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# **Exploring The Role Of A Special School Teacher: An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry**

**By Philip Richard Masterson**

## **Abstract**

The aim was to explore my own professional experiences in the role of a special school teacher; a role which I had recently moved to after 16 years teaching in mainstream education. The purposes framed this study: 1. To gain an insight and in-depth understanding of the role of the special school teacher. 2. To examine the influences of teacher identity, personal morality, autonomy and power, upon the role through autobiography.

Using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry methodology, data sources included field texts, reflective journal and other salient material. Deep and ongoing reflection using the three-dimensional inquiry space and narrative thinking played a significant part of ensuring the rigour of the study. Results indicate that there is a significant impact upon the role of the teacher due to a lack of specialist training, which impacted upon power and leadership roles within the relationships across teaching teams. Teacher identity, beliefs and personal morality appeared to have an influence upon professional decisions. Generous autonomy and lack of direct accountability appeared to be a significant factor in providing opportunity for a cultural acceptance of poor standards by a small minority of staff. My personal histories were seen to have a significant impact upon my present values and attitudes and had a significant impact upon the shaping of my teacher identity.

This narrative inquiry assists in understanding the role of the special needs teacher at a time of profound interest in SEN. It supports understanding the complexities of teacher identity during a time of significant role change and how this affects the teaching role. This study supports a deeper understanding of factors such as morality, power and autonomy and their interconnectedness with relationships in special education.

# **Exploring the Role of the Special School Teacher: An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
At the University of Durham**

**by**

**Philip Richard Masterson  
School of Education  
University of Durham**

**November 2016**

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Secondly, I would like to thank the staff of the study school for allowing me to be a part of their 'special world' enabling me to conduct my research and learn so much about education and myself.

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## **Prologue: Stories Of School**

*“One of the starting points for narrative inquiry is the researcher’s own narrative of experience, the researcher’s autobiography.” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.70)*

*“These narrative beginnings of our own livings, tellings, retellings, and relivings help us to deal with questions of who we are in the field and who we are in the texts that we write on our experience of the field experience.” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.70)*

*“...of the importance of inquiring into our own stories of school, stories that shaped our assumptions, understandings, and experiences in and out of schools.” (Clandinin, Steeves and Caine, 2013, p.6)*

### **Stories Of School: Introduction**

In line with Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) narrative inquiry methodology, and the nature of the research being autobiographical, this thesis will begin with the re-telling of a series of short stories from my past. The purpose of this is to allow myself, the researcher, the opportunity to understand myself in terms of critical influences which may have shaped my outlook, values and biases (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Having an understanding of our past experiences, their meanings and their influence in shaping our beliefs, prepares the researcher to have a deeper understanding of themselves when interpreting and making meaning from their experiences in the field (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The stories are selected to recognise key moments from my past which I feel were significant in shaping my attitudes, beliefs and moral values.

**Early Story 1- Infants (1973)**

I was six years old and in the infant class. It was 1973. A bottle of school milk was provided free. My class always had milk each morning. I used to struggle with it every day. As a child you had to take a bottle from the crate, but to me they were often warm, creamy and even worse, sometimes the foil top had been attacked by a bird and the cheesy stuff around the top of the bottle was on display. I struggled with the look of it and the smell of it. Our straws were very short and to suck from it meant that your face was very, very close to the top of the bottle. I was sometimes close to gagging. Sometimes the foil lid would collapse as I tried to push the straw through also revealing the cheese around the top. I privately hated milk at school.

One day, I was the last person in the classroom and all of the other children in my class had gone out to play. I remember the teacher leaving the class saying that she wouldn't be long. The classroom was silent and the milk crate stood by the door with all of the bottles returned but mine.

As I sat sucking the last of the milk from the bottle, a boy came into the classroom. He was much older than me and he had something wrong with his legs. I later would understand that he had 'wooden' legs. When he came in I felt really scared. I had never seen anyone 'walk' like that and in my mind he was like a monster. He picked up the crate and put it onto a trolley cart that was in the doorway. Then he started to walk towards me.

As he walk/stumbled towards me I remember feeling panic. I guess that he simply wanted to get the last milk bottle and add it to his crate. In my panic, I jumped up and ran from the room as quickly as I could, climbing over chairs and tables and not looking back. I recall the boy said something 'scary' to me as I ran which increased my panic to get out of the class as quickly as I could. I went onto the yard and never spoke of it to anyone. I never saw the boy again.

### **Early Story 2 – Infants (1973)**

I was still in the infant class. It was the end of the day. My end of day routine was that I made my way out of the classroom and my big sister would meet me and we would walk around to my nana's house and remain there until my dad came home from work at around 6pm to take us home. This day was going to be different and I had thought about it all day. Either my dad or my mum would collect me instead.

My mum and dad were in the middle of their divorce. Today was the day that the court would decide who I lived with. My sister and I lived with my dad after my mother left but the custody hearing was to decide if that would change. Weeks before, a big fat lady had come to the house and asked me who I wanted to live with. I remember telling her that I wanted to stay with my sister.

My father had informed me that if he won the custody battle, he would collect me from school himself. I remember feeling very excited about being collected from school by my father; that had never happened before. I wanted desperately to stay with him. I remember feeling very frightened that he might not be collecting me that day. That would mean moving house, changing schools, living with my mother's new husband. I just wanted everything to stay the same as it was.

The end of the day finally came. I still recall the fluttering in my stomach and the sense of excitement as I left the classroom to walk out towards the waiting group of parents. I remember looking at the group, being unable to see anyone that I recognised. Time seemed to stand still for an eternity as my heart pounded in my tiny, five-year-old chest. The moment I saw my father, I burst into a run and he knelt down to receive me with his arms wide.

### **Early Story 3- Juniors (1977)**

It was lunch time and we were all on the playground. My school only had a yard but we enjoyed our breaks very much. My friends were talking about who the fastest runner in the school was and the name came up that always did, NK. He was regarded as the fastest runner throughout junior school. I had been the second fastest runner for the same period and nobody ever questioned our labels. This day, the boys wanted NK and I to have a race to see who was the fastest. We both agreed.

The race was from the junior football pitch 'the wall' (as it was affectionately called) to the infant building, where the bins were stored, and back again. The yard had some classes in for their dinner and some classes were still playing on the yard. Most of the infant classes were in for their lunch so their yard was fairly clear. The race started and we reached the bins together. I remember having to weave around some of the little infant children as I ran (as I am sure NK had to too). The race back to the wall saw me get a little ahead and I was declared the winner by a small margin. As boys gathered around us, NK declared that his trainers were too tight and that was why he had lost the race.

My reflections of this moment recall the unfairness I felt as my momentarily elevated social status was 'rubbished' by NK's excuses. I recall a strong sense of outrage and disappointment over his reaction to my winning. Maybe I thought he would be pleased for me? The feeling of unfairness lingered and still quickly comes to mind even forty years later when I watch pupils competing in sport.

#### **Early Story 4 - Secondary School Year 10 (1982)**

I was asked by my form tutor to wait outside the head's office after registration. I waited outside her office wondering what she was going to say to me. I wasn't sure what I had done wrong, though I felt that school was becoming a place where I was being noticed for more negative reasons lately. I knew that teachers were talking about me and there seemed to be a campaign emerging against me. I was getting detentions for trivial things and I felt aggrieved, under siege by the school, their rules and the staff.

My parents had separated years before but after years of complete happiness, home was becoming difficult now. My father and I were not seeing eye-to-eye and I was becoming interested in girls and heavy metal music; both changes strongly disapproved of and challenged by my father. I was invited in and sat politely for ten minutes while the head teacher tried to talk to me, on behalf of my father, about my conduct in and out of school. I chose to not speak, rather put up a defensive wall of silence but remained polite.

That weekend, I went to town to get my earlobe pierced (against my father's advice) and that destroyed the remaining relationship we had. On returning home, my father made a brief phone call to my mother; 'Come and collect your son'. My mother collected me twenty minutes later and I was moved to my mother's house with a few belongings.

### **Early Story 5 - Secondary Year 11 (1983)**

I had a single PE lesson followed by a single Science lesson. It was a rush for all of the students to get to Science on time. I arrived last, moments after the boy before me, and I tried to get to a seat quickly. The class sat down then immediately we were reminded that the exams were soon to be upon us so this lesson would be a sort of test. Everybody was asked to stand up. The rule was that after you have answered your question correctly you can sit down.

I remembered thinking that I didn't like this at all. Not because I might not know an answer, but because of the way you have to stand up in front of everyone. It put me 'on edge' and I didn't like it.

After a few children were asked questions and sat down, I could feel the tension and see how seriously the teacher was taking it all. Now it was my turn; so early in the lesson, but at least it would be over with and I could sit down and watch everyone else afterwards. The teacher asked me my question and I looked at him. My mind was blank. Nothing was there at all. I stared back at him. I remember feeling the sweat from the PE lesson and the mad dash to this classroom still on my back.

The teacher asked me another question instead and same again; nothing at all, just blank. I continued to look blankly at him and I could see he was beginning to get irritated. I wondered at the time if he thought I was playing a game with him? Looking back, he may have thought I was trying to spoil his lesson or reverse the control he enjoyed over us? The teacher offered me a third question after he publicly declared that he considered it easy. I could not tell them apart. I felt like a rabbit in headlights and my mind remained blank to anything related to scientific facts or knowledge.



By this time, the class were displaying a mixture of amusement and bemusement, and the teacher had by then decided he was not going to let this pass lightly. He invited the rest of the class to 'sit down and relax' and only I remained standing. The teacher proceeded to ask me question after question, giving me ample time to reply each time, until the end of the lesson. I remained standing, mind still blank, with an overwhelming awareness of my acute spotlight and my staring into his eyes until the ordeal and humiliation finally ended at the sound of the bell.

At the next science lesson, I found that I had been 'dropped' from the GCE exam board and transferred to the easier CSE paper (a paper that we 'top class' students had always thought was for the 'dim' students). Without any conversation to explain what was going on, the teacher approached me, handed me a CSE science textbook and asked that I work on my own at the side of the class until the end of the school year.

**Beginning Teacher's Story 6 - My First Student-Teacher Placement During My PGCE Training Year (1996)**

Liam was a lovely lad. He seemed cheerful though I seldom spoke to him. His wheelchair meant that he was always at the very edges of my year 3/4 classroom and his full-time carer never left his side, reducing, I felt, the need for me to make the long journey across to him past children who were asking for help. He worked at a table much higher than any other children due to him being sat in his wheelchair. This presented some extra difficulties for him to share work or speak to peers as their communicative heights were never the same.

Even though he seemed cheerful, Liam was always 'alone' during lessons and during breaks on the yard. His physical limitations meant that he couldn't run alongside his peers and this left him in his own space for most of the break time. I watched him and felt a little sad for him, for me, for the school and for his family. Was this the best we could do for him? Was this the best I could do? How did Liam rate his experiences? What did the school think? Were his parents happy? What alternatives were there if he was unhappy?

I wondered at how well suited Liam and this school actually were. I felt that he was confined to his wheelchair, but also to the outer edges of the classroom because the room was packed tight with small clusters of tables and chairs, units and storage cupboards. It was a challenge for me to navigate the classroom furniture on legs, how much harder would it be in a large wheelchair? I thought about Liam's isolation in his wheelchair and how hard it must be to be different from his peers. I considered how difficult I had found it to get across to him during my lessons and begin to make a relationship with him. My stay at the school was temporary, but I couldn't use that as an excuse for not speaking to the boy. I was making excellent relationships with the easier to reach children in the class. Personal and professional guilt was hitting hard.

I would try much harder to talk to Liam in the next few days, though his carer did like to answer for him and steer my conversations with Liam to her. Maybe she needed more than the company she was getting from Liam? Maybe she was craving adult attention in her world of just Liam? I wanted to know Liam better and get him more involved in the class. I wanted to bring him into the 'body' of the class more. I would try to plan for this in the near future.

My teaching practice ended and despite my moving the furniture around and trying different activities, I never felt that I had made any progress in my attempts to reach Liam and bring him closer to the 'heart' of the classroom.

### **Teacher's Story 7 - Qualified Teacher At Last (1997)**

My first interview led to my first appointment as a fully qualified teacher. I was employed in one of the best primary schools in the local authority and I was relieved and delighted to be a professional working man. The staff members were incredibly supportive of me. The children were all coached from a very young age to conform to prescribed study behaviours and their attitude to learning was incredibly positive. These children were driven to succeed; they are all from a very prosperous local catchment in a leafy suburb where Mercedes Benz cars were common. The pressure upon the children was from parents as much from school and there were no behaviour issues at all in the school. I mused over the fact that my biggest behavioural problem that day had been to ask Stephen (after raising his head from his reading book after 25 minutes silent reading) to concentrate on his reading book.

I was talking to one of the Y6 students at morning break about the approaching summer holidays. I asked her if she was going away. She told me that she was going on safari to Africa again, that it's fantastic and she couldn't wait to go. I replied that it sounded very exciting. She mentioned seeing rhinos and elephants and that it was very hot in Africa. The girl politely asked me if I had been on a safari. I replied that I hadn't as they were quite expensive and generally speaking, not many people would get the opportunity to go on a safari, especially at such a young age. I reminded her that safaris were the kind of holiday that families save up for years to afford and they become a 'once in a lifetime' experience. She politely disagreed with me and informed me that many of her friends have been on a safari. To make her point, she began pointing across the playground naming boys and girls that had been on a safari in Africa.

During the following academic year, I left the school to join a primary school set in a socially deprived council estate.

## **Teacher's Story 8 (2000)**

### **Part 1: Finding My Story To Live By**

My first six months in the 'tough' school was very difficult. I felt the behavioural challenge was hard to meet. All of my strategies appeared ineffective and the more difficult students were regularly very challenging as they seemed to know I was out of my depth. The classrooms in the old building were isolated from each other, up staircases and along corridors. There were no support staff in class with me and no help. The kids came into class and the survival job was mine; to get through to the bell. It was very tough.

I worked very hard to find answers to why I was clearly failing but felt embarrassed and ashamed that I couldn't control my class or teach very well as a result. As one year ended and the next began, I started with an approach which I felt may serve me well and things were so much better for me and my class. The students responded well and we had an excellent, enjoyable year together. I had found the ingredients to making life successful for both myself and these students. I had pondered long and hard in the early months and often felt I was in the wrong job and the wrong profession. However, honesty, respect and trust as the foundation blocks of my emerging relationships with the students empowered me to enjoy easily the best years of my teaching career. My students learned to trust me and believe in me. I didn't shout at them, humiliate them or make them feel small for asking or getting something wrong. These ideas became my key building blocks for my classroom ethos for the remainder of my career.

