important to make the subjective nature of the data clear to the reader and not imply that the observations could be repeated with the same outcomes.

I do not believe this to be a weakness of the data but a valuable tool for action research. The subjective nature of the data is explicit. The records were to guide my thinking and not to prove or disprove a theory. I did not use triangulation to confirm whether other people would observe the same behaviours. Triangulation might subsequently have been employed if I had thought the children were isolates or unable to hold a conversation, to check understandings and meanings. Any subsequent triangulation would have been used to build a richer picture of the child not to challenge what I had observed. For both Hugh and Harry I had misinterpreted the situation and it was only later when I listened to other children that the real picture emerged. My initial impression points to a stage in my thinking, not 'an error' and also affirms the advice of Clarke et al (2000) who suggests a mosaic approach to understanding children.

Each step in the research process became a stepping stone on which to reflect, adapt and prepare for the next. Whilst recognising and affirming that each

child was an individual with a unique personality my 'platforms of understanding' of the research process developed. The emphasis moved from the interview questions to providing an environment and climate where children would talk and I would really listen. When the children initially refused to respond, I had to reflect on my own practice and I felt, not like a traveller, but someone taking very small and carefully considered steps along the research journey.

4.3 Stepping stones on the research journey

- *Informal notes and aide memoirs*

It is difficult to convey the warmth and humour of some of the comments and notes kept in the research journal and school diary. As Harry said as I listened to him at lunchtime

> *I'm not surprised that you want to learn more about talking to the children. You must get very bored in your office, just writing all the time. You can come any day you are feeling bored.*

Through the research more people became interested in my research and offered views and opinions. When I first wrote to the parents I presented the research as mine, but through the year it became a shared project. I could be argued that the notes in the diary or comments, which were written alongside interview notes, present a biased view. I have written down what I consider to be important, and anther researcher would have recorded different things. In this way I learned from what was said by interested parties but also the data reflects a change in the ownership of the project.

Also as parents came to see me with issues or concerns it is impossible to convey the degree of tensions and stresses that they appeared to have relating to their children. Tension and stress is difficult to evidence in hard data. This is my interpretation of the situation and my attempt at 'reading the situation'. When I first arranged to talk to Catherine her Classroom Assistant came to see me immediately after. Her father telephoned at lunchtime and her mother came to see me at the end of the school day. Whilst the three incidents were a very minute part of the school day the three incidents flagged up a tension for

Catherine's adult carers. They appeared very sensitive to her volatile nature and there was obvious tension by adults about her 'being interviewed by the head'.

There are several examples of notes of small incidents, which together implied meaning. After I had interviewed a child's friend she called to my office, popped her head around my door and asked, " *How did you get on?*" This comment must be seen in the context of school to understand the rye humour. A six-year-old child was enquiring about the success of the Headteacher. Again these notes are personal and what or what is not recorded is a subjective decision but the research explicitly sets out to paint a picture of the particular. Another researcher may not understand the same incidents in the same way, but they influenced my thoughts and feelings as a researcher/practitioner. I will return to this aspect of practitioner research in the final chapter of the research.

One of the outcomes of practitioner research is that fringe thoughts and linked incidents occur and in addition to the planned learning process unexpected issues emerge. These can be an unexpected richness or a distraction from the research focus. As issues emerge the researcher must acknowledge them whilst remaining focused on the research issue.

- *An individual interview of a friend of Hugh called Laurie.*

The class teacher acted as the gatekeeper advising me who would know about Hugh. The class teacher asked the boy if he was prepared to help me. The boy Laurie was asked whether he wanted to talk to me or not. The boy 'agreed' but there are ethical dilemmas in a Headteacher asking for a child or pupil to comply. I believe Laurie is confident enough to say to me that he did not want to talk to me. However the moral dilemma is that a young boy (7 years old) can not really understand the real implications of the interview. Laurie was told that I was interested in talking to Hugh but a seven-year-old is not likely to understand the concept of a research project. It has to be recognised that he was agreeing to something he did not really understand.

My thoughts had to go back to the basis principals of access and gatekeepers, consent and assent, confidentiality, anonymity and secrecy, ownership, social responsibility and ensuring no harm. Consent and assent and levels of understanding present a moral dilemma but I believe that the overarching principal of 'ensuring no harm' is most important and balanced with the positive benefit of the research. The interview was recorded using an audio-tape. Laurie consented to the tape recorder but again it could be argued that there was a huge imbalance of power and he was not in a real situation to refuse. In addition to the tape recording, there are also personal notes.

- *An interview with Abigail.*

Before interviewing Amy I interviewed a friend. I asked the class teacher who could advise me how to hold a conversation with Amy. The class teacher knew that most of the girls in the class knew how to relate with Amy but Abigail would offer good advice. I noticed that a girl called Abigail often played with her. I asked Abigail if she would help me. I explained that I was investigating ways to talk to Amy and I needed advice. I was conscious that this was not the whole truth. I did not talk about my university studies. It could be argued then that Abigail was not in a proper position of giving or withholding consent but I kept the ethical framework in mind. Abigail agreed to advise me but she said that Amy would talk more in the presence of a friend. I asked if Abigail would come with Amy but she acknowledged that she was not the best person for the job.
For this interview I made notes immediately after the interview.

- *An interview with Emily*

I asked the class teacher to advise me who would advise me about Catherine. The class teacher nominated a girl called Emily. I asked Emily if she was prepared to help me. I explained that I wanted to talk to Catherine but she had refused. I asked Emily if she was willing to come and talk to me. It could be

argued that she was not in a real position to refuse. The interview was recorded but she seemed very nervous. I am not sure whether this was because of my position in school or the audio tape recorder but the interview was not 'comfortable'.

- *Toby*

A surprise in the research came when Toby offered his help. The children in school had obviously been talking about being invited to come to talk to me. They had been discussing what they had been asked about. Between the children they had worked out whom I was likely to want to learn more about. Toby came to my office and said that he could help me talk to Hugh. This incident made me aware that the children as a group was feeling involved in the research. They were beginning to offer to take part in the study. I asked Toby if I could tape the interview and he said that he would prefer to just talk but he would also like to listen to his voice. I recorded the interview and Toby listened to it.

I made notes immediately after the interview.

- *The school diary*

Visitors use the school diary as a signing-in book for school security. It is an example of several small incidents building up a bigger picture. The support staff from the LEA come and go in school and I had not appreciated the number and frequency until I studied the book. I had looked at the book when I was considering observing or interviewing the children with a Statement. I did not want to interview children immediately before or after a lesson from a support assistant. Neither did I want to take time with the children when the school provided classroom support. The diary presents objective evidence of the frequency of visits for the children with a Statement.

4.4 The interviews

- *The interview with Catherine*

I had planned to record on audiotape the interview and make a transcript and keep notes of fringe thoughts and feelings. I had already interviewed Emily as

a friend who had given me advice. However an incident occurred and I used my previous experience and 'caught the moment'. I had prepared the questions for Catherine's review and planned the interview for later in the week. One morning the classroom assistant was absent due to illness and Catherine was distressed. I sat down in the corridor with her and used the opportunity of Catherine wanting to communicate with me. During the interview Emily came and sat down next to Catherine. I believe Emily came to join us because Catherine was upset and she wanted to help. I do not believe that another child presence changed what was or was not said. I had planned to use an audiotape and I was fortunate that a recorder was available when I met Catherine

The interviews had been planned around the interview questions developed by Norwich (2001). I had planned to use the same questions but to be flexible about settings, the environment and the sequence of questions. Each interview setting, pace and style was an individual response to the child. There was no longer an expectation that a child would have to fit into my schedule or setting but I would respect their wishes and preferences.