The school was full of students with very low self-esteem, values that failed to match mine, no belief in education, and limited social skills. We were caught up in a political agenda of SAT exams that were taking over the curriculum and I felt very unhappy teaching to government

led exams when I felt that these students needed a well-rounded education involving social, emotional and practical skills. I saw artists, sportsmen/women, poets, joiners, craft workers and computer literate people being denied their opportunities due to a hideously limited diet of maths, English and science revision sessions.

### **Part 2: Examinations**

As the Y6 teacher, I was responsible for teaching to, then administering, the SATs. The students and I had a very good year together. The results arrived. I was summoned to the Head's office.

Three months previously, a boy from Thailand had arrived new to the school and been entered for the exams. He did not speak English. Just prior to the SAT exams beginning, he returned to Thailand for a family holiday. He returned to school a day after the exams started. The boy failed his exams and each subject percentage dropped by 4.7%.

During my 'interview' with the headteacher, the Thai boy's results were noted and flagged up to me. I was then subjected to a hostile interrogation as to why this child had failed and what more could I have done to prevent his failing the tests? I politely, always politely, informed the headteacher which interventions the boy had received and was duly made to feel that I had failed the boy, his parents and the school. I listened politely whilst silently promising myself that I would not work for this headteacher a moment longer than necessary. I felt sure the education system no longer understood the experiences of the students that were in it. During the following term, after 9 years at the school, I left teaching.

### **Teacher's Story 10 – 'Teaching' Again (2008)**

After a financial need arose, I offered myself as supply cover in a local special school. I was quickly offered a full time teaching post in the secondary department. I was in a very happy place both personally and professionally.

I was happy to be teaching. I was especially delighted that the SAT exams issue, for me, was over. I thought my new colleagues were highly skilled professionals dealing with amazing students with significant medical and behavioural challenges. I thought the broad curriculum on offer suited special school children but, personally, I thought it should also be offered to mainstream children. I acknowledged that I had no special school training and felt extremely vulnerable about getting my professional decisions wrong.

The teaching teams within each classroom were large (up to 5 staff) and everyone seemed to know the children intimately. The staff were quite old; some past retirement age. Many were related and many were in friendship groups that holidayed together or had frequent social nights out together. The students liked the staff and appeared to enjoy their lessons, they seemed to appreciate the efforts staff made for them.

I could see no reason why I wouldn't stay there a long, long time.

**Parent's Story 11: The 'Right' School (1993)**

My wife and I had three children very early in our marriage; we were both young and not far in our careers. My wife gave up her job as an office clerk and we depended on my warehouseman's wage to get by. Times were financially hard but we were very happy. At the time, we lived in a small terraced house in a fairly rough area where there was a generous amount of social deprivation; there were police raids to homes, domestic violence issues and local families and children openly swore at each other.

The local primary school had a terrible reputation, noted for poor discipline and very poor academic attainment and the thought of sending my children there filled me with dread. However, our house was adjacent to a Roman Catholic primary school and its reputation and published results were very, very good. Neither my wife nor I were religious, so at first we didn't consider that school to be an option for our children until a neighbour informed us that a small percentage of non-Catholics could be admitted.

Over the following week, I penned a letter to the parish Father requesting a school place for our child. I loaded the letter with references to our high moral standards and our approach to education and parenting. We were offered an interview with the Father which my wife attended and my daughter was offered a conditional place. The condition was that we begin attending church on Sundays. My wife and I attended a local Methodist church with our three children for a couple of months and our daughter started in the Roman Catholic nursery at the next intake. We were delighted at our success and felt that we had achieved something significant for our children's education and life chances. A year later, our son started at the same nursery.



### **Parent's Story 12: Proud Of Academic Success (2006)**

As a parent of three children, my goal for them was to be confident, independent, well-balanced adults that would contribute to the community in which they live, wherever that may be. If academic achievement could help facilitate that then so be it.

My fear (lurking within) was that school can be a 'dark' place for children. Bad experiences such as bullying can occur, from peers or teachers and self-esteem can be eroded or destroyed. Keeping up with the expected learning can be a thankless task in itself and I felt tensions between the homework demands and my wish for family time and extra-curricular activities.

At Year 6, all of my children achieved predominantly level five in their SAT results. My children appeared to enjoy school and had a strong work ethic. According to their teachers, all three children were excellent students and I should be proud. I was. Despite my pride, I was constantly bothered by a feeling that their school-based curricular experiences were too focussed on academic success. At home, we focussed upon activities away from 'academia'.

My eldest daughter loved music and learned to play the piano and the flute. She also went horse-riding and had ballet lessons. My eldest son loved football and played in the school team and his local club team regularly for 8 years. He also played the classical guitar to grade 8. All three children achieved black belts in karate and competed in local, national and international competitions, winning trophies for themselves, their club and their country. I supported my children's extra-curricular activities throughout their childhood and valued its place in their development toward becoming well-rounded adults. I felt that there were often difficulties for my children managing their school work burden due to their interests beyond the classroom.

Despite my anxieties regarding workload, on leaving school, all three children achieved the required amount of GCSE passes in order to access the expected A level courses and, (for the two older children), subsequently go on to university degree courses. Five years later, having passed their degrees, two of the three are unemployed living at home with their mother and the other is working part-time as a social care worker on minimum wage, living with her boyfriend.

### **Parent's Story 13: Damaging Experiences? (2015)**

As I conducted this narrative inquiry, following my divorce, I became parent to three more very small children, with the eldest (5years) beginning his journey through the education system.

My children this time attended a well-regarded, local school, noted for its emphasis on academic attainment. I had reservations about this in the deepest recesses of my mind, but our child attended because it was a 'good' school and it was the closest primary school to our house.

My child had been in school two terms in the reception class and he could already read all of the first 100 key words, write complex sentences and spell many words independently, punctuating his joined writing with capital letters and full stops. His weekly homework burden was usually a reading book to read to me, a reading book for him to have read to him, to learn to read, write and spell 5 key words, a piece of writing and/or some maths practice. I found this really hard to fit into a weekend which was focussed upon family time.

Despite the heavy emphasis on academic progress, and my uneasiness about my 5-year-old being driven so hard, I tolerated it because he loved working hard and showing off how 'clever' he was. As parents, we supported the school and ensured he did every piece of work whilst giving him enthusiastic support and encouragement. I mentioned to the teacher at parent's evening that I was delighted with his progress, but quietly worried for other children that might not keep up.

At bedtime, my son told me that he had been kept in at playtime. I asked if he had been naughty. He replied that he hadn't finished his work and I asked why? He told me that he had misunderstood the task and written about the wrong thing. The teacher had made him start again and playtime passed him by while he was rewriting the new version. He assured me that

he had not been naughty, talking, messing about or gazing out of the window and repeated his account that he had misunderstood. "I wrote about how Goldilocks was feeling instead of writing a letter to her." He added that the only bad thing was that he couldn't play with his best friend at playtime. His teacher was young, just out of college and had no children. I wondered at the levels of empathy set against the professional demands made to ensure all children 'keep up'. I wondered if she would think about how keeping a 5-year-old in, when they are trying their best, affects their self-confidence and self-image as a learner. The next day, my son said, in passing, that he was a slow worker and I asked who had said that to him? "Nobody," he said. He then added, "Well, I got kept in the other day."

### **The Narrative Threads**

What follows is a summary of the threads emergent in my stories of school.

#### **Thread 1: Use (And Abuse) Of Power And Authority**

My stories reveal three pivotal occasions when I felt that I was unfairly treated by people in positions of power and authority. My science teacher, who humiliated me in front of my friends during the exam revision lesson, and then compounded the (mis)treatment of me by having me spend the rest of the school year sitting at the side of the class, working on my own without ever having talked to me about the changes or having asked me if anything was wrong. My head teacher used her position to act on my father's behalf and probe into affairs which I felt were my personal, private matters. I had no relationship with her and she expected to counsel me based solely on her position of authority. Finally, after qualifying as a professional teacher (and so would be respected by most), I felt that I was unfairly made to feel that I had let children, parents and school down over SAT results. Each occasion affected me deeply and resonated with me for a long time afterwards. I failed to really understand why each person was choosing to treat me in such a way.

The science teacher dented my confidence. As educators it is important that we understand how our personal behaviour can create negative learning environments or situations (Corbett, 2001). Parsons (1981) argues that the interactions between students and their teachers are powerful and there lies 'the opportunity to build a student's self-esteem, or the opportunity to tear it down' (Parsons, 1981, p.24). He goes on to point out the benefits of attending a student's self-esteem can include a good mental health and a rich emotional life.

Ironically, teaching is generally thought of as a caring profession (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996 in O'Connor, 2008) and Kearney (1987) reports that students prefer to be treated with

kindness and respect and resent the coercive attempts by others to control their behaviour. I remember thinking at the time that I wouldn't treat someone else like this. In this sense, my experience was helping me shape my own morality. Falkenberg (2009) states that, 'Teaching is also inherently moral because of the effect it may have upon the student's morality.' (Falkenberg, 2009, p. 9). I learned from these experiences that people with power and authority can be harmful in a wide range of ways.

### **Thread 2: My Gradual Political Awareness Of Education**

The growing awareness that education might not be inherently good for students developed as I assimilated a number of jigsaw pieces over many years. This realisation would damage the sacred story that school is safe, inherently good and beneficial for our future; socially, emotionally and economically. My stories illustrate key jigsaw pieces which had significant impact upon me at the time. Beliefs are formed through personal experiences (Ertmer, 2005). Many teacher beliefs are formed through, what is referred to as, an apprenticeship of observation in childhood (Anderson and Piazza, 1996 in Stuart and Thurlow, 2000), suggesting that my childhood experiences of school shape my beliefs that I bring to my professional teaching.

I felt that, as a child, secondary teachers didn't care about their students; they were concerned about how much we could remember. As a qualified teacher, I felt sure that the curriculum was not giving the students what I felt they needed in the socially deprived school, but the same curriculum was well-matched to the affluent school where academic attainment was expected. I develop the view that government was wrong to emphasise exam success assuming that every child can be motivated to achieve academic success in a very narrow, prescribed set of subjects.

I developed the view that the education system was failing many students and I felt sad to be a part of it. I resented my role and struggled morally to be complicit in a system that I felt was doing harm not good to children. My decision to leave mainstream teaching reflected my beliefs and attitudes (Kuzborska, 2011). I felt that I would rather leave the profession than change my beliefs (Ertmer, 2005). It further reflected the way my professional role and my personal self are inextricably linked. I felt my teaching role was defining me as a person I didn't want to be (Barber, 2002 and Nias, 1989, in O'Connor, 2006).

As a father, I became increasingly sensitised to how easily small children listen to and believe their teacher's comments and teachers may damage children with what they consider to be throw away remarks but to the child they can have a huge impact (Parsons, 1981). These revelations left me reflecting about my job and my career and I felt that I would need to leave teaching permanently as I could find no congruence with my philosophical ideals and educational policy.

### **Thread 3: My Encounters With Special Needs**

My encounters with special needs were very different. The first, as a small boy not having seen disability before, I reacted as may be expected; I became frightened and fled. My reaction, sadly illustrated the historic hidden nature of disability, their marginalisation (Naraian, 2010) and my personal lack of exposure to disabled people.

Perhaps more disappointingly, later as a teacher in training, I had a disabled boy in my class and I felt that I failed to include him into the heart of the class. I tried to recall any preparation for teaching special needs students on my own PGCE course and could think of none.

I was left with the idea that I had not been a good professional and considered this a moment of personal and professional failure. I had little knowledge or experience to draw from and my course left me ill-prepared to deal with issues of inclusion (Jones and Bishop, 2002; Rouse, 2008; Jones and West, 2009). I felt a considerable emotional reaction to my professional failure due to my personal investment into my work (Nias, 1986 in O'Connor, 2008) and the fact that emotions play a significant and integral part of the teacher's role (O'Connor, 2008).

#### **Thread 4: My Personal Development And Teacher Identity**

My stories of school illustrated the accumulation of significant fragments of my personal development as experiences which became my beliefs and attitudes (Ertmer, 2005) about aspects of teaching, education and relationships. I found that my beliefs were continually forming, being shaped and influenced by my lived experiences (Ertmer, 2005) and I found that I was defining myself through my professional identity (O'Connor, 2008).

As my values, attitudes and identity emerged, (as a result of reconstructing my view of myself in relation to my workplace, colleagues, students and school culture (Olsen, 2008)), I became a teacher who needed to deliver a curriculum that I believed in as the best for the students' all-round development. I needed to feel valued, not be used as a scapegoat by my superiors. I recognised that I am sensitive and have a strong connection to the emotional dimension of relationships, and that in order to teach, I needed to have a strong personal connection based on respect and trust with my students.

Finally, I recognised in myself that I make a stronger connection with socially deprived students or special educational needs students than with privileged students from wealthy backgrounds.



### Summary

In re-telling my stories from school and in reflecting upon their significance, it can be seen that many of my attitudes and beliefs were formed either early in my childhood, as a school boy (Anderson and Piazza, 1996, in Stuart and Thurlow, 2000) or as later experiences (Ertmer, 2005). Interestingly, the beliefs I hold, have led me to walk away from the profession I loved (mainstream primary), illustrating, that once formed, their deeply embedded nature and their reluctance to be changed (Ertmer, 2005; Stuart and Thurlow, 2000).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) indicate how important it is for the narrative inquirer to understand their own narrative history before embarking on a narrative inquiry research journey. It is with this insight into their own 'narrative beginnings' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.70) that the narrative inquirer is able to understand who they are in the field. Clandinin and Connelly argue that the inquirer, having this understanding of their own narrative past, enables them to make possible connections with their own narrative histories and their lived experiences within the three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.70).

Clandinin and Connelly's methodology pays significant attention to the researcher understanding their own influence on the research. In an example, Joann Phillion is used to illustrate how personal history, (an inquirer's narrative beginnings) shapes the values and attitudes that the inquirer brings to their observations in the field. In her case, Phillion's background centred upon matters concerning equity and equality (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.69), and these ideas may affect or influence her observations, interpretations and possibly feed any biases. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommend the inquiry to begin with narrative beginnings as they see each narrative inquiry as beginning a new story (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). During the course of this research journey, having an awareness of my own

narrative beginnings and a reflective insight into who I am has facilitated opportunities to make the connections suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). *'The narrative threads coalesce out of a past and emerge in the three dimensional inquiry space'* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.70) and, for this inquiry, lead to a deeper insight and more meaningful understandings of my experiences in the field, my narratives histories and their relationship and connectedness. The next section will formally introduce the research and contextualise its aims and objectives.

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis begins by offering a background to the study in the form of a brief description of the changing educational landscape before outlining the research purpose, objectives and questions. The nature of the study is then detailed and the research design explained. Finally, the organisation of the thesis is detailed by chapter.

## **1.2 Background To The Study**

### **1.2.1 The Broader Educational Landscape**

Over recent decades, mainstream and special education has been affected by a combination of changing social attitudes to curriculum content, accountability, raising standards and debate about where we educate students with special education needs (SEN). This in turn, has led to modifications of funding structures, increased parental choice, the introduction of 'market place' to education, new curricula, local, national and international league tables (e.g. OECD, PISA), OFSTED and alternative placement and care arrangements for groups of students. In addition to this, recent government policies and international treaties have pushed for ever-greater equality and opportunity for disabled and SEN students of all kinds. These social and political changes are reflected in the succession of Acts over the last 50 years beginning notably with The Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act 1970 (introduced by North West MP, Alf Morris) which was the first in the world to recognise and give rights to people with disabilities (History of legislation, 2016). Other key Acts and legislation followed at national and international level. The Salamanca Statement (1994) was highly significant, leading to ninety-two governments adopting the principle of the right to an education for all, regardless of difference and the principle of inclusion in education (Unesco, 1994).

This steady change of approach has reflected the changing political priorities and social attitudes towards education and disability within education (Unesco, 1994). For children with disabilities and special educational needs, recent history has seen many forward steps in both social attitudes and legislative support for equal opportunities and inclusive education through legislation; Education Act, 1981, Disability Discrimination Act, 1995 (updated 2005), SENDA, 2001, Equality Act, 2010.

The adoption of the principle of inclusion for SEN students gathered pace following Warnock's report in 1978. She introduced a system of statementing which was, in theory, to enable the student access to the specific support that they needed within the mainstream classroom setting, based upon the notion that the students' abilities would develop at their own rate at different points in their lives (The Warnock Report, 1978).

During the subsequent decades, there were many Acts, reforms and policies providing legislative frameworks and guidance for the inclusive education of children with special needs (Education Act, 1993, Education Reform, 1994, Green Paper, 1997, SEN and Disability Act, 2001, Code of Practice Identification and the Assessment of children with Special Educational Needs, 2001, Removing Barriers to Achievement, 2004). The UNESCO Salamanca World Statement on Special Needs Education, in 1994, called on governments to adopt the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise (Unesco, 1994).

The commitment to inclusive education, which is conceptualised as a 'human right' in the UNESCO Treaty Against Discrimination in Education (1960) and is later reaffirmed in the Salamanca Statement (1994), remains high priority on the political agenda. However, the education system in England has not achieved a fully inclusive educational system, retaining a

number of special schools despite many closures during the 1990s. Data reveals that there are currently (in 2010) around 1,656,000 pupils in England identified as having SEN. This is equal to 20.5% of children in our schools (Hartley, 2010). The vast majority of SEN students are educated in mainstream settings. According to DfES (2009) figures there are 29,000 pupils with severe learning disabilities (SLD) and 9,000 pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) across the education system, three quarters of them being educated in special schools (DfES, 2009). In 2009, 89,000 children were educated in special schools (Hartley, 2010).

Debate continues as to the most appropriate educational setting for SEN students. It is argued that the increased and disproportionate time and resources needed by SEN students has a negative impact on the education of their mainstream peers (Hartley, 2010). Baroness Warnock herself has stated in 2005, that in her opinion, inclusion is not working (Warnock and SEN, 2007). However, others suggest that evidence for this is negligible and inclusion actually offers an appropriate setting to facilitate full social acceptance and equal opportunity (Hartley, 2010). However, an inclusive mainstream setting for SEN students and more complex learning difficulties has presented arguments that teachers are not suitably trained to meet the needs of these more challenging students (Bishop and Jones, 2002; Jones and West, 2009) and that teachers' attitudes to inclusion were strongly influenced by the nature of the disabling condition and the availability of physical and human support (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Mainstream schools increased their intake of SEN students during the 1990s and during the same period many special schools were closed as education moved toward an inclusive system. Teacher attitudes to inclusion shows that PMLD are often regarded as being too demanding for mainstream inclusion in terms of the perceived extra workload and required specialist skills (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). This is reflected in the fact that special schools continue to exist and teach students with complex educational and medical needs.

Over recent decades the responsibility for the disabled and PMLD moved from the medical department to the Department for Education; clearly implying a principle of inclusion and education for all. This, as part of a raft of political and social change, attempted to address the historic marginalisation of disabled students (Naraian, 2010). In keeping with this change, the approach to educating PMLD moved from the historic medical model (based around the personal ‘faults’ of the child) to a social model (Jones, 2005). This model proposed that the relationship between the experience of disability and the reduced function is contingent on social and environmental factors (Reindal, 2008). This is supported by Oliver (1996b) who sees the model as dealing with the social barriers of disability rather than the individual ‘having to deal with it’.

The residential homes which housed PMLD children were closed and now a range of inclusive facilities, day care and special schools (including some mainstream schools) offer their provision in what has been very significant changes to attitudes to and treatment of PMLD. However, these changes remain largely unpublicised to the general population.

### **1.22 The Teaching Landscape Within Special Education**

There has been a change in the nature of special school admissions and this is recognised and documented by the government (DfE, 2011) and OFSTED (2010). The group termed CLDD (Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities) present a further challenge for special educators’ classrooms as demand for more personalised learning takes hold. The Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Research Project was commissioned by the DfE, in 2012, to support the development of evidence-based teaching and learning strategies for this group of learners. Significantly for special educators, their findings include that the learning profile of this kind of learner has not been experienced before, asserting that new pedagogy must be developed (DfE, 2012). This carries obvious training implications. Interestingly, special school

settings, as the acknowledged alternative to mainstream education, already have concerns relating to the appropriate levels of training of their staff (Salt, 2010).

The Salt Review was commissioned in 2009, due to government's acknowledgement of an aging SLD (Severe Learning Difficulty)/PMLD (Profound and Multiple Learning Disability) teacher population and an increasingly complex profile of SEN students. The subsequent review raised key issues within SEN teaching regarding recruitment, training and professional development. Namely, that teachers of SLD/PMLD students were insufficiently trained, recruitment and retention was low, ITT (Initial Teacher Training) provision inadequate and an expected recruitment crisis imminent.

Furthermore, it was reported that in the UK, SEN students did not necessarily receive a quality education and in addition to this there was evidence of underachievement in SEN students (Hartley, 2010). Hartley's review echoed the findings of Salt, and proposed that, *"One key reason for the underachievement of these children, and the inadequate functioning of the SEN system as a whole, is the lack of core or basic understanding of SEN amongst the teaching workforce. A second, and related reason, is the lack of teaching expertise and specialism in SEN."* (Hartley, 2010, p.8). Hartley further commented that, *"What is clear is that, for whatever reasons, in the last 20 years insufficient attention has been paid to the training needs of special schools."* (Hartley, 2010, p.8)

In response, the government has taken measures to increase the training provision for pre-service teachers but research indicates that special education teacher attrition is a persistent problem in the UK and further afield (Jones and West, 2009; AAEE, 2003). Research indicates that the nature of the teaching role has also evolved and developed over time creating two different roles where special school teachers' specialism identifies them apart from their

mainstream counterparts (Jones, 2004). Her research finds that special school teachers have a strong social identity and affiliation with other special educationalists, Jones (2004) identified some special education teachers identifying strongly to 'a cause', others identified with the moral worthiness of 'wanting to make a difference' (Jones, 2004, p.162). Issues regarding the separation of special education from mainstream indicate that special school teachers are somehow 'marginalized or set apart' (Haplin and Lewis, 1996, p.101). Further to this, Jones (2004) reports that teachers in her research formed a close, supportive group against the difficulties they faced in a 'culture that does not appear to value them or their students' (Jones, 2004, p.163). Jenkins (1996) discusses the tensions that can exist between the perceived professional expectations and a teacher's own teacher identity as a special educator. He suggests this is part of the interaction between the changes in how we understand identity and a changing society. For Wenger (1998), identity is developed and sustained through constant negotiation of the meanings of experiences through their social communication (Wenger, 1998, in Jones, 2004). This identifies identity as a changing, fluid concept which responds to social experience, rather than a fixed entity.

This research also considers contextual factors for teachers in the form of autonomy, identity, personal morals and the many pressures placed upon teachers. The pressures may vary from setting to setting and take a wide range of forms. For example, they may be from within a teaching team, department or individual member of staff, or there may be pressure to work collaboratively with other schools rather than in isolation. Other generic pressures introduced by government policies include greater paperwork demands and ever-higher standards in teaching quality, OFSTED thresholds rising, performance related pay and the 'threat' of an imposed change of status to academy should an inspection not meet the required standard of Good or Outstanding. Bishop and Jones (2002) note that in the field of education there is a clear dichotomy of aims where there is a need to "*...see the raising of standards, as reflected in*



*test scores, as paramount, while at the same time being urged to celebrate and accept diversity in the classroom.”* (Bishop and Jones, 2002, p.59) Where teaching is inherently stressful, literature suggests that where greater autonomy is enjoyed by individual teachers, on-the-job stress decreases (Pearson and Moomaw, 2005). However, a lack of appropriate supervision has been cited as a key factor in instances of mistreatment in residential educational contexts (Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale, 1999).

Schools are highly complex organisational structures. Historically, the power in schools has been organised around the traditional hierarchical structure focussing the power with the headteacher. However, research indicates that this structure has struggled to meet the educational demands of the twenty first century, and a movement toward power-sharing which empowers the teacher has seen recent favour (Sennett, 1998). Government policies have reflected a push towards increased school collaboration and a desire to convert schools into academies, governed as groups of schools or chains rather than under more traditional local authority control.

In addition, government has placed significant emphasis in recent years on issues relating to safeguarding children. After the Soham Murders of August, 2002, and the subsequent Richard Inquiry, the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) was established and Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks were made compulsory for anyone working with children or vulnerable adults. School staff safeguarding training has become ever more frequent and intense. Safeguarding has been inspected by OFSTED since 2005 and is now a principle focus of all OFSTED inspections; any school failing to meet any of the DfE requirements for safeguarding children will automatically be judged an inadequate school and thus fail the inspection.

This brief overview of the wider educational landscape and the special teacher landscape gives a glimpse of only some of the pertinent issues upon which this research lies. This autobiographical study rests upon this complex backdrop of educational, political and social

change towards special needs and disability and explores the complex interplay between teachers' identity, personal morality, professional autonomy, and power within educational organisations. This research draws upon my personal experiences, as an experienced teacher, having recently made the transition from mainstream education to special education.

### **1.3 Statement Of Research Purposes**

The research has two closely related purposes.

- Firstly, the research aims to explore the lived experiences of the special school teaching role and thus facilitate a deeper understanding of the role of a special school teacher where little research exists.
- Secondly, the research intends to examine and give meaning to the lived experiences of the special school teacher in the light of personal morality, teacher identity and professional autonomy.

### **1.4 The Nature Of The Thesis, Research Design And Identification Of Conceptual Gaps**

Upon reading Phillion (2002a, 2000b, 2000c), I realised that my research observations, and my own biases as a mainstream teacher observing special school practice, presented a situation very similar to Phillion's experience. My further reading of Clandinin and Connelly's work around narrative inquiry assured me that for me to really understand the meanings behind my observations, or indeed my personal experiences, I must consider the three dimensional inquiry space and think narratively during my research (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

#### **1.41 Nature Of Thesis**

Using Clandinin and Connelly's model of narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), based upon Dewey's (1938) assertions that education and experience are inextricably linked

through interaction and continuity as a 'social process' (Dewey, 1938, p.58), this research takes the form of an autobiographical narrative inquiry. The research is set within an interpretivist paradigm which promotes social reality as a construct relative to the culture and values shared by the group within that culture. This philosophical paradigm is especially suited to the research area (and my philosophical positioning) due to the nature of school settings, their structure, rules and values being man-made and contextual, making each reality a relativity and a social construction as advocated by Berger and Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger and Luckmann, 1966)

#### **1.42 The Research Design**

My research design is inspired by Clandinin and Connelly's model of Narrative Inquiry (1995).

Narrative inquiry, according to Clandinin and Connelly, is focussed upon understanding experience (2000) and lays emphasis to, *"...trying to think of the continuity and wholeness of an individual's life experience."* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.17)

The aim of my research is to develop deeper understanding of experience. Clandinin and Connelly see experience as happening narratively, arguing that educational experience should be studied narratively (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly's model of narrative inquiry features an emphasis upon experience as a function of its temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). These concepts overlay with Dewey's continuity, interaction and situation (Dewey, 1938), forming a conceptual framework for narrative inquiry into lived experiences.

The inquiry model recognises three metaphoric dimensions of inquiry space as inward, outward and forward and backward, locating them in a place. These are regarded as, *"...avenues to be pursued in a narrative inquiry."* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000 p.54) and

explore the personal dimension of feelings, hopes and dispositions, the social dimension of existential conditions, the temporal dimension of past and future as well as paying attention to location (Schaefer and Clandinin, 2011).

A final dimension to narrative inquiry in this research is 'narrative thinking'. Phillion (2002a) considered narrative thinking to be an essential part of her research and describes it as, *"seeing experience as fluid rather than fixed, as contextualized in time, place and sociality."* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, in Phillion, 2002, p.537). Phillion describes how thinking narratively required her to reconsider her relationship with theory during her research. She found that theory pre-structured and limited her understandings of her research experiences in the classroom and thinking narratively allowed her freedom from these constraints (Phillion, 2002a). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe thinking narratively as an awareness of how our personal histories, attitudes and values can cross the boundaries of our research causing tensions. Phillion experienced these tensions in the form of preconceived ideas partly from the 'abstract and decontextualized' (Phillion, 2002c, p.538) theory. So, thinking narratively, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is principally the 'doing' of narrative inquiry, though they acknowledge thinking narratively can present numerous tensions where it *"comes into the territory of other ways of thinking"* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.46) for example between formalistic and reductionist thinking (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.46).