• *Amy and a friend*
Abigail had advised that Amy was very shy about talking to adults but would talk with a friend. The interview was recorded and notes were taken. Although there were two children present this was not a group interview. Whilst I explained to Abigail that the purpose of the interview was to really listen to Amy, the dynamics of the two girls was interesting. With the tape and notes it is hard to convey the use of voice and body language that Abigail used to encourage, persuade and sometimes direct. When Amy was trying to ignore me Abigail's voice was quite assertive.

The group interview with Abigail and Amy had different implications because of the significant differences in maturity and confidence. Whilst Abigail was there to help and check for understandings she did lead and suggest ideas.

> *What do you need help with Amy?*
>
> *I don't know.*
>
> *You need help with cutting and sticking don't you?*

This was said in an authoritative tone. It could be argued that the friend suggested things, which Amy may not have thought of, but there was an easy atmosphere, which suggested Amy, would have challenged things, which she disagreed with. There are benefits and disadvantages of having two children together but on balance I found it beneficial to have two children together. Amy does not readily communicate and when I have tried to speak to her in the past she has stared around the room. She does have her own choices and preferences. The friend articulated ideas and Amy accepted or rejected them.

An additional benefit in interviewing the two children together was in behaviour management. When Amy looked away or attempted to ignore me her friend helped her to stay focused and responsive. In the transcripts the sharp voice to direct Amy to make a response can not be seen, but throughout the interview the friend kept Amy focused and communicative.

It could be argued that over time I could have built up a relationship and understanding of Amy to keep her focused on the conversation. Involving a friend who knew her well was very useful and saved a great deal of time. It also kept the interview on a more formal basis for the purpose of an annual review. The meeting was clearly a 'conversation with a purpose' and not a casual chat.

- *An interview with Hugh and a friend.*

In the interview, care was taken to ensure that Laurie did not dominate or lead what was said. Both boys were of a similar age and physical size and they supported each other but neither dominated. However the purpose of the interview was explained to both boys. However it must be acknowledged that 'the purpose' involves layers of meaning and the children were not in a position to have a concept of these layers. It was not really possible for children to understand the deeper

understandings of the request 'for help' or to understand the real extent to which the children felt they could accept or refuse to be interviewed.

However it was useful to check out meanings with two children. Words such as 'naughty' or 'work' can suggest a wide range of behaviours. When I asked Hugh why he was supported he replied that it was to help him with his work. It was Laurie who explained that the assistant helped with English and mathematics, specifically activities that required manual dexterity.

> *Mrs B talks to Hugh about things and what things sound like and he writes them down.*

Laurie also explained the need for different levels of difficulty for different children.

- *A friend called Henry with James*

Amy and Hugh's friends helped to keep them on track and also provided an opportunity to check understandings. The interview with James was helped by the presence of Henry who provided an opportunity for vague phrases to be checked out such as

> *What do you mean by 'work'?*
>
> *What do you think 'naughty' means?*

The friend also stopped James from going into role-play and kept the answers in response to my questions. The presence of Henry provided an opportunity to talk about the behaviours that made Joseph 'different', such as wanting to touch people's hair.

At the beginning of the research proposal I had anticipated using an audiocassette for all the interviews so that I could focus my attention on body language. However with young children the tape recorder was not very useful. It changed to climate of the interview. Some children did not like it and James liked the recorder but he spoke like a film star. Note taking during an interview seemed inappropriate and also I wanted to watch the children as well as listen to them. Notes after the interview seemed the most useful. It can be argued that these are anecdotal and I have selected what I want to present to

the reader. However any conversation whether an informal chat or a formal interview is about each personal reaction and about relationships. The account is intended to reflect what I saw and felt and not intended to portray how someone else may have felt or thought.

- *Stepping stones to unfolding meanings - an interview with Harry*

Before the last interview I looked at all my previous notes, diary and transcripts. Over the previous week the support staff from the LEA had come to me concerned that Harry would not speak. The teachers expressed frustration by his lack of co-operation. I listened to his friend's advice on the setting and context for an interview and I checked this out with Harry. I planned to use an audio cassette player to record the interview. I did not feel that it would change the dynamics of the interview because Harry has <u>very</u> poor sight and he would not see the machine.

I thought it important to explain to Harry that I was using a recorder. It would not have been ethically correct to deceive or conceal a recorder. I brought Harry into my room during his playtime to let him see my room and the tape recorder. I let him practice with the machine to ensure that he understood what it would do. Although I learned a great deal from Harry, for the purpose of an annual review it may have been more useful to have a friend. Harry had not linked his eye sight problems with his support. A friend provides a useful lead to encourage a discussion about the support and also the purpose for the support

The interview was held in my room on the advice of his friend and Harry's agreement. We met immediately after playtime so that he could come straight to my room and not have to leave a lesson. Holding the interview in my room allowed me to use a tape recorder. The quality of taped recordings is not good in a classroom because of background noise and also it attracts the attention of other children. Recordings need a room without background noise.

I explained as much as I could why I needed him to talk to me. I explained that I needed to send in a report about his education and I needed his views. I did not explain about my research. Harry is just seven years old and I did not think he could understand the implications of my study for him.

The data consists of the tape, the transcript and personal notes.

The transcript is as near to what Harry said as possible, but there is always an element of translation. My notes are subjective observations both of what Harry said and his manner. I also noted 'fringe thoughts'. As Harry was speaking I was aware of very conflicting messages. When I looked down and listened to him I was moved by the sensitive and interesting things he had to say. I was surprised that this was the same boy who support staff found unresponsive. However when I watched Harry he presented a different picture. He is very small in stature and he has no control over his pupils, which roll up, into his eyelids. Visually Harry presents a picture of a child with greater communication difficulties than is the case. During the interview I was aware of feeling privileged to have heard Harry talk. He had so much interest and general knowledge that he was really interesting to listen to. I felt touched by a child, who said,

"I'm tired of being special"

I regretted that I had misunderstood his social difficulties. I had thought that Harry was happily playing with his classmates but when I listened carefully he felt lonely because he could not see the other children. Following these lonely playtimes, Harry's feelings were further hurt, by a Support teacher coming and making him feel different to the others.

He refuses to speak and they go away
(A friend's explanation of Harry ignoring the LEA support teacher)

4.6 Being there

What these children had to say seemed far greater than any transcript can convey. I felt privileged that I had the experience of 'being there'. I felt uncomfortable at finding how much Hugh had to say and how much the children admired about him. I had watched Hugh outside with others and he

had seemed an isolate who sat and day dreamed whereas he was central to their games and the child with the ideas. Support teachers have found him uncommunicative and yet he had a great deal to say and with lots of humour.

I walk like a toad- a peed.

Far more than listening to what the children had to say, my feelings towards the children also changed. The boy who I thought was playing with others was feeling lonely and the boy who I had thought a loner was central to the outdoor games. Through the interviewing, I learned about them as interesting individuals with both stresses and humour. I listened to the frustrations of Catherine when she said

"I want to stop kicking but can't, I try but I can't."

or when Harry said,

"I'm tired of feeling special."

On reflecting on my experience of 'being there,' I must return the focus to the children and what I learned from them. As I have said before, interviewing is not a finite event but time when lives meet and each person goes on with lasting memories. My findings from the children have proved both interesting and valuable but as Kvale (1996) warned I have been changed by the research journey. My feelings and attitudes to the children have changed at a personal and professional level and I would not like to portray a smooth and comfortable research journey.