The narrative inquiry methodology generates field texts as observations, exhaustive reflective journal entries and autobiographical narratives as the primary source of data. These experiences are storied and re-storied into research texts (in conjunction with participants) and possible meaning is derived through the re-storying process with deep reflection and narrative thinking.

### **1.43 Conceptual Gaps**

There is little research that focuses upon the lived experiences of the special school teacher and even less that encompasses the transitional journey from a mainstream teaching role to a special education teaching role and acknowledges the issues related to training, the socialisation process and potential impact upon identity and beliefs. The research study is embedded in constructs which overlap and intertwine. The study offers insight in areas where little research currently exists. This section will briefly address each construct and point out how this research will address conceptual gaps.

The literature relating to the construct 'power' features in areas of bullying (Crozier, 1997; Keenan, 2013), interpersonal-relationships and businesses, predominantly reflecting its use in corporate contexts (Sennett, 1998). Literature explicitly on teacher power concentrates on the different styles (Kearney, 1987) and their effectiveness. There is little research relating to special school settings, which explores how the locus of power fuses with other key factors such as morality, identity and autonomy and explores any subsequent impact upon the dynamics of special school teams, staff's perceived roles within the teams and the potential effects upon the student's experiences. This study views power as a variable which potentially can have positive and negative outcomes; corrupt moral judgements, motivate groups or individuals and impact upon perceived roles and identity. This research also enquires into how the power within relationships interacts with organisational structures and potentially impacts upon the role of the special school teacher.

The study carries increased relevance and significance due to the originality of the study. The autobiographical narrative inquiry methodology as a research tool into the role of a special school teacher is rare, and of further relevance and significance is that it links to transition

from a mainstream background rather than the typical ITT context. This research is highly original and significant in its contributions to academic discourse for these reasons.

Morality within teaching is embedded within the professional codes of conduct and receives little explicit coverage in the teaching literature. Special school teaching is defined as a moral profession (Falkenberg, 2009) and related literature defines caring in the teaching profession (O'Connor, 2008; Noddings, 2012). Other literature examining morality discuss abuse of the vulnerable, though this is mostly presented through studies of historical cases in residential style institutions (Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale, 1999; Keenan, 2013). Related literature links morality through issues such as school bullying (Purdy and McGukin, 2015; Capewell, Ralph and Bonnett, 2015).

Further literature charts and explores the abuses of vulnerable groups in society including disabled children (Westcott, 1991; Westcott and Cross, 1996; Westcott and Jones, 1999; Sobsey, 1994; Sobsey, 2002; Fitzsimons, 2009; Quarmby, 2011; Williams, 1995).

This study explores morality in a special school culture, as a mediating factor and as a function of the role of the special school teacher and support staff. The research examines its potential influence upon the professional roles in conjunction with other prevalent factors such as autonomy, power and teacher identity.

Training for special needs teachers is discussed extensively in the teaching literature (Jones and West, 2009; Bishop and Jones, 2002; Jones, 2010; Jones, 2004; Jones, 2013; Corbett, 2001; Rouse, 2008). The arguments following from the Salt Review (2010) which highlighted that issues such as special education teacher training, attrition, retention (Jones and West, 2009; Bishop and Jones, 2002; Salt, 2010; De Mik, 2008; Nance and Calabrese, 2009; Bozonelos, 2008), teacher shortage and an aging population of special teachers were becoming serious issues for special education (Salt, 2010). Literature reflects the impact of pre-service training

becoming in-service and the very few courses available now to teachers, indicating the concerns that both the retention and the quality of special school teachers have been negatively affected. The literature on training focuses predominantly upon initial teacher training and the issues around adequately preparing teachers for teaching special needs students in either PMLD or SEN in mainstream contexts. Unlike this study, current teacher training literature does not explore the training issues of mainstream teachers that make the transition to special education settings and potentially find themselves professionally de-skilled for their new professional role. The study of these experiences and their implications will contribute to the literature.

Teaching beliefs and teacher identity literature is plentiful (Jones, 2004, 2005; Maulucci, 2013; O'Connor, 2008; Naraian, 2010; Davis and Andrzejewski, 2009). Much relates to the emergence of identity and beliefs and upon changing beliefs with a view to professional development; changing teaching practice in the classroom. The literature defines teacher beliefs are resistant to change and this carries implications for future teacher development. Teacher identity evolves over time as a function of the social interactions. There is little, if any, research exploring the teaching beliefs and identity of a mainstream teacher making the transition and socialisation process into a special school teaching role and culture. Identity literature does not address how identity may be affected by the cross-over from a mainstream school to a special school. Little research, if any, explores the pressures upon teacher identity through factors such as relationships with peers and students, professional expectations and morality.

Literature of autonomy in education may cover a range of types of autonomy at different levels in the organisation. This study views autonomy as a member of staff having freedom to choose as an individual moral agent (Moomaw, 2005). Literature on teacher autonomy is

predominantly based in motivation studies and is linked with factors such as teacher stress, job satisfaction, empowerment and teacher attrition (Pearson and Moomaw, 2005). Autonomy can be viewed as empowering but can be viewed as superiors neglecting their responsibilities (Frazer and Sorenson, 1992, in Moomaw, 2005). Other research indicates that autonomy can also be defined through personal qualities and characteristics and behaviours (Moomaw, 2005). There is little, if any, research which examines the impact of autonomy as a factor within the lived roles within a special school culture. Unlike other research, this study begins to explore if and how autonomy may be a contributing factor in the complex interactions of teachers, their morality, their identity and professionalisms as they live out their roles in school. This research study will make a significant contribution to the understanding of these constructs individually, but also how these factors combine to impact upon the role of the special school teacher.

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

Using Clandinin and Connelly's narrative inquiry methodology, incorporating their constructs of thinking narratively and the three dimensional inquiry space, (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) this research has the following objectives;

- To explore my own experiences in my professional capacity as a special school teacher
- To explore my role in relation to factors of teacher identity, personal morality, professional autonomy and the locus of power within relationships and within the organisation.
- To use narrative inquiry methodology and analysis techniques to explore connections and influences between my own stories of school, experiences past, present and expected in the future.



- To examine how my teaching practice and identity is influenced and shaped by the themes of autonomy, power and personal morality.
- To explore how my career is influenced by my own pursuit of my own story to live by.

### **1.6 Research Questions**

1. What meanings can be drawn from storied personal experiences as a special school teacher?
2. To what extent do factors such as autonomy, teacher identity, morality and power interact with and influence the role of the special school teacher?
3. To what extent is professional practice influenced and shaped by past and present storied experiences?
4. How do factors such as teacher identity and personal morality shape my stories to live by?
5. How do sacred stories of school, familial stories to live by and personal histories influence emergent teacher identity and professional practice?

#### **1.61 (Fig.1) Diagrammatic Representation Of The Study Linking Purposes And Research Questions**

| <b>Research purpose</b>   | <b>Research question</b>  |
|---|---|
| 1. To explore the lived experiences of special school teaching and thus facilitate a deeper understanding of the role of a special school teacher | 1. What meanings can be drawn from storied personal experiences as a special school teacher?  |
| 2. To examine and give meaning to the lived experiences of the special school teacher as the professional role is lived out.                      | 2. To what extent do factors such as autonomy, teacher identity, morality and power interact with and influence the role of the special school teacher? |
|   | 3. To what extent is professional practice influenced and shaped by past and present storied experiences?   |
|   | 4. How do factors such as teacher identity and personal morality shape my stories to live by?   |
|   | 5. How do sacred stories of school, familial stories to live by and personal histories influence emergent teacher identity and professional practice?   |

**1.62 (Fig.2) Diagrammatic Representation Of The Study Linking Purposes, Research Questions, Conceptual Content, And Data Collection**

| Research purpose  | Research question  | Conceptual content                                   | Data collection   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Aims to explore the lived experiences of special school teaching and thus facilitate a deeper understanding of the role of a special school teacher</p> <p>To examine and give meaning to the lived experiences of the special school teacher as the professional role is lived out.</p> | What meanings can be drawn from storied personal experiences as a special school teacher?  | Influence of teacher autonomy                        | observations and lived experiences in the form of:        |
|   | To what extent do factors such as autonomy, teacher identity, morality and power interact with and influence the role of the special school teacher? | Development of teacher identity in special education | Personal journal  |
|   | To what extent is professional practice influenced and shaped by past and present storied experiences?   | Power within complex organisations                   | Reflective accounts                                       |
|   | How do factors such as teacher identity and personal morality shape my stories to live by?   | Personal and Teacher morality as guiding principles  | Autobiographical field texts                              |
|   | How do sacred stories of school, familial stories to live by and personal histories influence emergent teacher identity and professional practice?   | Stories to live by                                   | Discussions with colleagues                               |
|   |  | Familial stories                                     | Re-written autobiographical field texts as research texts |
|   |  | Sacred stories and grand narratives                  |   |

**1.7 Contribution Of The Thesis**

This study rests within and draws upon a conceptual framework which reaches beyond education and SEN. The multidisciplinary element of the research, by nature of the overlapping constructs, broadens the impact and contribution of the findings. The study, therefore, will make several substantial and original contributions to knowledge.

There is very little research which explores and gives meanings to special school teachers' lived professional experiences. Much of the research in special and SEN education areas tends to

explore teacher training, efficacy, motivation and low ability (LA) students in mainstream settings.

In adopting autobiographical narrative enquiry methodology, the study contributes to research concerned with what it means to be a special school teacher and how this role is lived and experienced. By introducing the idea of teacher identity, the research concerns itself with, and contributes to, research issues relating to emergent identity in established teachers experiencing a change of role (rather than initial teacher training and first year teachers). Special education identity studies of this kind are scarce.

By incorporating the constructs teacher autonomy, the study will contribute to the studies within education concerned with how this construct affects a teacher's decision-making, their delivery of curriculum, morality and general performance within the organisation. Significantly to this study, the introduction of the notion of relative morality, allows the study to ask meaningful questions of teacher professionalism and personal values, and enables the study to contribute to research beyond educational including social and philosophical studies. By introducing the concepts of power within organisations, the study contributes to studies concerned with understanding how the locus and orientation alters and shifts within complex organisations. The study also explores power within relationships and contributes significantly to the understanding of how power can impact on professional and interpersonal relationships in professional settings.

The findings of the current study may offer a significant insight to anybody interested in joining the teaching profession but especially special school teaching. Furthermore, this study contributes significantly to the current debate regarding initial teacher training and special school recruitment and retention. The research findings will also contribute significantly to

education professionals with a professional interest in SEN/SLD/PMLD, including teachers wishing to change direction to a special school setting after mainstream career.

The study will be relevant to existing special school teachers and student teachers wishing to gain a deeper insight and understanding into the lived experiences within their chosen profession. Parents, governors and the wider community of investors in special education would benefit from insights into the role and experiences of special school teachers. The study will also be of interest to any person interested in the experiences of the most vulnerable in our society in the hands of 'caring' professionals in an educational setting.

### **1.8 Context Of The Thesis**

This thesis is concerned with a question which emerged within my professional teaching career six years ago. What is it that makes a special school teacher? The essence of this simple question remains at the very core of the thesis. The original question emerged as an indirect consequence of an unplanned change of employment. After many years as a mainstream primary school teacher I found myself, quite by unplanned circumstances, employed as a special school teacher in their secondary department teaching a predominantly primary curriculum.

My primary background and caring nature was suited to the caring ethos and emphasis upon relationships of my new employment. I became aware of how little I knew about special needs children and felt quite useless, relying heavily upon existing staff expertise. I became aware of generous autonomy that the teachers were afforded and little accountability for teacher decisions regarding curriculum. On seeing the differences between special and mainstream practice I realised I saw myself as a mainstream teacher but became aware that others colleagues now perceived me as a special educator. Feeling vulnerable and deskilled, I felt

strangely resistant to being thought of as a special school teacher as I held onto the practices and skills that served me so successfully in a mainstream context. I wondered at the factors which created the mainstream teacher self-image and what influences these ideas.

My initial experiences at special school left me feeling deskilled, untrained, my personal morality, my teacher identity and my teaching beliefs (regarding pedagogy) didn't match my new colleagues. I observed practices that, to me, appeared sometimes professionally outstanding, and yet at other times, appeared lazy and unprofessional. However, I saw relaxed teaching, lots of fun with teaching teams and children, little heed to bells and timekeeping. I saw children waiting for staff to prepare lessons and yet it all seemed very relaxed and with no exam pressure.

I wondered further about teacher autonomy and personal morality as factors which may be influencing differing levels of professionalism within special school settings, constantly aware that I was an untrained eye watching and judging others. As I turned my reflections upon myself, I wondered how my own perceptions fit with the grand narrative of special school, the sacred story of benevolent nurturing in an exam-free, pressure-free learning environment. I considered my past professional experiences and became ever more interested in trying to make some sense of it all.

As a direct consequence, the intention to look deeper into the role of the special teacher became an easy decision as I saw myself adjusting to the new role. I reflected upon my basic assumptions of what teaching is, what teaching looks like and what teachers do, and began to question what I regarded as solid definitions. At the same time, I thought about how I saw myself, other professionals saw me and how the new classes saw me compared to my previous

mainstream students. Phillion's (2002a, 2000b, 2000c) study inspired a certainty in my research direction.

### **1.9 Organisation Of The Thesis**

I organise this thesis into seven chapters. The Prologue introduces the researcher's background and history of school in the form of short narratives, and outlines the key threads within them. Chapter One formally introduces the research by outlining the background to this research then explains the research purpose, objectives and questions. In Chapter Two there is a thorough review of the relevant literature and detailed explanation of the key theoretical frameworks which underpin the research. Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach used by the researcher and details the methods of analysis. The choice of autobiographical narrative inquiry is explained and justified. Chapter Four presents my research texts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) as re-storied experiences selected because of their benevolent themes. The stories are presented under the heading Stories Of Benevolence which features four accounts to which I add commentary and discussion. In Chapter Five, I present Stories Of Maleficence/Oppression, which comprises five research texts chosen for their darker themes; narrative accounts which portray themes of questionable morality and professional practice. Each narrative is fully discussed with commentary. In Chapter Six, I discuss the threads which permeate the presented narratives and give meaning to the experiences in order to deepen our understanding of the experiences in the light of the factors of autonomy, identity and morality. In the light of the meanings offered, Chapter Six draws tentative conclusions and proposes implications and suggestions for future research in this area.