My position of Headteacher produced a physical and emotional distance from the classroom. There was a far bigger gap between my position of Headteacher and the classroom than I had anticipated. I felt distanced from the classroom. This gap was created by the structure of the school day, the support structure in place for the children with a Statement and also my inexperience of children who were not readily communicative.

I was unprepared for the difficulties of accessing the views of the children, not only in the skills 'to get in' but the barriers, which the structure of the school day created. To solve a research question there must also be personal

reflection, not only a reflection on the data generated but on the change on the professional and private self. The research will influence the interviewer's views and thinking. Just as in previous research into racism, I had realised that my own behaviour and professional practices were racist, I also had to acknowledge my own exclusive practices in the school.

CHAPTER 5.

I HEAR THE ANSWERS, I COULD NOT MYSELF INVENT.

5.1 The social model of impairment; lessons learned

I would like to remind the reader that my initial proposal was to learn how to talk to children but this developed to learning to listen and understand. Many serious issues emerged from the interviews as the children 'tell it how it is', but I hope to also convey the warmth and humour that emerged. At the outset any preconceived ideas were around the belief that children, particularly young children do have views about their educational provision. The work by Norwich influenced my thinking at the initial stages of this research and gave the action research direction. It also set my small-scale piece of action research in context. Unlike the research by Norwich (2001), this piece of research did not start with assumptions about what issues may emerge however like Norwich I found that many of the difficulties experienced by the children relate to the 'social' aspects of life not the impairment *per se*.

I would like to remind the reader that impairment is a physical condition whereas disability is imposed by society by segregation and disadvantage. The social model of disability looks at economic, environmental and cultural barriers which are encountered by people who are perceived by others as having some form of impairment. One of the major factors in disability research is the recognition that the environment, prejudice and discrimination disable individuals more than the perceived impairment It must be remembered that the children I listened had impairments with which they had been born and their situation for them was 'normal.' Any challenges for them were learning to live in the social world of school. The tensions that emerged were in relation to experiences of support balanced with feelings of 'difference'.

What emerged from this research was that inclusion concerns everyone in school, not only the children who have a Statement of Special Need Many children and parents mentioned tensions, created because they did not

understand the social world of the children with a Statement. The structures, funding and organisation focused on the individual child with a perceived impairment. The children assumed that when Harry wore spectacles that his vision was acceptable, not that it just improved a little bit. When the class teacher reminded the children that Harry needed to have a place at the front of the class so that he could see the book, a child said

He can see he's got his glasses on.

There had been a great deal of distress caused by the other children wanting to try on his spectacles yet Harry's sight was not discussed with the class. The children and parents complained because James touched children's hair and clothing and he was judged to be 'naughty'. The other children were not given strategies to understand his wish to touch or to deal with it. The problem belonged to James. The children did not understand why Catherine screamed when the classroom became noisy.

5.2 What did I learn about the children with a Statement of Special Need? 'Listen and I'll tell you how it is'

• *Physical Impairments*

I can't use my left hand and arm. My left leg works a little bit and I need glasses. I'm not worried about going into the juniors but I do worry about the operations. I have to go to hospital a lot. I am having an operation on my foot to stop it turning the wrong way. I shall feel better when it has been done.

As in the research by Norwich (2001) the children were aware of their particular difficulties. Norwich found that this was more prevalent for older than younger pupils but I did not find age was a factor. All the children had a clear understanding of their impairments whether physical, emotional or psychological and they were able to talk about it. However the children with physical impairments were more able describe their difficulties and their strengths.

Unlike the findings of Skaalvick they did not transfer self-concepts of physical difficulties and academic achievement. Whilst Hugh had physical difficulties he was confident about his academic work.

> *I am very good at science and I read a lot. I like looking for information about animals.*

He knew he needed help with his shoes, and any activity, which needed hand control.

> *I don't mind having a lazy leg but I wish I could get my shoes on and off. The boots are really hard.*

Hugh was also very accepting that an adult could not always be there when he needed to change his shoes.

> *I just have to be patient.*

He remembered being helped in art and in mathematics but he knew he was good at mathematics. It was the recording that he found difficult. The assistant wrote down the mathematical problem for Hugh to put in the answer. Hugh told of his difficulties in a very amusing way and described his limp as walking " *like a toad-a peed.* " I asked Hugh whether he was bullied of laughed at. Hugh acknowledged that children laugh at him but he made them laugh on purpose. He understood the difference between sharing a joke and being laughed at.

> *I am a comedian you know.*

Hugh thought positively about his physical difficulties and aimed to be a weather reporter when he is an adult. As the weather reporter only uses one arm to point to the weather map and jokes, He thought he had both qualities for the job.

> *You got to make it interesting 'cos weather could be boring. Like Michael Fish, he tells jokes and points to a map. I could do that. I'm a bit of a comedian you know.*

The children and friends were able to discriminate between physical difficulties and other qualities. They could also used internal and external

frames of reference. Harry could distinguish between his difficulties with sight and his strengths in reading and writing.

I read books all the time. I love it. I need help with my monocular."

Harry was supported in the classroom for literacy hour but was not sure why this lesson was supported in particular. He commented that his support assistant sat next to him in the classroom but he did not know why he was helped in literacy because he was such a good reader.

He had a clear understanding of the particular difficulty with his vision.

I am very good at cricket – as long as the ball is white- not grey.

Harry talked about his need for a monocular and he had a clear understanding of what he could or could not see. He remembered with regret that he could not see the baby birds that his mother had spotted but he understood that his problem was about contrast.

So like- brown lizards, if they are next to a tree, I can't see them. Yes I mainly use my right eye and right hand. They are more useful to me than my left eye and left hand.

He anticipated a problem in the junior class because the teacher uses a traditional chalkboard.

I won't be able to see white marks, and chalk is too faint.

However Harry seemed more disappointed about having to wear spectacles than the poor eyesight. To Harry, it was the glasses that made him feel 'different', not his sight. Even though there are several children in his class who wear spectacles Harry felt he was the only one.

I have deliberately not used triangulation in this research to support or disprove statements made by the children. There are several children in the class who wear spectacles but Harry felt he was the only one in school. This is

how Harry feels whether it is true or not. Although his visual impairment is quite significant the negative feelings were towards wearing spectacles.

> *I wish I was someone else* *...because these glasses make me feel special........I know its very important for grown ups but I just want to be like everyone else.*

In contrast Harry referred to his monocular almost as a person, a friend called 'Monty.'

> *Yes my monocular- Monty the monocular.*
> *In case I can't see anything on holiday I'm going to take him.*

The children who received help for physical difficulties recognised why they are supported. They accepted the need for help but did not like to feel different.

> *I need help with my monocular.*
>
> *She comes to help me with my shoes.*

• *Emotional, social or behavioural difficulties*

The children with emotional, social or behaviour difficulties were less clear about their impairments. There appeared to be less clarity and understanding. Catherine and Joseph talked about a personal turmoil of being unable to understand or control their own behaviour. However the vagueness may have been a learned response- not to admit to unacceptable behaviour.

At first, the children seemed reluctant to talk about behaviour but as I listened and made no comments they became more open. This was an aspect of listening to children that reached the personal, private self of the interviewer. I listened to very young children telling me about their behaviour. They were conscious that it was unacceptable, but they were not in control. I listened but also sensed their personal torment. There were several occasions when the children seemed embarrassed when they talked about their difficulties. As the children spoke about kicking or biting there was a fleeting hesitation. When they told me and I listened without comment or criticism they continued to tell me more about their personal struggles. When Catherine told me how difficult she found controlling her temper she became distressed.