## **Chapter 2: Literature**

### **2.1 Chapter Overview**

The nature of this study encompasses a range of constructs and disciplines; they include the nature and role of the special school teacher, teacher identity, vulnerability, caring, the nature of teacher relationships, teacher autonomy and perceived power and authority. Organisational culture and organisation also relate to this study. In the context of this thesis, it is not possible to provide an exhaustive review of the literature in all of the areas related to the study.

This chapter will clarify the terminology used in special education, then provide an insight into how the literature related to the narrative inquiry methodology and illustrate how the cyclic nature of the literature searches was led by the researcher's experiences in the field. Following this, the chapter will review the literature in the key areas relating to this thesis. Firstly, the nature of the role of special school teacher is explored, followed by a review of teacher beliefs and teacher identity. The chapter goes on to briefly define the special school curriculum before presenting a brief review of the history of the treatment of special needs students. This chapter will then review the principle of inclusion including teachers' attitudes to inclusion. Finally, this chapter will examine the literature relating to the victimisation and abuse of the vulnerable in society.

### **2.2 Terminology Used In Special Education And This Study**

There follows a list of acronyms used in this research thesis relating to special education:

PMLD    Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties

SEN      Special Educational Needs

SLD      Severe Learning Disabilities

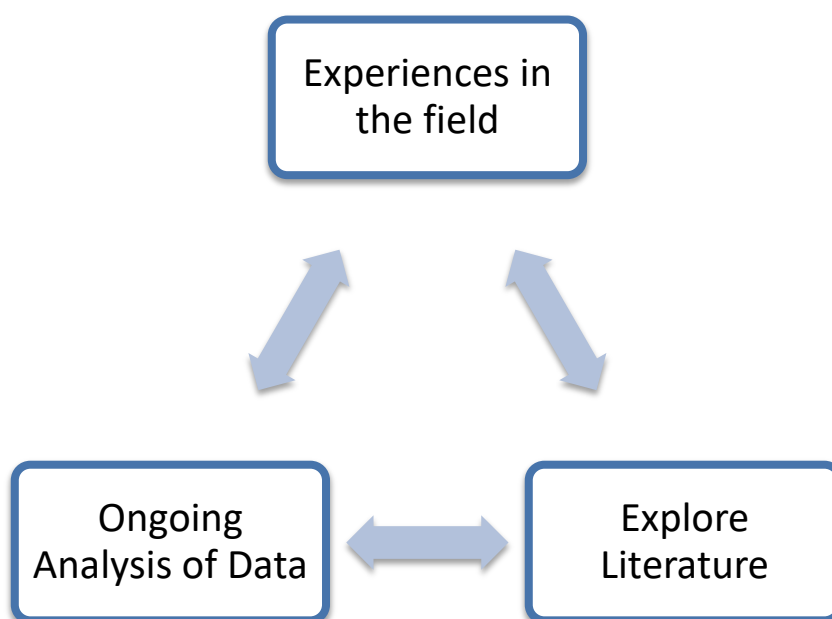
|       |  |
|-------|--|
| ASD   | Autistic Spectrum Disorder                       |
| MLD   | Moderate Learning Difficulties                   |
| CLDD  | Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities   |
| ADHD  | Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder     |
| ASD   | Autistic Spectrum Disorder                       |
| CPD   | Continuing Professional Development              |
| NQT   | Newly Qualified Teacher                          |
| TA    | Teaching Assistant                               |
| ITT   | Initial Teacher Training                         |
| HA    | High Ability                                     |
| AA    | Average Ability                                  |
| LA    | Low Ability                                      |
| DfE   | Department for Education                         |
| ICT   | Information and Communication Technology         |
| CAMHS | Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services      |
| PE    | Physical Education                               |
| EYFS  | Early Years and Foundation Stage                 |
| QCA   | Qualifications and Curriculum Authority          |
| CRB   | Criminal Record Bureau                           |
| KS2   | Key Stage Two. Years 4-6 (age 7-11) Primary      |
| KS3   | Key Stage Three. Years 7-9 (age 11-14) Secondary |
| FE    | Further Education (age 16-19)                    |
| PPA   | Planning, Preparation and Assessment             |
| UN    | United Nations                                   |



### **2.3 How The Literature Related To The Inquiry**

During this research journey, the narrative inquiry methodology places a significant emphasis on the inductive process to make meaning from experiences in the field (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). As a consequence, the literature review was not leading the inquiry as is the more traditional methodologies. Instead, the inquiry focussed upon lived experiences and relationships between factors which influenced the experience including the place, the characters and their pasts, presents and futures. As a result, the literature was accessed to set the scene for my inquiry based upon my initial expectations. However, as the inquiry commenced, my literature searches were largely as a response to my field experiences. The diagram below, (Fig.3) illustrates how the research, field experiences and literature became inter-related and inter-dependent during the remainder of the research journey. Toward the latter stages of the research journey, as I was writing the research texts, the literature was accessed again in order to situate the findings in contemporary literature and academic debate (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

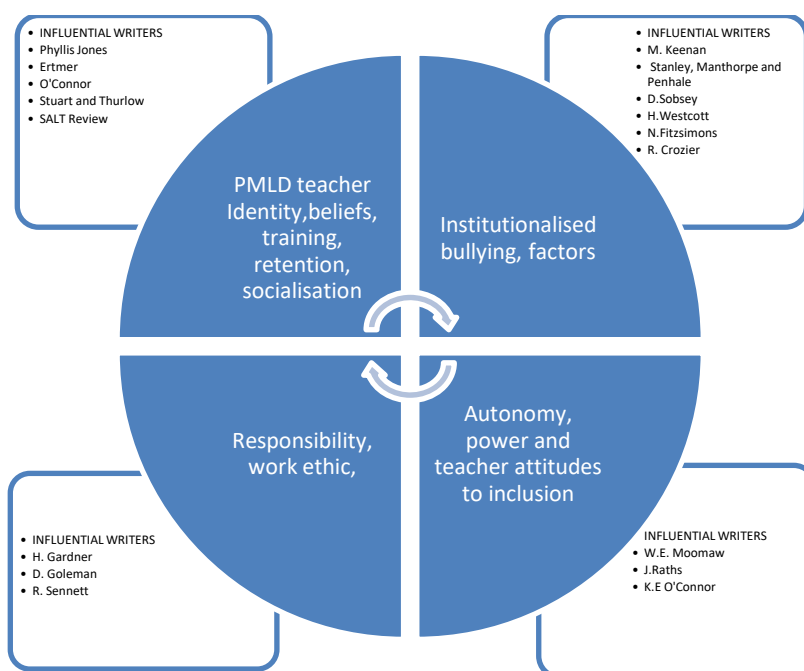
#### **2.31 (Fig.3) Diagrammatic Representation Of The Relationship Between Experiences, Data And Exploring Literature**



It can be seen that the narrative inquiry methodology is not led by literature and for this research; the literature was accessed intermittently throughout the journey as my experiences generated new areas that I considered pertinent and relevant. As my research journey continued, I often needed to revisit areas of literature or expand my reading to support my broader understanding of the educational landscapes relating to the specific areas of relevance.

The diagram below (Fig.4) illustrates the process in more detail; how different areas of academic literature were explored and the cyclic, repetitive nature of this process.

### **2.32 (Fig.4) Diagrammatic Representation Of Access To Literature During Research Journey**



At the onset of the research journey, I read the literature relating to special school teaching and teacher identity relating to the role. The significant influence in this area was the writings of Phyllis Jones.

As the research journey progressed, I found it relevant to access literature relating to abuse of the vulnerable in society in order to begin to contextualise my educational experiences in the broader community of caring professions. Thought provoking texts in this area were initially Keenan (2013), Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale (1999) and Crozier (1997), then later in the cycles, Westcott and Jones (1999), Fitzsimons (2009) and Sobsey (2002).

The research journey led me to explore literature in the areas of autonomy, power in the classrooms and further my exploration of attitudes of teachers to inclusion, before looking at ethics and morality in the work place through the influential writings of Gardner.

## **2.4 Special School Teaching: A Caring Profession**

The Disability Discrimination Act (DHSS, 2001 in Jones, West and Stevens, 2006) and the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001b in Jones, West and Stevens, 2006) state that a mainstream placement should be the first choice for all children regardless of their SEN. However, the Department for Education (DfE) acknowledge that there may be a range of factors that may contribute to a child being unable to attend mainstream school and need a separate provision. The DfE (2004) describe the need for 'separate provision' where a mainstream placement *'...may detract from the learning of the majority of students.'*(DfE, 2004, p.26)

The role of special education is the care and education of a vast proportion of statemented students that are unable to access the curriculum in a mainstream setting. Students that are educated in a special school can vary across a broad range of SEN categories including ADHD, ASD, Down syndrome, SLD, PMLD and more complex students with severe impairments and combinations of medical conditions (CLDD); all will have a statement of SEN. Jones (2005) describes the category of PMLD as students who have, *"...a greater degree of intellectual impairment and more than one significant disability, and require one-to-one adult support for their learning and personal needs."* (Jones, 2005, p.377)

Jones, West and Stevens (2006) describe the changing landscape of special education over recent years. They talk of the change from the challenge of marrying a subject driven National Curriculum with individual learning needs during the nineties, to the onset of a 'quasi commercial' policy context for all education, including special education,' (Jones, West and

Stevens, 2006, p.83; Jones, 2010, p.682). This agenda of raising standards emphasised showing progress through the assessing, measuring and testing the students. The idea of 'value added' allowed progress to be measured from any starting point through rigorous data collection and target setting. The pressure to show value for money has been translated through policy initiatives to include special educational needs (Jones, West and Stevens, 2006).

In order to fulfil the expectation of a 'value for money' agenda, it may be accepted that highly skilled staff and training are needed. However, the training of teachers for this sector has been 'a growing area of concern', (Bishop and Jones, 2002, p.58; Jones and West, 2009, p.69; Jones, 2010 p. 682). Initial teacher training had been, up until 1989, a specialist training route for teachers wishing to teach children with SEN. However, as policies for inclusion changed the teaching landscape, this training became in-service rather than pre-service (Jones, West and Stevens, 2006) and there followed a significant fall in the number of teachers trained to teach SLD/PMLD leaving 'a gap in the system' (Salt, 2010).

The Salt Review (2010) examined the supply and retention of teachers in the special education sector, specifically of students with SLD and PMLD. The review raised a number of issues:

The report discovered a widespread perception that SLD/PMLD students require 'carers' not educators. The idea that PMLD are so disabled they are 'uneducable' was noted by Corbett (in Jones, 2005) as she reflected her early career. She talks of the language that was used in relation to her students as 'vegetables', 'dumping ground', 'baby minding' and 'shitty work'. (Corbett, 1994, p.9, in Jones, 2005, p.376). These attitudes, wherever they exist, can present as a barrier to high quality professionals entering the sector.

The career progression for SLD/PMLD teachers was perceived to be poor. It was thought that the nature of the job was classroom based and any progression would involve leaving the

classroom and consequently, PMLD. The Salt Review suggests that this inherent disincentive may contribute to a lack of uptake for ITT by the highest quality candidates (Salt, 2010).

The review found that special educators were not always highly valued or seen to require specific skills or expertise. This would complement the perceptions of 'caring' rather than teaching, a 'dumping ground' rather than a classroom. Certainly, there would appear to be an image issue with special school teaching. Jones (2004) found that PMLD teachers felt 'separate and different' (Jones, 2004, p.168) from their mainstream colleagues; that their mainstream colleagues viewed them negatively. She talks of teachers seeing themselves as belonging to a specialist profession within teaching and suggests that the shared identity of difference supports them, '...in a culture that does not appear to value them or their students,' (Jones, 2004, p.163). Raising the profile and status of special education teaching became a recommendation of the review.

The Salt Review (2010) found that recruitment was low for the special education sector. It was argued that this may, in turn, cause workforces to stagnate and not 'benefit from continual refreshing' (Salt, 2010). In special education, a low staff 'turnover' can create an environment where change is infrequent and becomes unwelcome. The report notes that vacancy rates in special schools are twice that of all schools, indicating the recruitment problem.

The training of SLD/PMLD teachers was highlighted as a serious issue. It was noted that newly qualified teachers (NQTs) did not feel adequately prepared to teach SLD/PMLD after their initial teacher training (ITT) courses. In addition to this concern, CPD (which was the in-service route for specialist training in SLD/PMLD) was found to be inconsistent and not universally quality assured. Teachers that did enter the profession were found to either leave quickly or remain for a very long time. In discussing a range of barriers to recruitment and retention, Jones and West (2009) suggest that PMLD teachers were leaving the profession 'at an alarming rate' (Jones and West, 2009, p.70). In response to this, Billingsley (2004, in Jones and West,

2009, p.70) suggests that teachers that are better prepared to teach are less likely to leave. Therefore, teacher training is a vital component for students wishing to teach PMLD and SLD students.

A further development in the special sector was highlighted by the review. The Salt Report (2010) points out that due to increasing advances in medical treatments, there has been (and is expected to continue to be) an increase in students with increasingly complex needs. Jones and West (2009) acknowledge this change in demographic and point out the need for specialist training for this more challenging and complex category of student (Jones and West, 2009).

The aging population of special school teachers suggests without intervention, there will be a severe loss of technical expertise and experience in SLD/PMLD teaching from the profession as this generation reach retirement age. The Salt Report suggests that this issue requires 'urgent attention' (Salt, 2010).

The landscape of special education has had investment and initiatives in SEN and social care but very little investment in special education specialist training (Salt, 2010). To this end, there remains issue over how special education is perceived as a profession in terms of its credibility, recruitment and retention, training of student teachers and the ongoing professional development of existing teachers. A final issue is that the generation that trained before 1989 on the specialist PMLD courses will retire leaving a skill void in their wake.

## **2.5 Special School Teachers; Teacher Beliefs And Identity**

Gee (2000) describes teacher identity as, "*The type of person an individual is recognized as being in a given context.*" (Gee, 2000, in O'Connor, 2008, p.3). Olsen (2008) reminds us that teaching is a complex personal and social practice involving the whole person and O'Connor (2008) relates the importance of the emotional commitment teachers invest in their roles. She

points out that professional identity involves reflection, social communication, personal philosophies and their public actions.