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I want to stop kicking – I want to stop but I can't- I don't know why I do it- I can't stop- and the people are cross.

"I need to be quiet, not the screaming inside the classroom," said Catherine.

In my professional capacity I have seen Catherine being very uncommunicative. I have also seen her kick and bite staff. When I listened to her I was touched by the pressures and stresses that she feels trapped inside. She needed her classroom assistant

To cut my jumper, my wrists - the pain- Mr Lay stops the pain.

Catherine's friend Emily explained that the tiny threads, which came loose on her jumper, were extremely painful. Any thread or ribbon really hurt.

I had been surprised when Catherine said that she needed Mr Lay to cut her jumper but I felt feelings of sympathy for the personal torment she must feel. She also referred to 'the screaming' in the classroom. I do not believe that the room is ever noisy but for Catherine the noise is so loud it is painful. I asked Catherine and Emily if the teachers had explained why Catherine found touch and sound painful but they had not.

When I asked James what he did that was naughty he replied

I think, I think, I think, biting, kicking and punching.

I felt when James hesitated it was not because he was trying to remember but he was considering whether to admit to me what he had done. He looked at me as though he expected to be in trouble. This was interesting as I could see by his facial expression that he knew that his behaviour was unacceptable. I asked how his assistant responded and was told-

She holds my hand.

When I spoke to James at first, he did not mention that he found it difficult to behave in an acceptable manner in formal lesson times but he accepted the

comments from a friend about his behaviour. When I asked Harry to explain why James had help Harry said

Sometimes when he's been naughty.

I asked James directly if this was correct and what he did that was 'naughty' and he said-

"*I think, I think, I think, biting, kicking and punching, I need help not to kick and bite," said James.*

It was this aspect of the interviews that I found having a friend most useful for the purpose of a Special Needs Review and raising issues for the child. James said several times that he needed help to do his work but his friend explained that he needed help to stay focused on the work, there was not a problem with his ability. The friend provided a useful forum for the child to articulate the aspect of 'help', which they needed.

Why do you think James has help Toby?

You mess about don't you James. When the teacher goes to someone else you just stop.

Is that right James?

Yes

In the previous chapter James wanted it to be made clear about a particular aspect of his photograph. In this photograph James is looking straight into the camera. For many children this would be the usual 'photo smile' but James finds making eye contact really difficult. This photograph illustrates that while he was talking honestly about himself he relaxed for a fleeting moment and he felt at ease enough to make eye contact. He was relating to me and not staying in 'his world'.

• Some need…. a little bit easier work.

All the children had developed external and internal frames of reference regarding their academic abilities. Emma noticed that Catherine found Numeracy difficult. She also said

She is not ready for Year 2 yet.

Emma's comment reveals 'an understanding' of Catherine but also an understanding of the school curriculum and expected achievements. By the age of six this girl had an understanding of the school's expectations in academic achievement and comparisons. Emma had a concept of what it is to be 'a Year 2 pupil'.

Laurie had an understanding of Hugh's needs,

Well some people need a little bit harder work 'cause…well sometimes it's to do with their age and sometimes its just about well… they just need more work to do that's harder –and some sort of catch up, some need…. a little bit easier work.

He also showed thoughtfulness, trying to explain his needs in his friend' s presence.

Amy knew that her friends all could write their name and she needed to learn. She knew that there was an expectation for her to name colours and count. When Amy was asked about the support she receives in the classroom she replied

"She helps me with cutting and sticking."

The children and friends had an understanding and acceptance of impairments but confusions and tensions emerged from school policies and practices. There were tensions between understanding the need for help and exclusive practices and feelings of 'difference'. I asked Toby why Harry received special support he said

Because of his eyes, they can't see very well can they?

The friends were also very understanding about behaviours that presented difficulties for other children in the class. Toby was sympathetic to Harry's feelings 'of being special'.

> *I can't think of anything he can't do –he's just fed up of being special. He says he would like to be someone else.*

I was unprepared for the maturity of response when I asked Toby which lesson made Harry feel 'special.'

> *It's not about the lesson; it's how he feels really –its not what the teacher says, more what he feels inside.*

An aspect of the children's responses which influenced my personal/private self was the friends recognition of their friends strengths and gifts. The friends' replies were not what I had intended but in fact their answers were better than I had planned. My thoughts were connected to the school curriculum when I asked about strengths. The children recognised strengths of personality and character.

> *What is Hugh best at?*
>
> *He is always kind. He thinks in a kind way.*
>
> *In what way has he been kind to you?*
>
> *He hasn't in particular, but like -not what he does but how he thinks- we were asked to write about surviving on a desert island. All the other children planned to kill the wild animals and people. Hugh planned to feed and care for the animals and make friends with the people. That's why we like him, he sees a kind way of handling things.*

When I asked if anyone ever teased Amy, a child in her class replied

> *Why would anyone do that? She has never said anything nasty about anyone- so no one is nasty to her- there is nothing not to like.*

James had often been brought to me as Headteacher for fighting and scratching. When I asked a friend Toby, what James was good at he said

> *Well he is the best speller in the class- like a computer- but the best thing about him is he is really good with little children. He is really kind. He is often in with the Reception class. He often doesn't mean to*

hurt people, he just likes the feel of things- like hair -or a toy- he only wants to touch- he never means to hurt.

- *Disability*

Contrary to the new Code of Conduct 2001 none of the children had been consulted into the amount or type of support they were offered or in what curriculum areas. The support whether from the school or the LEA was fitted into the timetable and organised without the children being part of the decision making. The children could not explain why they were supported in some lessons and not others and their view of where the support should be had not been sought.

The children had a clear picture of their impairments but there was little understanding of how the organisation of the school was aimed to enable them to overcome the impairment. None of the children had vocabulary or overt awareness of the relationship between the support in school to their impairment. The children referred to school curriculum issues such as the literacy hour, numeracy, RE and cutting and sticking as the reason they were helped but they did not understand how barriers to learning such as poor sight, behaviour or mobility needed to be helped in school.

As Hegarty (1993) reminds us, often the process of integration is seen in relation to the child. The support is there to support the child instead of the school to rethinking policy and practice to accommodate the child. Booth (1998) defines integration in terms of participation, 'a process of increasing participation in the educational and social life of ordinary schools.' The children that I listened to had not been guided to develop their own learning skills and behaviours. When I asked James why he was supported he said that he did not know. However when he talked to me with a friend Henry understood that James needed help with his behaviour.

Sometimes when he's been naughty Mrs E holds his hand

One of the aims of this study was to understand how a child perceives the support they are given. A dictionary defines 'to perceive' as

"If you perceive something you notice or realise it".

Harry is a very astute boy and yet when he was asked why he had special classroom support he replied

"I don't know. It has always puzzled me".

I found this a really surprising response because of Harry's high level of achievement and understanding. Harry is partially sighted and his support (I had thought) is explicitly to support his vision in the classroom. I did not feel that he was avoiding the truth when he said that he did not know why the classroom assistant worked specifically with him. He was not denying that he had sight problems and he talked about this openly and clearly. The surprise was that he did not connect his need for a monocular and spectacles and his classroom support.