The nature of teacher identity is a complex mesh of interlocking and overlapping constructs. In special education, Jones' (2004) research illuminates a number of interesting issues relating specifically to special educators. Jones (2004) found that special school teachers identify themselves as distinct from their mainstream colleagues. She suggests that mainstream colleagues are thought to underestimate and not appreciate the work that they do (Jones, 2004). Her research also found that the PMLD teachers' social identity creates a close homogenous group (Lacey and Ouvry, 1998, in Jones, 2004). The group identity bonds its members and they distance themselves from mainstream teachers. This social identity formed a peer support mechanism for a professional world in which they felt that they and their students were not valued (Jones, 2004). Garner (1994, in Jones, 2010) indicates that mainstream teachers perceived special educators practice in specialised settings as 'secret and alternative procedures' leading to a specialist pedagogy surrounded in myth' (Jones, 2010, p.682). Such is the sense of difference between special educators and mainstream educators that Jones (2004) suggests an emergence of a profession within a profession. However, the emphasis upon difference is guarded against, as it upholds ideas of segregation and separate services rather than promotes a sense of shared teacher identity and shared understandings of effective learning and teaching for all pupils (Jones, 2004).

Jones' (2004) research illustrated that many special educators identify with a cause; wanting to make a difference and that this is often formed very early in their younger experiences (Jones, 2004). Jones concludes that in her research, she found the PMLD teachers to be very strongly identified with each other and apart from mainstream teachers, that this was deep-rooted and powerful and influential in their responses to professional developments.

A teacher's identity is embedded by their personal philosophies and beliefs carried into their professional lives from experiences and learning throughout their lives. Blumstein (2001, in Jones, 2004) suggests that, as identity is a result of interactions with the social environment and this interaction is continuous, and then identity is constantly shaped and re-shaped, continuously evolving.

A significant feature of teacher beliefs is their resistance to change which carries important implications for professional development, initial teacher training and socialisation. Davis and Andrzejewski (2009) suggest that the beliefs are layered, multi-dimensional, sometimes implicit and very difficult to change. In trying to reason the failure of teacher training courses to have an impact on practice, Raths (2001) cites Kennedy (1997) who suggests that the beliefs that teachers hold are used to evaluate new ideas and ideas that challenge are dismissed. This is what Bruner (1996, in Raths, 2001) referred to as 'folk pedagogy'; a position where teachers hold true to their existing "deeply ingrained beliefs," (Raths, 2001, p.2). Thurlow and Stuart (2000) remark how the beliefs systems held by teachers act as a filter for new ideas, allowing for rejection of ideas with justification.

Davis and Andrzejewski (2009) offer an insight into the nature of beliefs held by teachers. They regard the beliefs as being the teacher's subjective reality which may be in conflict with the objective reality. The teacher may have beliefs about themselves across a range of domains which teachers may give different emphasis or weighting to. We are reminded that teacher beliefs have huge impact:

*"Teachers' beliefs are a form a subjective reality...Their beliefs guide their decision-making, behaviour, and interactions with students and, in turn, create an objective reality in the classroom, what students experience as real and true."* (Davis and Andrzejewski, 2009, p.6)



They go on to explain how beliefs, through informing and influencing the decision-making process, shape curricular decisions and their beliefs may be in conflict with accepted educational ideas (Davis and Andrzejewski, 2009). It is important to note the significant influence of teacher beliefs upon the key aspects of the teacher's role; decision-making, interactions with students and creating a 'reality' in their classrooms. There is considerable power and influence entwined with the teacher's role and this is moderated and driven by their beliefs. Where the beliefs fit in congruence with school policy and culture, this arguably is a positive outcome. However, where conflict occurs, it is important that professional standards are maintained and school policies are rigorously adhered to in order to prevent emerging pockets of 'falling standards'. This can be achieved through robust accountability and supervision structures (Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale, 1999).

Ertmer (2005) regards teacher beliefs as deeply embedded and difficult to alter. She theorises that changing a teacher's belief would require a second order change, which she states would be a permanent change of belief, so would be extremely difficult to achieve. A feature of beliefs that are often formed early in our lives and result from lived experiences is that they are a part of 'us', our character and personality, a composition of our psychological and emotional self. O'Connor (2008) stresses the emotional aspect of teaching. She points out that teacher beliefs are part of the teacher and therefore, due to their cultural embodiment are difficult to change and can, therefore, represent barriers to pedagogical improvements, advances and changes. Teachers, who may easily have spent many years working 'alone' in their classrooms believing their practice to be effective, may well, resist the request to change or update their methods. Corbett (2001) acknowledges that teachers are resistant to being asked to alter what, for them, practices that have worked for years.

Ertmer (2005) sees the resistance to change as encapsulated by the teacher's identification of self within their belief system. In this view, the teacher identifies their beliefs to be 'who they are', thus making a change of belief equivalent to a deep personal change of self. Within a profession which is undergoing frequent government-led policy initiatives and a relentless drive for raising standards, a workforce that is resistant to change is problematic. It is important to keep up to date to avoid becoming a stagnant workforce (Salt, 2010).

The literature clearly presents a problem relating to teacher beliefs, that they can represent a barrier to progress; developing new skills, taking on new technology or being resistant to changing practice. This may be due to teacher beliefs' profound influence in the classroom and the intrinsic link between beliefs and decision-making. (Kurborska, 2011; Davis and Andrzejewski, 2009; Thurlow and Stuart, 2000). Furthermore, where beliefs are incongruent with the principles of the curriculum, they may hamper the effective and successful implementation (Cronin-Jones, 1991). To further illustrate the impact on curriculum, Ertmer (2005) relates an account of two teachers that have the same knowledge of ICT but their beliefs differ; one teacher viewing the knowledge as a 'curse' while the other teacher views it as 'liberating'; the contrasting beliefs directly affecting the subsequent teaching.

## **2.6 Vulnerability, Care and Teacher Identity**

### **2.61 Introduction**

The role of the special school teacher involves working on a daily basis with, arguably, the most vulnerable young people in our society. The vulnerability of the students is intersected with the professional duties of the teaching teams to meet the individual educational, physical, medical and emotional needs of these vulnerable people. The way the needs are met is fused with the teacher's identity, which involves social communication, public actions and personal philosophies, (O'Connor, 2008).

Meeting the students' needs often involves a range of care based duties, some of which are intimate. The construct of care here is referring to the notion of professional tasks provided to or required by the student in lieu of parental care and duties which facilitate the experiences in school. There also remains the idea of caring, the emotional investment in a relationship, task or idea. Caring is intimately related to this discussion as the profession is usually considered to be a 'caring' profession (O'Connor, 2008). As a moral persuasion, caring resides deep within our morality and self-identity. Gilligan (2014) points out that we are relational beings, seeking interaction (relationships) from the earliest age. She relates caring with empathy for others and overcoming the pursuit of self-interest.

Teaching is about personal relations (Noddings, 2012) and wishing to enter special needs education, a caring profession, would expect and require a caring, empathetic disposition toward SEN students. Westcott and Jones (1999) indicate the importance of recruiting staff, *"...who are willing and able to contribute to a caring environment that respects the wishes and requirements of the children and young people,"* (Westcott and Jones, 1999, p.504). Caring is arguably, taken for granted as a characteristic of those entering the special education sector but is unlikely to feature upon the written contract of employment.

Caring relationships between teachers and students, built upon trust and respect, can have within them, the capacity to betray, let down and destroy the trust within the relationship. Gilligan (2014) refers to this as, *"...moral injury – the shattering of trust that compromises our ability to love,"* (Gilligan, 2014, p.90).

This section will explore the variety of issues of surrounding the constructs of vulnerability and care and consider how these ideas intersect with teacher identity. Initially, the study will examine three significant ways in which the students of special school placement are vulnerable and relate this to the staff's obligation to provide care at a professional level. Then

the discussion will examine the intersection of the factors of care, vulnerability and teacher identity. Links will be made to 'caring' where relevant.

Finally, the discussion will address vulnerability of the staff and the intrinsic vulnerabilities related to the research study.

## **2.62 Vulnerability Of The Students**

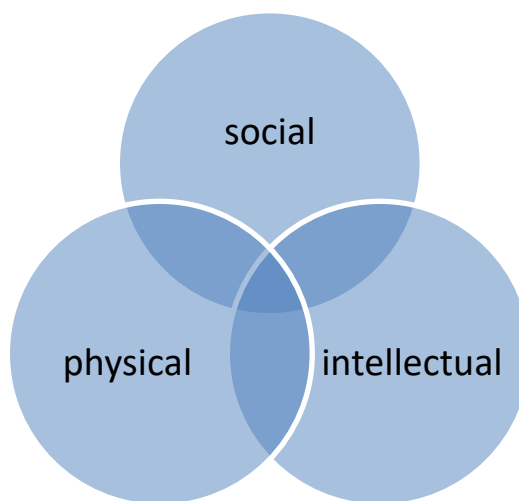
The needs of special school students are defined in their Statement of Educational Needs or, more recently, their Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP).

The range of special educational needs is vast, from moderate learning difficulties (MLD) to non-communicative, non-ambulant, medically complex students defined in the categories SLD, PMLD and CLDD.

In a world of adults, each student is vulnerable which is exacerbated by their disability and statistically, their disability dramatically increases the likelihood of being abused (Sobsey, 1994). I suggest that their vulnerability can be categorised broadly into three key areas; social, physical and intellectual. Within these areas, the students, whichever disability they have, are vulnerable to a wide range of factors which can negatively impact upon their quality of life. (E.g. Factors such as prejudices, oppression, various forms of abuse, bullying or neglect).

The diagram below (Fig.5) illustrates the significant areas of vulnerability of the individual student.

### **2.62.1 (Fig.5) Diagrammatic Representation of The Significant Areas Of Vulnerability**

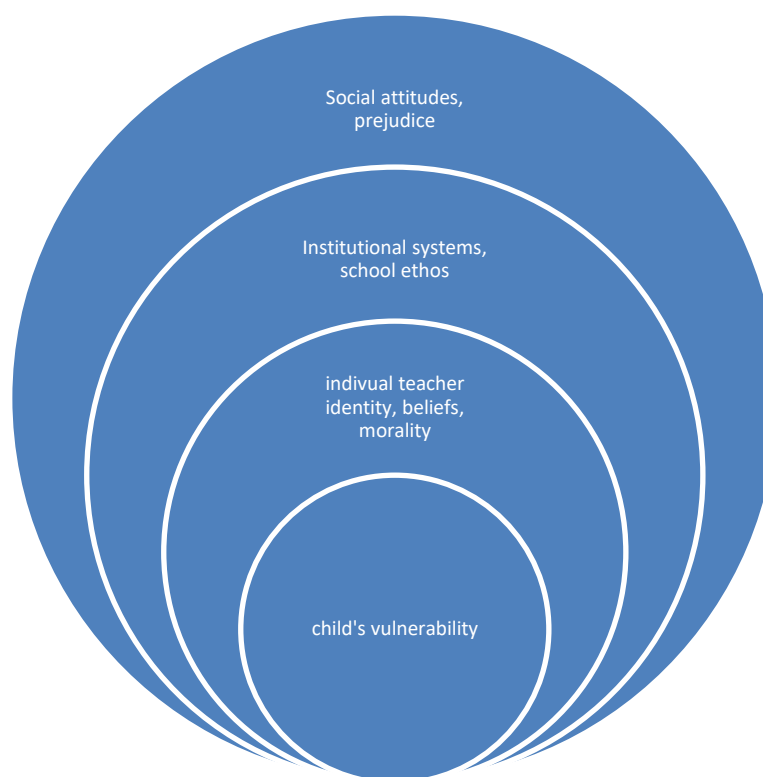


The diagram serves to illustrate how the areas are not discreet but overlap, sharing contributing factors and common aspects to their vulnerabilities. For example, where a child is intellectually vulnerable, there may be likelihood that they may also be vulnerable in the physical domain. This may arise, for example, from a predatory sexual interest which is not recognised due to the nature of the intellectual vulnerability.

The domains are closely linked and potentially overlap and all three domains have further factors influencing and exerting pressures. These are illustrated in the Figure.6 below.

The diagram below (Fig.6) illustrates the forces acting upon the vulnerabilities of the individual student.

**2.62.2 (Fig.6) Diagrammatic Representation Of The Layers Of Factors Impacting A Child's Vulnerability**



The nature of the forces which apply pressure to the child's vulnerabilities are illustrated. The child's vulnerability is at the centre and the nearest, most intimate factors in the educational setting is the teaching staff, their beliefs, identities and morality. Moving away from the child, the next set of influences are the institutional and organisational factors such as the systems and procedures, team ethos, timetable, locations etc. Furthest are the social factors which include social attitudes towards the child, their disability and family. These factors are nested as they reside within, and are intimately connected and interdependent. The social factors may have a significant influence upon the organisational in that the organisation will reflect the social attitudes of the era. Similarly, these factors will contribute to influence the individual philosophies of the staff and once established, are very difficult to change (Raths, 2001; Ertmer, 2005).

Having outlined the vulnerabilities and factors influencing them, I will briefly explore each area of vulnerability in turn.

### **2.62.3 Social Vulnerability**

Literature has documented the history of social attitudes to disability and until recent times they have been predominantly negative (Sobsey, 1994; Sobsey, 2002; Westcott and Cross, 1996; Westcott and Jones, 1999; Quarmby, 2011). Attitudes of prejudice, social rejection, isolation and bullying and intimidation justified as 'fun' are a few examples of the disdain society has shown disabled people. In extreme cases, attitudes have resulted in more serious crimes such as rape, torture and murder (Sobsey, 1994; Westcott and Cross, 1996).

Where these long standing negative social attitudes remain, the potential exists for disabled people to suffer negative comments, treatment or worse. These attitudes could remain hidden deep within a person and only surface in 'favourable' conditions. Arguably, in a school setting, the likelihood would be small but not impossible. The Soham murders of 2002 provide a chilling reminder of this.

Prejudice against disabled people is often steeped in myth and social stereotyping. These include ideas such as: disabled people feel ugly, inadequate and ashamed, their lives are barely worth living, they crave to be normal, those needing carers are helpless cabbages who have nothing to give, leading meaningless, empty lives, their judgement and preferences are overridden and contradicted as inferior to able bodied people, disabled people's need and right to privacy isn't as important as able bodied people, disabled people need to be monitored in a way that deprives them of privacy and choice, (Westcott and Cross, 1996, p.11).

Sobsey (1994) discusses other recent attitudes to the disabled such as, 'they are better off dead' and 'they are a burden on society'. Other attitudes can be summarised by these

reactions to abuse of disabled children; 'nobody would harm a child already unlucky enough to be disabled', and 'it is alright to abuse a disabled child because they are damaged/unfeeling/stupid anyway so what's the harm?', (Westcott and Cross, 1996, p17). The worrying point is that this 'dehumanising' of disability contributes to increasing their vulnerability (Westcott and Cross, 1996).