The children had support 'given' to them but it was not democratically agreed. None of the children knew why any particular area of the school curriculum was supported or for how long. In the classroom the children were placed in groups but they did not really understand the rationale for the grouping. The children with a Statement were aware that children were chosen to work with them but the game or the activity was talked about, not the behaviour such as sharing or taking turns. The children were not involved in deciding which group they were in or in the intended learning outcome.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, research by Norwich (1997) identified the lack of democracy in schools as a concern and a barrier to inclusive practice.
It may be argued that very young children do not have a concept of time but the children had not been involved in any discussion or planning adult support. All the appointments and arrangements for classroom support and visits by professionals were made between adults. Sometimes the appointments were made without including the class teacher, therefore not taking into account the school's timetable.

No she just comes. (James 5ᵗʰ November)

It may have been thought kinder to avoid talking about the children's impairments but the children were very aware of their situation. The children

need personal targets towards independence. By avoiding the children's learning needs the adults were supporting the children's dependence, not independence. The children were not aware of how many hours of support they received and they did not know why specific lessons were supported. When I asked James which lessons he needed most help with he said

To do my work

I asked him to explain for what sort of work did he need support. He replied

"I don't know".

Whilst the children did not understand the rationale for the support they did have views about how their support was translated into practice. The children each mentioned good and bad aspects of classroom support whether it was inside the classroom or outside however all the children preferred being inside the classroom. Just as the mainstream children interviewed by Norwich, (2001) the children mentioned receiving support in withdrawal settings, in class, in small groups and individually. They all said that they enjoyed working with their support assistant, whether inside or outside the classroom.

However there were several re-occurring themes with the main concern was the tension of being made to feel 'different'.

I hate being made to feel special.

As Loxley had found in his research there were tensions between receiving special help and been made to feel different. The children accepted a need for help by an adult but they did not like being singled out from the rest of the children.

She comes and takes me out- I hate it.

A friend explained that Amy pretends to ignore the support teachers.

She doesn't like being taken out so she ignores them and they go away.

The children admitted that they ' pretend' to be unresponsive as a strategy to deal with adult behaviour, which they did not like. A frequent concern was the process of being taken out of the classroom. The children developed strategies such as ignoring the adult, staring into space or pretending to daydream. Harry is a very able, articulate boy but Henry told me

> *He just stares in to space and they go away.*

I asked Harry if he did not like being taken out of the classroom. He explained that the support teacher Mrs C always took him outside

> *Mrs C takes me outside and I hate being made to feel special.*

He knew another teacher came and she always took him outside. He did not think it was for any particular curriculum area.

> *She just comes, and takes me out.*

Amy liked staying in the classroom and working at the same table as everyone else.

> *She stares into space and then the support teacher gives up and leaves. (A friend explaining Amy's strategy to ignore the teacher)*

All the children disliked being singled out and made to feel different. While I was talking to Hugh I said -

> *But you have come to talk to me now*

Hugh replied,

> *"But you asked me to come outside in the yard and we came in here. You didn't come into the classroom and call me out. I hate it."*

The school diary shows that there were frequent support staff coming from the Local Authority and the amount and type of support focused on 'the individual' not inclusion. . The support teachers from the LEA all withdrew the children from the classroom and the children did not like being singled out. A support teacher came to me to explain that Harry would not co-operate. She therefore felt it was a waste of her time but she felt guilty that she had not given him 'his hour'.

> *He is just refusing to talk to me. I want him to use his monocular but he is just staring at the wall.* (Diary notes- 11th September)

I directly asked Harry why he didn't co-operate and he said he didn't know. However a child in the class heard the question and explained that he did not like being made to feel special.

> *No its not the talking, it's being embarrassed and made to feel different. He doesn't speak and they go away.*

It was the process of being taken out of a lesson that was an issue, not being outside or inside, which was the concern by the children. I had not considered

this experience for the children but it emerged in several interviews. I asked the children about preferences of being inside or outside the classroom, but the significant aspect was being taken out of the classroom. The children felt embarrassed by being withdrawn from the room although they were happy to talk to an adult outside.

This was an aspect of support, which was raised by the children with a Statement, and by their peers. When I asked Laurie for advice about interviewing Hugh he said that Hugh does not like being taken out of the class. He does not mind working outside but feels embarrassed at being taken out. The children said that they were supported individually most but sometimes a group of children worked with them. The children were aware that the support assistant asked other children to join them, for example, to make up four children for a game. Hugh enjoyed taking a friend with him for physiotherapy. Whether in a group or with a friend the children knew the support was there for them but they could not explain why.

Catherine had the clearest preference because she found the classroom noisy. She did not suggest that she found the formal lessons difficult when the children sit together on the carpet but it was the noise from the other children.

> *They don't talk - they scream.*
> *The teacher asks them to be quiet but they don't be quiet- they scream like at a party. "*

When Hugh was asked if he preferred being supported in the classroom or taken out he said that he preferred to work with a friend. When he was put in a group he was unsure why the particular children were put together. He didn't mind being in or out of the room but he preferred to be with other children. Hugh liked to work in a group but he appreciated just taking one friend with him to do his exercises.

> *I like it best when I can take a friend with me for my physio; I like staying with my friends.*

When I asked James why he was supported, he replied that he needed to do his work. I asked why he was supported but not the other children in the class and

he said *"I need help with my work."* I challenged this by commenting that he was the best speller in the class so why did he need help? *"I have no idea"* he replied.

Most importantly through the research I learned to understand the children and not just know about them. I feel sympathy and hopefully more patience with Catherine. When I listened to her crying and saying

> *'I want to stop hitting but I don't know how'.*

I felt disturbed at a personal and professional level. I was both amused and angry when Hugh said

> *'I just have to learn to be patient'.*

I saw a really pleasant boy being well behaved but sadly let down by insufficient support. He should not have to learn to be patient but learn to be included with the other children. I was touched at many levels when Harry said

> *'I'm tired of being special'.*

Listening to the children, friends, peers and adults, proved valuable at many different levels. Through listening to the children I learned about the children with a Statement. I was impressed by how much they were valued by their friends. In addition to the research aims of learning what the children thought of their educational provision and themselves, I was touched by how much I learned about the children and how my attitudes towards them changed. In addition to learning about the children's attitudes to school and themselves, the experience for me of listening to a child say *"I wish I was someone else"* was as important as the expected outcomes. I also learned a great deal from children about accessing the views of their friends.

In the past when I have interviewed adults I have carefully considered the interview setting and researched the situation. When I spoke to Amy I misread her response. She was uncommunicative and stared into space but with further research I found a different picture

> *If she doesn't want to talk to you she will ignore you, so you'll go away.*

Also by listening to the children I had more strategies to deal with problems.

Tell her to look at you- insist.

James talked but we did not communicate, he just talked about Harry

Potter like a monologue.

Just tell him to stop. Say 'I don't want to talk about Harry Potter'.

Don't be afraid about hurting his feelings. It's kinder to put him straight –he can't work it out himself.

It was these first attempts at interviewing moved my thinking from what the children had to say to reflect on my own practice.

The children's friends provided a great deal of support and tried to offer help and support. When I listened to other children they all mentioned ways that they helped each other.

She can't tell the time so we make sure she comes in for lunch.

"When he starts to mess I deliberately ignore him so that he stops."

"If there is no adult to help him with his shoes we go and find someone."

"I let her sharpen my pencil. I can do it, but she really likes doing it- so I let her."

The children offer a great deal of pastoral support and practical help in and around school. In my research the greatest help was their expertise in understanding and having positive relationships with the children with a Statement.

She used to open her mouth and we tell her to close it.

When I saw Catherine sobbing in the school hall I asked a friend why she was crying. The teachers and lunchtime supervisors could not tell me why she was crying. A friend told me

She is still wearing her 'writing badge' and she is not writing- its lunchtime.

The mother of Amy also commented on the positive aspect of playing with children in a mainstream school. At Nursery Amy had attended a Special unit where she copied unusual behaviour. In the mainstream school the children

acted as a positive role model and also explicitly helped the socialisation of Amy.

When she scribbles on things we take the pen away

However these positive comments came from children in the junior end of school. There was a great deal of stress identified in the infant department, as the children were all struggling to learn to live together and the teachers were responding to the tensions.

> *We were just responding to one crisis after another. Someone is bitten or scratched. The children would not leave Harry's glasses alone. They did not realise that he needed them to see. They wanted to try them on and they got broken.*

The children did not understand that James liked to touch things and they were not given strategies to stop being touched. In this way it was James's behaviour that was seen as challenging rather than the children's ability to function independently with challenging behaviour. The children were not explicitly guided to understand about Harry's eyesight or James and Kate's sensitivity to sound or touch.

Many of the difficulties for the children with a Statement of Special Need, developed from children, parents and/or staff not being given the skills to understand and accommodate difference. The behaviour of James has often been the cause of many parental complaints. He was accused of pulling hair or touching other children's clothing. Harry told me that James liked to touch hair but he never meant to pull it. I asked James to tell me about pulling hair and at first he ignored the question. I told him that Harry thought it was an accident.

> *I only want to touch- it's the silk - the silk- I like soft socks or ribbons too- or shiny shoes- but people go mad - I don't know why-I only touch.*

As James and Catherine were telling me about their sensitivity, I wondered why the other children were not told of how they felt. No adult had talked to the children about James and Catherine's sensitivity to sound and touch. By not discussing or sharing how Catherine and James felt they remained

different and difficult for the children to accept. Neither had an adult talked to Catherine or James about his or her sensitivity and strategies to cope in the classroom.

In addition to children being clear about learning objectives all children need to develop a self-conscious awareness of what is needed to be a successful learner. Self-knowledge and understanding of personal goals in behaviour and learning skills are as valuable as learning objectives. To be helped to become an independent learner, self-motivated and self-reliant, a learner needs to know what behaviours and skills he/she needs to develop.

Perhaps in an attempt to 'be kind' the children have not been taught how to understand their own learning needs and those of others. By not being explicit on the purpose of the supporting adults, the children are not given the information to move towards being independent. For the Code of Practice to be a really valuable tool for developing an appropriate provision for each child, the children need help to understand the choices and their part to play. The assistant holding James' hand was not helping him learn to behave in a sociable way but was encouraging dependency.

5.4 What did I learn about school?

The practice of support at Hillfoot focuses on the child's impairment and support is not offered to help the child to be included in the class. The teachers all referred to stress caused by the Support Services transferring their policies and practice into mainstream settings without taking the different context into account. Yet in many ways the teachers organised the teaching assistants and planned to support a dual system within the mainstream school. The teachers found the Support Staff from the Special Needs Support Service appeared to add to their workload and not help it.

At Hillfoot School there must be a positive, planned whole school approach to inclusion, which ensures that diversity is seen positively by the teacher, not a burden. This must include an active management support for those who carry

out the inclusion. All staff must feel supported and understand the wider picture. Morgan (1997) likened an organisation to machine a where each part is vital. Staff must feel that their contribution is vital and understand how this contributes to the whole. Clear and shared aims for including pupils must involve clear and shared aims for including all the staff.

The teacher must rethink how classroom assistants are used within the classroom for the benefit of all. The teacher must rethink classroom practice and encourage the children to support each other. This is challenging for adults brought up in a culture of competitiveness and individual rather than group success. The teacher must make time to work collaboratively with the Teaching Assistant. She must consider the amount and type of support for individual pupils and consider how this can be met within the classroom. Teachers must also be encouraged to support each other and share good practice. The role of the SENCO must be to support the teacher, not just the child

In service training on the effective use of teaching assistants should help all the children not just individuals or a small group. The teacher working with a well-trained assistant need not feel deserted in the classroom. Pupil assessment is part of good teaching, to ensure that pupils are making progress. The Governors and Headteacher must celebrate the progress of all the pupils and not only focus on the most able. Teachers must not feel professionally challenged, by having children who need special provisions.

The management team must also recognise the time necessary for review meetings, for parental liaison and for differentiated planning. Schools for all will not be achieved by transplanting special education thinking into mainstream contexts. Teachers are faced with increased diversity of pupil's need. Ainscow (2000) suggest there are three options

- To continue with the status quo in the belief that some children have a problem

- To lower the exceptions in the belief that some children will never be able to achieve traditional standards
- To develop a whole new culture, seeing all children as unique rather than the negative connotation of 'different'. All pupils entitled to a personal plan not a few to an individual plan.

The school also must work with all pupils to celebrate the success of all the pupils. The plan for inclusion must be for all children. All parents must understand the schools aims. A review of the use of available resources, structures and a review of current practice is necessary for new meanings to emerge. Differentiation must involve using many teaching styles and acknowledge different learning styles of children. Teachers build up a repertoire of skills and experience and part of this experience must be an acknowledgement that children learn in a variety of ways. Some children prefer visual rather than oral stimulus. Diversity must be seen as challenge and not a problem.

Class teachers at Hillfoot School felt that the way that the Authority funds the Statement also generates a problem for the parents. The parents are informed of the level of funding and hours of support that the Local Authority is providing for their child. The parents have accepted a mainstream school place yet they also want their child to have all the support he/she is entitled to. The way the school is funded for specific children or specific Government initiatives encourages the school to target children who 'are different' and support them separately. The children all commented on being in a group, which was selected by the teacher. When I asked a friend of Hugh what sort of work Hugh was helped with, he commented that he never had been in a position to see what Hugh did in the classroom.

I did have to go and sharpen my pencil once though.

In an attempt to ensure each individual had his/her entitlement Hugh was supported in a way which appears to segregate him, not include him. When the teaching assistants were asked about their role and tasks they all mentioned

individual children, not the class as a whole. The Support teacher form the LEA said

'He gets his hour'

This support took the form of withdrawing the child with partial sight from the classroom and offering individual support. Although this teacher was working hard to support children identified as having Special Needs she was not working in liaison with the teacher to support all the children. Job descriptions for teaching assistants support a dual system within the mainstream school.

However support teachers employed by the school had a feeling of job satisfaction. . As in Maslow's hierarchy of human need the assistants gained more job satisfaction working with individuals or small groups of their own rather than supporting the class as a whole alongside the teacher (Morgan1997). The classroom assistant never felt any part of the job was' below her'. She said that in some ways the more personal or intimate tasks were more important. She said that most people have the skills to put out pencils and cut paper but caring for sick children or dealing with wet pants takes a special relationship.

I have really felt needed.

There was an obvious tension for the parents of children with Special Needs. Although the parents had made the decision to send their children to a mainstream school the parents seemed apprehensive about the security of their child's placement. The concerns did not revolve around whether they felt it was the correct placement or not but whether the local authority would reduce support or suggest another school. The parents knew their rights but all had felt pressure from the local Authority to choose a Special School.

All parents mentioned that they had to go against professional advice for a child's place in mainstream. The mother of Harry had been advised that he would be better paced in a school with a Special Unit for the partially sighted. Amy's mother had been advised to place Amy in a Special School but Amy learned from the other children to rock and make unusual sounds. In the mainstream school the parents felt that Amy was learning a great deal of positive behaviour from the other children. Amy's mother commented

The LEA thinks of resources and staffing but the other children teach a lot.