Segregation and isolation of disabled people intended to provide care and education in settings where the specialised resources can better meet their needs. Despite literature contradicting this view, this has continued to this day as special schools from its origins in dark, isolated and abusive institutions (Sobsey, 1994, p.127).

With attitudes such as these, it may be argued that there is potential for disabled people to continue being subjected to negative social attitudes. Where attitudes are backed up by official power, the maltreatment becomes oppression and Westcott and Cross argue that, at this point, the potential harm to the child is limitless (Westcott and Cross, 1996, p.12).

The power within a relationship in an educational setting is already heavily weighted with the adults and primarily the teacher, making it incredibly important that they do not abuse the position of trust and authority (Parsons, 1981). Personal morality and teacher identity and beliefs would act as personal guides and professional codes of conduct would act as professional equivalents, thus combining with morality to provide behavioural boundaries which serve to protect the vulnerability of the students.

Sobsey (1994) points out that where the balance of power is allowed to become extremely weighted toward staff, this can characterise and facilitate institutional abuse. If prevailing social attitudes are negative, disabled people can become subject to an abusive sub-culture where maltreatment is not viewed as wrong amongst the staff adhering to the norms; peer



pressure exists for staff to join in with social consequences for failing to cooperate (Sobsey, 1994, p.91).

Children are of course subject to the behaviour policies which apply to the specific school in which they work. However, staff may operate their own 'ways' of achieving control which are practiced in the relative privacy of their own classrooms or teaching areas. Where supervision and accountability systems are weak, there remains an increased risk of a child being subject to such treatment.

#### **2.62.4 Physical vulnerability**

In the special school setting, one of the main aims for our students is for them to develop their independence skills as much as possible. Much curriculum time is dedicated to this area of their development in an attempt to get the disabled students as normal as possible (Westcott and Cross, 1996, p.50). It is of particular interest, that disabled people consider their independence in terms of control of their own lives; making choices and having 'active charge of their lives', (Westcott and Cross, 1996, p.51).

This is important from the view that my teacher identity presents as a teacher whose empathy and respect for my students are very strong. I consider that my relationships with students afford them as much autonomy as possible in terms of choices but begin to acknowledge that I could do so much more in this area.

Where the students have a carer to attend their personal requirements, statistics suggest their vulnerability increases and further increases if a number of carers are used to provide intimate care (Westcott and Cross, 1996).

A disabled person's dependency on carers can evolve into a relationship which is unequal and can potentially become abusive. The carer may exploit the vulnerability of the person

receiving the care, for example by taking control over the timing and manner of the care being given, (Westcott and Cross, 1996, p.51).

In a similar way, systems, procedures and organisational frameworks can exacerbate a student's vulnerability. Quarmby discusses 'communal bathing' of disabled and the inherent problems associated with it (Quarmby, 2006). In educational settings this may relate to the planned curriculum and the logistics such as staffing, movement of students, location, timings and expectations of the students.

#### **2.62.5 Intellectual vulnerability**

Intellectual vulnerability refers to the difficulties some students have understanding language, social signals and nuances (Historically referred to as 'mental retardation').

Struggling to engage with people, the community and the world with a common understanding creates a vulnerability which permeates all aspects of life and needs special ongoing care. In addition to this the students require a curriculum which helps to address the ongoing issues of safety. Sobsey (1994) discusses a range of empowerment programs for disabled and intellectually impaired students including role play. He comments on the importance of age appropriate behaviour which has particular significance for educators in the educational setting. My experience in special education is that the aim is to teach age-appropriate behaviours but accept mild forms of immature social behaviour. Sobsey's point is that we shouldn't as this acceptance further increase their vulnerability in the wider community where the behaviour may not be tolerated or be interpreted differently (e.g. physical affection as sexual), (Sobsey, 1994, p.188).

Special school curriculum time devotes much time to coaching the students in the ways of appearing to fit in as much as possible – a presumed desire for the education of disabled (Westcott and Cross, 1996).

Further time is spent modelling appropriate behaviours across a vast range of social settings. These occurs as both planned lessons and as an ongoing part of staff's relationship with the individual students and their responsibility to be seen as a good role model. In addition to this, as part of the increasingly important safeguarding agenda, teachers are asked to plan and teach weekly lessons around 'Sex and Relationships' and 'Internet Safety' themes. Despite this increase in focussed tuition in these areas, we are still experiencing an increase in the occurrence of 'problems' in these areas.

There are clearly significant issues of increased vulnerability for impaired children compared to 'normal' children because of their reduced understanding of social norms. They are vulnerable to exploitation, often being unclear of appropriate boundaries (Sobsey, 1994; Quarmby, 2011).

### **2.63 How Vulnerability, Care and Teacher Identity Intersect And Are Problematic**

Teacher identity defines how we see ourselves in a given context (Gee, 2000, in O'Connor, 2008, p.3) and as a professional; it influences our professional behaviours and attitudes (O'Connor, 2008). In practice, teacher identity and beliefs have a significant influence on our perception of 'reality' in our classrooms, it influences the decisions we take throughout our living our professional role (Raths, 2001; Davis and Andrzejewski, 2009; Kurborska, 2011).

The role of a teacher sees the intersection and trade-off between our personal and professional beliefs, our teacher identity and our professional duties and obligations (Davis and Andrzejewski, 2009).

Given any situation in a special school setting, as professionals we strive to uphold our professional obligations, as teachers, we strive to fulfil our self-images and identity and as moral agents we strive to do what we believe to be the right course in the face of any ethical or moral dilemmas that may arise (Gardener, 2007).

Whether we 'care' or not becomes a dimension of our teacher identity and morality. Noddings (2001) describes teachers who claim to care. She suggests their perception as 'caring' as a virtuous form; that they want the best for their students and they work hard to achieve those aims (Noddings, 2001). She illustrates how, despite their claims to 'care', teachers can engage in coercive practices in the name of caring; to fulfil a narrow curriculum objective or similar.

It may be argued that a teacher fulfilling a lesson's stated aims will feel justified to coerce the students into compliance in order that the criterion (for the lesson's success) is met. However, if the lesson was 'failing', and the students' reaction was illustrating this, I would argue that listening to the responses and abandoning the lesson is favourable to pursuing it to the end. She states that every act of coercion raises a question; is the end worth the coercion? (Noddings, 2001). This coercive educational 'caring' can potentially result in, what Angela Valenzuela (in Noddings, 2001, p.40) called, 'subtractive schooling'. This is a position where the students have less than they started with, be it knowledge, enthusiasm, relationships etc.

It is clear that caring should not result in a negative net gain on the students' educational, emotional or physical development. Teachers do not deliberately intend to have a negative impact on their students. However, there are many influencing factors placed upon teachers.

These pressures can strain the relationships with the students and the definition of what is important; the moral climate.

Noddings (2012) discusses how pressures upon teachers are affecting the moral climate in which they teach. Her remarks focus upon mainstream education but similar issues reside in special education. In special school, there is less academic pressure than mainstream, but there is still pressure to demonstrate academic progress, felt as a result of the increased emphasis on academic learning (Jones, 2010).

Caring for vulnerable students puts teachers into relations which are, by definition, imbalanced, the power and authority weighted heavily to the carer. This imbalance exacerbates the vulnerabilities of the student and the dynamic relationship is moderated by influencing factors such as teacher identity, beliefs and morality of the individual caring teacher. These interactions are complex and dynamic as every member of staff and student is different and every moment in every relationship has a unique context.

Despite the pressures in teaching, and the imbalanced nature of the relationships, teachers try to establish a good relationship and have a positive impact on the students they teach. Noddings argues that, *“Good teachers, like good parents, hope that the personal relations formed will enhance the likelihood that their students will live in and promote a public climate in which caring relations will continue to flourish,”* (Noddings, 2012).

The vulnerability of the students is fused with the professional need to provide duties of care, some intimate. These duties need to be conducted within guidelines which protect both student and staff. However, teacher beliefs and identity can corrupt the relationship as a result of the inherent and significant power imbalance favouring the staff (Fitzsimons, 2009).

Fitzsimons discusses a range of behaviours toward vulnerable students to achieve compliance which illustrate unprofessional and abusive use of the power (Fitzsimons, 2009). The intersection of the factors of teacher, their identity and the student and their vulnerabilities, morality and the nature of the care being given becomes the dynamic 'cocktail' which determines whether the power is used to build up a student or tear them down (Parsons, 1981).

It relevant here to acknowledge that adults in caring roles can be vulnerable. In education, there a number of guidelines which protect and safeguard members of staff from being in a vulnerable position with students. However, these policies are more difficult to follow in a special school setting where staff may be required to provide toileting or intimate care in a private and secluded setting, possibly in a one to one setting. The vulnerabilities may include accusations of inappropriate touching, inappropriate remarks, staff not following medical protocols accurately, etc. Serious accusations would have profound implications for the school, the staff and the students themselves and of course, families.

Of particular relevance to the special study school role are the following scenarios: changing nappies, personal feminine hygiene, undressing, drying and re-dressing for swimming, emotional support through physical cuddles, changing clothing for PE lessons, washing hands

and face, and physical contact through the implementation of physical behaviour management and control (Team Teach) techniques. Each scenario may be a feature of any working day as either a planned scenario or as supporting colleagues or 'covering' for absent colleagues. Each scenario places extra vulnerability upon the staff and requires that they observe professional protocols and are seen to be following such guidelines at all times.

#### **2.64 Vulnerability In The Context Of The Research Study**

As the researcher, I felt vulnerability in a range of forms. A significant part of this vulnerability related to my role as researcher amongst my own colleagues. I felt that being a researcher in my own school presented some unique unforeseen problems in terms of my potentially divided loyalties and conflicting responsibilities.

My research needed to be authentic and true, conducted with integrity and honesty. This was a duty to myself, my morality and my identity as a researcher. I also held a responsibility, and in part, the reputation of my university in my hands. I wanted to conduct high quality research for myself and my academic faculty.

However, I also felt a responsibility to my school, not to damage its reputation; its continued viability provided future financial security for me and my family.

Furthermore, I felt that I had a responsibility to the staff and colleagues, who worked there; most of whom were clearly very dedicated professionals who were a credit to the profession. It would surely be wrong to damage their reputation or the reputation of their school. These

manifested as further tensions upon my allegiances which at first appeared to be very simple and straight forward.

I also needed to protect the very positive and strong relationships that I enjoyed with the students themselves. My research may adversely affect these relationships if details were to emerge portraying them in a compromising light.

All of these issues generated a cauldron of tensions which were constantly in my thoughts and reflections. As the research journey progressed I needed to make a decision as to whether to proceed at all due to the potential problems ahead. I felt vulnerable, I felt I was potentially making the school and the students that I cared so much about vulnerable and worried that maybe I should remain silent. However, the thought of not exploring, not finding out, not raising difficult issues and exposing a reality seemed a more impossible choice.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledge the ongoing difficulties relating to the ethics throughout narrative inquiries and, following their guidance, I tried to consider the 'relational responsibilities' to each dilemma, considering the characters, their families and the potential impact afforded good guidance and substance for my consultations with my tutor (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.177).



## **2.7 The Curriculum For Special Students**

### **2.7.1 Context Of The Special Curriculum**

Curricula for students with SEN and disabilities have moved through different approaches. During the 1970s, the developmental approach utilized the modification of infant curricula based upon the premise that their needs would be met by focusing upon their mental age. Browder, Spooner and Bingham (2004) note that by the 1980s, curricula were based around a functional approach which focused upon age-appropriate functional skills. The additive model had a strong emphasis on social inclusion and focused upon how students could have their educational needs met in mainstream settings.

Special schools teach students that have been given a statement of special educational needs. This statement identifies the students' needs and the special school receives funding in order to provide the support and services the student requires to access the school curriculum and the statutory national curriculum at an appropriate level.

The government has implemented recent changes to the SEN provision system and from September 2014, statements have been replaced with care plans covering the child's development to the age of 25 years. The Government states that provision for SEN should where possible be inclusive but, *"...where this may detract from the learning of the majority of students, separate provision may be necessary."* (DfE, 2014)

Special needs teaching traditionally celebrate diversity and are based on meeting very individual learning needs. To this effect, it is important to note that any SEN curriculum begins with the student themselves. For Tina Bruce (1996), the curriculum is made up of three parts: the child - the process and structures within the child, the context – the people, places (gender, race, language, SEN, and the content – what the child knows/what he wants to

know/needs to know (Bruce, 1996). Bruce notes that the child's individual physicality must be taken account of and understood, the context includes their support needs and their specific social features. Finally, understanding where the student is academically, what their interests are, what they are motivated to do and learn about, set against what they need to learn are all important aspects of developing a useful SEN curriculum.

The special school curriculum endeavours to meet the needs of a wide diversity of SEN. To this effect the study school utilize support services such as a physiotherapist, a speech and language therapist, a school nurse, a health visitor, CAMHS, a resident counsellor and an occupational therapist. In addition to this there is an educational psychologist attached to the school and the Educational Welfare Service monitors attendance. The study school prospectus relates its curriculum in terms of core aims for its pupils. These aims are traditional student-centred learning goals discussed by Jones, West and Stevens (2006) with its emphasis on life skills and 'functional skills training' (Jones, West and Stevens, 2006, p.83).

In its advertised prospectus, the study school presents 10 core aims upon which the school curriculum is built. For its pupils, these aims include social integration, health and independence as priorities, but acknowledge the perceived value of the national curriculum. They state:

*"The intention is that our pupils should benefit from our specialist approaches but still follow a curriculum which reflects the best that is on offer in mainstream schools."* (YTG School, 2013)

Within special school, the curriculum needs to satisfy a huge diversity of needs and consequently any necessary differentiation, parallel activities and parallel curricula can exist

within a single classroom. Students can experience a variety of inclusive lessons then be taken out for individualized sessions with support staff or outside agency staff.

The government stated that the first choice for all students should be a local mainstream placement, though they acknowledge there may be need for separate provision. Some previous placements in special schools were being challenged (Jones, West and Stevens, 2006) resulting in the question of which is most appropriate? This 'where to learn?' dilemma (Norwich, 2008) refers to the longstanding and ongoing debate about where best to meet the needs of SEN students. In support of special schools, Kaufmann and Hallahan (2005) argue that special schools are necessary to give specialized instruction well, reasoning that no teacher can give all things to all students and that some students need to be taught different content to others.