There is now an expectation in schools to have inclusive policies and practices for all children. A criteria for OFSTED inspections is the degree to which a school is inclusive with the voice of the child being heard in policymaking and practices. At Hillfoot School, the children with a Statement were not involved in any democratic process. The school has a Pupil Council but this does not include pupils with a Statement.

In Seattle in the United States a varied and diverse mix of programmes and services were transformed into a national system when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act 1975 was passed. The funding for Special Education is funded through a complex set of arrangements between the local, state and federal levels of Government. Studies have shown that 63% of education funding is used to support inclusion. As a result questions are being asked about whether too much money is being spent on assessment and programme administration.

This picture is mirrored in Britain. There are arguments for and against centralisation of funding and control. However at Hillfoot School there appears to be a dual system of support being offered. In the move to being an inclusive school, there is funding and structures being developed to support pupils in mainstream schooling. Schools use delegated funding to appoint staff and provide resources. However the centralised Local Authority service still exists and the children with a Statement are withdrawn from the classroom for specialist support. These specialists are appointed by different organisations such as speech and language therapy department and the physiotherapy department and there is no consultation. This can create a situation where four or five different professionals support some children in one day and they do not explain why they have come. When I asked Catherine why the teacher from the Autism unit came to work with her she said

We just play games.

I followed this up by asking why she played games.

She just does OK.

On 21st November, five staff came to see two children. As the school already employed support staff, the children were expected to adapt to several adults through the course of the morning creating an exclusive environment within the classroom. The children who find it most difficult to relate with adults are expected to adapt the most. As Harry said

' I just hate being made to feel special all the time'

This was difficult for the children and the teacher. As a class teacher commented

'The children are fine but the number of adults in my room is ridiculous' (November 21st)

Research by Davis et al (Loxley et al 1997) show that effectiveness of Policies for Inclusion was dependent on time allocation for administrative tasks.

That is, the Code 's procedures may inflict high transaction costs upon the school. That is the amount of time spent on information collection is time that cannot be spent on supporting or attending to the learning needs of the individual pupil.
(Loxley et al 1997)

It is an anomaly then that professions feel overburdened with collecting information. There is a tradition in schools where adults assess, test, and monitor children but they do not directly relate to the children. In this small-scale research the friends and peers provided a wealth of information about the children's abilities, gifts and management. The convention is to 'talk about', not to let the children speak.

5.5 What did I learn about the LEA

There is a tendency to think of 'inclusive education' as a move from the concept of 'special schools' to supporting children with impairments in a the local school. The agenda for inclusive education is concerned with overcoming barriers to participation that may be experienced by a pupil with a

special need. Support is offered based on a medical/ deficit model of difference and there is an inference that the children with a Statement will become 'normal' in a mainstream school.

In Seattle they have no Special Schools and therefore parents are not given the choice of a Special School. Whilst the type of school choice may vary from State to State, their options include open enrolment, inter-district choice, intro-district choice, second chance programmes for at risk pupils, charter schools, post secondary enrolment options and magnet schools. The parents are allowed to choose the Elementary School. Each school interprets inclusion in its own way. Some schools have units where children with special needs children are given numeracy and literacy support. Some schools appoint assistants to work alongside pupils in the classroom. Parents then, choose an Elementary school, which they believe, offers the curriculum they want for their child.

Sheffield LEA has written a Statement for Inclusion which aims to ensure a common understanding of the meaning of inclusion an educational context. It outlines the Authorities vision of inclusion and the impact upon the children, carers and communities. In the LEA Statement barriers and constraints to achieving the vision for inclusion are identified.

> *'We believe that a major issue for the LEA and schools is the need to change the mainstream culture, which creates exclusionary barriers.'*
> *Sheffield Statement of Inclusion 2001:3*

The barriers are

- Inaccessible communication and information
- Inaccessible buildings , facilities and equipment
- Inflexible processes , organisation and resources
- Prejudiced attitudes, stereotypical thinking and inaccurate assumptions.

The statement by the LEA acknowledges the conflicting goals for schools to raise standards in Literacy and Numeracy and to embrace inclusion for all. Through this piece of research however 'standards' and 'inclusion' did not

present as great a challenge as 'consumer rights and choices' and 'accountability and value for money'.

The Code of Practice, set up to ensure the individual needs of children are met, maintains divisive practices. Children are placed in mainstream settings and the teacher feels all the support is directed to a minority of children. The teacher's task is to cater for all the children and therefore these children become to be seen as 'a problem'. The money for supporting children with Special Needs and strategies to raise standards specifically targets a minority group of children. There is a clear expectation that any Teaching Support should be targeted on exclusive practice and not inclusion. There is public accountability and auditors ensuring that the money is used on the target group or child. The Code of Practice and the Funding for the Standards Grant do not at the moment support inclusion for whole school improvement. This expectation comes from The Local Authority, the teachers and the parents. There must be a change in the way funding is allocated for the teacher to feel supported to teach all the children.

The concept of dual systems is an area of conflicting paradigms. In Seattle, Special Schools have been closed because of a stated intent to offer all children the same chances. The aim is that no child will be excluded from full access to State Education. In New Zealand Special Schools and Mainstream Schools are offered. This is not because it is thought to be the best educational provision for the children. It is a commitment to offer the parents a choice. In New Zealand there are Special Schools and Mainstream Schools but no Special Units or Integrated Units connected to mainstream schools.

In Britain there are Special Schools and mainstream schools with Special Units or integrated resources. Within a mainstream school the policy and practice of the school can reproduce a dual system within the school. At Hillfoot School all the staff considered children with Special Needs as a separate group. When Harry came to see me to offer advice the children had already worked out which children I was interviewing. The children had understood that the children with a Statement were a discrete group.

The support staff, employed by the Local Authority, plan their timetable and do not take the child's school curriculum into account. The speech therapist and physiotherapist did not know which lesson the children were missing. As a practitioner and researcher I experienced a tension balancing my agenda and the school curriculum needs of the child. The visiting support teachers did not take the school's curriculum into account. They did not consider how many adults had worked with a child within the day. For my research I was fortunate to have an overview of all the professionals involved with the child. The individual child was not at the centre of the support arrangements but the child was expected to fit into the support services agenda.

Customer centredness is particularly significant in countries where the success of the individual is valued rather than the success of the group. The research by Hofsted (1994) showed the employees of IBM had cultural attitudes to whether the individual or collective success was more important. The three countries, which most strongly supported the success of the individual, were the United States, Australia and Britain.
It is not surprising then that these three countries have a code of Practice for Special Needs

> *' With extensive references being made to addressing the needs of the individual child.'*

The funding for Special Needs is designated to provide support for an individual child. There is public accountability to ensure that the money is all used to support the child's problem. This largely takes the form of an IEP (Individual Education Plan), which is an attempt to make schools focus upon appropriate curricular/resource needs of specific pupils. It is also shown in the deployment of the teaching assistants where there is apparent pressure to be seen to direct the funding to the Special Needs child. The Code still largely presents Special Educational Need as being an individual deficit and in this way the Code of Practice actively works against inclusion.

In his research Ainscow (1999) observed children in Laos, New Delhi and Austria use the children to help each other. When I visited Tanzania, Ethiopia and Ladakh in India, I saw the children were used to supporting each other. An important resource in the classroom is the children. I found the friends and peers of children with a Statement were a rich resource in pastoral care and educational support for the children. They were also a rich resource for adults in each other's learning styles, behaviour and personalities. Whether personal traits are viewed as 'quirky' or individual needs, the children could provide useful information about pupil management.

5.7 What did I learn about myself- the product of my learning

As a researcher working in my own school I was surprised how difficult was to arrange to go into a classroom. I felt like a visitor in my own school. The difficulty in accessing the children because of the National Curriculum timetable and support from school and the LEA produced its own tensions. My own cultural background led me to place a high value on literacy and numerically. Our own values and socialisation, conditions what we hold to be important. Numeracy and literacy lessons are usually offered in a morning in school, which was when most children were thought to be most receptive and communicative. I sensed a conflict between my wish to interview the children in their most receptive and co-operative mood and their entitlement to the school curriculum.

The child observations heightened my feeling of watching as an outsider. I watched the children playing in the yard and talking in the classroom but I had not been able to communicate. Listening to the friends was a valuable step foreword in finding out about the children for several reasons. Listening to friends helped my self-confidence in the interview process. I developed on a personal journey to recognise that the children in the school are the experts of their lived world and I needed to learn from them. The children provided a wealth of information about their friends, which I could not have learnt without them but I must put myself in a position to listen. A significant change in the pace developed when I was willing to 'share' the research with the

children, parents and teachers. I had read the work by Norwich (2001) and recognised that he was researching inclusive practice from outside the organisation. It was hard for me to recognise that I was talking the same stance although I worked in the school.

An unexpected outcome of the research was the relationship with the parents. When I had first written to him or her I had expected that some would withdraw their child from the research project but no parent did. This produced a tension but also encouragement. The parents showed interest throughout the year and called in to ask how the research was going on. The taped interviews were not especially useful, as a method to record the data as it inhibited several of the children's responses. However it was a valuable tool with which to share the interviews with parents. When the parents agreed to allow the children to be interviewed they were obviously tense about what the children may say or do. To allow the parents to listen to the tapes dispelled the tension and allowed the parents to share what had been said. The tapes also provided a discussion point for the parents and myself. The parents could legitimately feel proud of the outcomes.

It is difficult to explain how much of an achievement the interviews felt for the children, parents and me. The children and parents had experienced many formal meetings in the past where the children had been unresponsive and where they had behaved in an unsociable manner. The initial interviews where the children were uncommunicative and the subsequent more successful interviews were useful for discussion. The problems lay at the skill of the adult, not the children and the parents and children found this a positive outcome.

When I listen to the taped recording of the last interview, with Harry, I feel a great sense of pride. This is not because it is a 'successful interview' but for this child it was a huge achievement. He is known by support staff to be uncommunicative and 'sulky' yet he came into my room and talked. He knew that the interview was being recorded although he could not see the cassette.

At the end of the interview I rewound the tape and an example of the success was he said

How did we get on?

It is perhaps not possible to explain to children the purpose and long or short term implications of interviewing for my research. However informing the children about the research and encouraging them to feel what they have to say is both important and valued significantly changed the interview outcomes. It was important to dispel the school convention of question and answers, with the adult already knowing the answer. I had to be explicit with all the children and put them in the position of 'expert' in their lived world and I was the learner.

This research project moved in pace and success when the children, teachers and parents felt involved in school and I believe that inclusive policy and practice will follow on the same path. This research has many implications for me in my professional role. In parallel to being involved in this action research during this year I have been involved in a working party for the Local Authority looking at 'Access and Inclusion' in a response to the Government's Document *'Every Child Counts'*. Also I have visited schools in Ethiopia and Ladakh in northern India. All these experiences, the research, professional development and personal travel all influenced my attitudes towards support and education to all the children.

Whilst the British Code of Conduct identifies consumer rights and choices as a priority this was not the experience at Hillfoot Primary, whether the consumer is seen to be the parent or the child. The Code of Practice states that parents have a choice of which school they would prefer for their child. The parents seemed very anxious about the child remaining in a main stream setting and this created an on going pressure. The British 'Code of Practice' and the United States' 'The Human Rights Act' place great importance on the rights of the pupils and parents. However there is still strong emphasis upon the validity of professional judgements especially educational psychologists and the education officers involved in funding. The teachers and assistants did not feel

that their professionalism was held in equal regard as medics and educational psychologists. The professionals who are external to the school staff, control funding and offer the training to newly appointed teaching assistant

The LEA must provide in-service training for teachers on the effective use of classroom assistants. Courses on Literacy and Numeracy must also involve collaborative planning and the use of shared classroom space. In service training by the LEA for teaching assistants must take into account mainstream settings. The course for Special Needs training must include practice that embraces the concept of inclusion and not only focus on a child's disability. Also the training offered to teaching assistants by the Support Services must not perpetuate a dual system within the mainstream setting.

It is not surprising with the rapid changes and initiatives in inclusion, that in the LEA where I work, the initiative looking at Access and Inclusion is referred to as 'Stress and Confusion'. I have worked for the last two years on the working party looking at Inclusive practice in Sheffield Schools. Sheffield has a policy of inclusive education and yet an OfSTED report in 1999 recommended that this policy needed to be more clearly defined. A clear definition has been redrafted as a new starting point, enabling the debate about inclusion to take place in schools. Out of this need for a shared understanding of inclusion is the possibility of making a new beginning.

The research developed from focusing on the five children with a Statement of Special Need, to seeing 'inclusion' involved everyone in school. It must not be directed at just a few children focusing on difference but celebrate and acknowledge the success of everyone. Through the social model of disablity the school must identify barriers for all children and no longer focus on a small group of children. Over the year changes have already been put in place. These can be evidenced by the recent audit by the LEA, on the school's implementation of the new Code of Practice.

There is now a policy on the use of classroom support staff, which places an enphasis on inclusion, and a policy on involving a child in the annual review

of support. There is now an explicit expectation that pupil support will occur inside the classroom. The reason for a child to be working outside the classroom must be defended from the perspective of the child, such as personal dignity during physiotherapy sessions. All the children with a statement of Special Need could explain their targets and the purpose for any support. . . There is a school policy for visiting support staff who are expected to make an appointment with the child and children should not be taken out of a lesson. In the Foundation Class small world figures include people with impairments so that issues of difference can be discussed. The school library and classrooms have books which include positive images of people with impairments. All curriculum leaders have reviewed schemes of work to include positive images of impairment. The move to being more inclusive does not focus on the children with a Statement but everyone and every aspect of school life

This thesis argues that the very process and structures set up to support the children with a Statement accentuate and maintain the difference. There is a need to change the social setting and environment for the school community to learn how to include every child. It was this aspect of the findings, which I felt most concerned about at a personal and professional level. All children need to be taught how to live alongside each other. Senge (1990) warns that a significant obstacle for the improvement an organisation is to think that the problem 'is out there.' The views of individuals, how mental images are constructed may become 'psychic prisons'. The frustration felt by the teachers involved with inclusion will not be resolved by blaming the children or the support services.

For the Code of Practice to work and for children to offer their views there must be a genuine feeling that their views are valued and will be listened to. This takes time, careful preparation and adults must listen. In the introductory chapter for this dissertation I aimed to develop my practice in talking to children. What I have learned to do is develop my skills in listening in order to understand. I wanted to learn about the experiences of children with a

Statement of Special Need but this involves a paradigm shift to listening to all children.

> *We live in complex interdependencies with the planet we inhabit.*
> *Whatever we do, whatever is done, includes us all, no matter what*
> *strategies we may use in an attempt to distance and isolate ourselves.*
> *Actions that exclude and diminish others exclude and diminish*
> *ourselves. Ballard 1995*

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