Criticisms are levelled at the concept of separate curriculum. Shaddock et al (2009) argue that preparing students for life in the community is best done in segregation 'is somewhat elusive'. *"Youngsters will not learn in segregated settings how to function in a non-disabled world."* (Shaddock, MacDonald, Hook, Giorcelli and Authur-Kelly, 2009).

Jones (2010) discusses recent developments in teaching and learning strategies for PMLD which challenge earlier views that separate, individual and functional curricula are best. She talks of a now sharply focussed academic content in least restrictive natural environments, where individual strengths and needs drive curricula decisions and the medium for learning has become centred on academic learning.

## **2.72 Curriculum For SLD/PMLD**

The mainstream schools provide a wide range of provision for SEN students but are sometimes unable to cater for the very demanding and specialist levels of care needed for PMLD students without jeopardizing the education of the majority of students. Where this is the case, there are special school placements that are able to offer the high levels of care required. The Good Schools Guide defines PMLD requirements:

*“In addition to very severe learning difficulties, children with profound and multiple difficulties have other significant problems, and complex needs. These may include physical disabilities, sensory impairment or possibly a severe medical condition. They will require a high level of adult support for both learning needs and personal care. They are likely to need sensory stimulation and a curriculum broken down into very small steps. Some pupils communicate by gesture, eye pointing or symbols, others by very simple language. Their attainments are likely to remain below level 1 of the National Curriculum in the P1–P4 range.”* (PMLD, 2014, p.18)

With levels of impairment and complexity of this profound nature, a curriculum for PMLD students is very sensory and experiential in its design. The aims of PMLD curriculum are markedly different to mainstream and also distinct from typical SEN provision. The government state that the curriculum for SEN aims to: 1. provide opportunities for all pupils to learn and to achieve 2. promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepare all pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life. These two aims are interdependent and reinforce each other. The personal development of pupils plays a significant part in their ability to learn and to achieve (DfE, 2014).

A special school curriculum is focussed upon meeting the needs of each child. Where their SEN is PMLD, their curriculum is planned as significantly experiential, including sensory

activities in a wide variety of forms. Targets may be assessed and set through P-levels, Routes For Learning, MAPP, or similar published assessment tools. The curriculum continues to emphasise small steps of measurable progress and an emphasis on promoting autonomy and independence where possible and appropriate. The core aims and values underpinning the curriculum can be seen to: enable pupils to interact and communicate with a wide range of people, enable pupils to express preferences, communicate needs, make choices, make decisions and choose options that other people act on and respect, promote self-advocacy or the use of a range of systems of supported advocacy, prepare pupils for an adult life in which they have the greatest possible degree of autonomy, support them in having relationships with mutual respect and dependence on each other, increase pupils' awareness and understanding of their environment and of the world, encourage pupils to explore, to question and to challenge.

P scales exist for all National Curriculum subjects, including the non-core curriculum subjects of personal social and health education (PSHE) and religious education (RE). There are eight levels of performance, with each describing some of the important knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils may gain from the programmes of study of the national curriculum. In the study school, children are continually assessed but do not undergo any formal examinations or testing. It's expected that teachers will use their knowledge of the child, consider the contexts in which learning takes place and gather evidence from a variety of sources to support their decisions to make a 'best-fit judgment' based on everyday activity and continual monitoring and assessment.

The key principles underpinning curriculum planning for the PMLD/SLD students are: *"Look into the future and have clear goals in mind. SEN students need to access a range of*

*educational opportunities and genuine choice in the directions that their education may take; that students will experience a quality education in response to their needs.” (NCCA, 1999).*

PMLD and SLD bring curricular issues distinct to their category of SEN. Within the study school the PMLD/SLD students were separated into their own classes and taught through a predominantly sensory curriculum, using specialized services and facilities and extensively using the school’s minibuses or local woodland to further extend the sensory experiences of the group. Facilities included the hydrotherapy pool, the ball pool, the sound and light room, the trampoline for rebound therapy and the physiotherapy room for PE activities. Two years ago, one of the PMLD classes was fully integrated into the other classes of EYFS and has this year moved up to the first junior class. Now the class has half of its ten students in a wheelchair with PMLD. The QCA (2001; 2009) learning difficulties booklets made it clear that teachers are free to develop whatever curriculum they feel is suitable for these pupils, but it has taken a little while for teachers to believe that this is really so (Lacey, 2011).

## **2.8 Historical Treatment Of Special Needs**

The attitudes and treatment of the disabled has been historically poor. Attitudes to imperfection began with the Greeks and their obsessing over physical attributes as a beacon of achievement. In medieval Europe, society lived by a feudal system which meant most disabled people were valued and worked the land. As centuries passed, religious leaders gained the responsibility for explaining affliction and misfortune and they did so by attributing these issues to sin. Afflictions to the individual were a punishment for their sinful ways. During the 1800s, as ignorance gave way to an emerging medical knowledge, philosophies were influenced by Darwinian theories of natural selection, survival of the fittest, and selection of the fittest within a gene pool. These ideas supported the notion of encouraging superior

people to procreate to ensure a strong society. Conversely, the weaker individuals within society would be 'discouraged' from procreating (Barnes, 1991).

The Idiot's Act 1886 provided institutionalized educational provision and the legal distinctions between idiots and imbeciles; however, this act was replaced by the Mental Deficiency Act in 1913 which gave instruction for the care and management for 4 categories of people; idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded and the moral imbeciles. All of these measures were aimed at legal segregation of the disabled through institutionalizing them. The act fell short of enforced sterilization. However, in America at the turn of the century, women who were born deaf and those with an IQ of below 70 were automatically sterilized to prevent procreation. Social control of the abnormal led to the housing of tens of thousands of both adults and children in single sex institutions against their will (Barnes, 1991).

During the twentieth century, after the European tragedy of World War Two, which saw the systematic execution of the disabled and handicapped, there were considerable reforms to education but the education of 'children who have a disability of the mind or the body' continued to receive an inequitable share of government resources. The Education Act of 1944 continued to view education of special needs through the medical model. Consequently, the categorization of the students through its emphasis on physical deficit meant that the handicapped were still segregated from their mainstream counterparts and provided for in separate special schools (Armstrong, 2007).

Jones (2005) points out that prior to 1970 in the UK, mentally handicapped children were deemed uneducable and the responsibility of the Department of Health. With the passing of the 1970 Education Act, a shift of responsibility for these children to the Department for

Education implied that they were in fact educable and 'had the right to attend a school' (Jones, 2005, p.376).

The work of the behaviourists during the 1960s and 1970s opened the door to the ideas that the teacher could and should be responsible for modifying the problems of the special needs student. This provided a small movement in conceptualizing a step towards inclusivity of special needs within mainstream classrooms. Warnock's report in 1978 brought significant change to special needs education with a specific emphasis on teaching in mainstream classrooms. She introduced a system of statementing which was, in theory, to enable the student to access the specific support that they needed within the mainstream classroom setting. Warnock established a move away from discrete categories of SEN and promoted the principle of inclusive education where possible.

During the 1990s there have been many acts, reforms and policies providing legislative frameworks and guidance for the inclusive education of children with special needs. (Education Act 1993, Education Reform 1994, Green Paper 1997, SEN and Disability Act 2001, Code of Practice Identification and the Assessment of children with Special Educational Needs 2001, Removing Barriers to Achievement, 2004).

The UNESCO Salamanca World Statement on Special Needs Education, in 1994, called on governments to adopt the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise (UNESCO, 1994). The application of this underlying principle saw the closure of many special schools during the 1990s.



Further embodiment of inclusive education has been in the notion that inclusivity is the right of the student and this holds the highest moral argument. However, there continues to be debate over the nature of inclusion, whether it works, what it should look like and how effective it really is.

## **2.9 Modern Inclusion And Legislation**

### **2.9.1 Defining Inclusion**

Inclusive education stands for a process of inclusion of all children in the mainstream education system. Inclusion implies that the student with SEN will be educated alongside their peers in a mainstream education setting rather than in a separate special school. However, the definition of inclusion is not as simple as it at first seems. The term inclusion, referring to inclusive education, actually represents and subsumes both a philosophical perspective about the rights of individuals and a practical perspective about the lived education of students with special educational needs. Inclusion-Europe, an organisation campaigning for fully inclusive schools as the norm across Europe, considers the philosophical position to be thus:

*“Parents demand the unconditional acceptance of all children in regular classes and in the life of the school. However, in many European countries children with intellectual disabilities still attend special schools that allow little interaction with non-disabled children.”*  
(InclusionEurope, 2016).

This view was in contrast to the European Policy of Educational Support in the European Schools (European Schools, 2013) which maintains there is a role for alternative provision when the social or educational needs are not able to be met by the mainstream school. However, the campaign for full inclusion does not recognise this and insists that children receive, *“as much support as necessary to be successfully included in neighbourhood schools*

*and regular classes.*”(European Schools, 2013) For this to occur in the UK, there are serious cost implications to remedy many initial barriers to a fully inclusive education system; radically altering the existing buildings to accommodate ceiling tracks, hoists, changing areas and space for the accessories which accompany PMLD students and well as funding the extra staff and their training.

It may be noted at this point that the UK is a signatory of the Salamanca Agreement which committed members to work towards fully inclusive educational systems. The full inclusion campaign is clear about the requirements for change:

*“To bring about this necessary change, strong leadership from school principals and other administrators is necessary. Schools must be restructured in ways that focus on individual achievement and student learning. Teachers and educators must look at their roles in different ways.”* (Inclusion Europe, 2016, p.4)

The aim is that all students (SEN, disabled and mainstream) are taught together, and is far from fully realised either globally or within Europe. Despite most countries adopting the principles of ‘inclusion’ in their educational policies, the practical application of the principle has created various kinds of inclusion. Inclusion, as a principle, is based upon the right of the disabled student to have equal access and opportunity as their mainstream counterparts. The right places the responsibility firmly with the school to make the necessary modifications to the curriculum, the school and to the lesson in order that the access to education is fair and equitable to all of the students (UNESCO, 1994).

The implementation of inclusion requires variants in order to be practicable. These variants are full inclusion and partial inclusion. Within the fully inclusive model, the students with

special needs are educated alongside the students without special needs or disabilities all of the time. At the extreme of fully inclusive education, they may still access special services such as speech and language or physiotherapy, but these services would be delivered alongside their peers. Partial inclusion, as its name suggests, denotes a system where the disabled student is educated with their mainstream peers for most of the time. However, they will leave the main class for extra services or smaller group lessons in certain situations or particular curriculum areas. The student would then return to the mainstream class afterwards.

The notion of an inclusive school has implications for both its philosophical approach to educating disabled students and its practical application of the curriculum. The DfES Report (DfES, 2004) acknowledges this, *“They have seen inclusion as concerned with processes of participation and learning as well as with placement and have seen these processes in turn as relevant to many groups of potentially marginalised children and young people.”* (DfES, 2004).

In this broader definition the inclusivity of a school cannot be assumed just based upon the SEN population within a school cohort, rather that schools should only be regarded as inclusive if they treat all of their pupils in equitable and participatory ways. On this view, a school with a separate SEN unit, or segregated classes for pupils with SEN or, indeed, with very high levels of disciplinary exclusion cannot be regarded as inclusive, regardless of the makeup of its population (DfES, 2004).

### **2.92 Principles Of Inclusive Education**

The principles underpinning inclusive education are embedded in the anti-discriminatory campaigns that have emerged since the disabled veterans campaigned for social justice after the war (Close, 2011). Key legislation has encapsulated the principles of inclusive education at national, international and global level, and many organizations are vigorously supporting the

implementation of inclusive schooling around the world. One such organization, Centre of Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE, 2014) identifies the principles of inclusion within its mission statement:

*“Arguments for inclusive education are well documented and rest on notions of equality and human rights. Much more than a policy requirement, inclusion is founded upon a moral position which values and respects every individual and which welcomes diversity as a rich learning resource..... The education system is called upon to cater for, among others, black and minority ethnic learners, children of migrant workers and of gypsies, travellers and show-people as well as for disabled learners. CSIE works towards the restructuring of mainstream provision so that all schools are willing and able to include, value and respect all children.”(CSIE, 2014)*

Other organisations enshrine similar values within their literature (e.g. Inclusion Europe, Inclusion.Org and UNESCO). The World Conference in Special Needs Education in Spain, provided an international forum which 92 countries attended and agreed to adopt inclusive educational practices. The Salamanca Statement set out clear guiding principles based upon equity for all and clearly recognizes the role inclusive education plays as part of a bigger picture with the wider aims of social inclusion and equality. This defines the cross-cultural values embedded within inclusive practices.

*“Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system.” (UNESCO, 1994)*

Regarding inclusive schooling, the statement set the principle that the international community should endorse the approach of inclusive schooling and should support the development of special needs education as an integral part of all education programmes (UNESCO, 1994). The statement goes on to espouse how inclusive special educational needs education, in principle, is the most effective way of altering discriminatory attitudes and re-setting values to benefit all students:

*“The Framework for Action says ‘inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights.’ In the field of education this is reflected in bringing about a ‘genuine equalisation of opportunity.’ Special needs education incorporates proven methods of teaching from which all children can benefit; it assumes human differences are normal and that learning must be adapted to the needs of the child, rather than the child fitted to the process. The fundamental principle of the inclusive school, it adds, is that all children should learn together, where possible, and that ordinary schools must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of their students, while also having a continuum of support and services to match these needs. Inclusive schools are the ‘most effective’ at building solidarity between children with special needs and their peers. Countries with few or no special schools should establish inclusive – not special – schools.” (UNESCO,1994).*

Inclusion as a principle and as a concept therefore, carries an agenda far beyond the classroom and the attendance of special needs students in a mainstream setting. There are practical issues of support for all students but deeper philosophical principles affecting cultural values, social values, equity and respect within and across cultural boundaries.

### **2.93 Definitions Of Inclusion In The UK And Internationally**

The anti-discriminatory climate of recent decades has provided the basis for much change in policy and statute, nationally and internationally. Social changes have found that inclusion has been adopted at the same time that segregation and discrimination have been rejected. In the UK, the adoption of inclusive schooling has gathered momentum since the Warnock Report of 1978 and subsequent Education Acts, notably the Education Act 1994, SENDA 2001, and the SEN Code of Practice, 2001.

The UK is also held accountable under international laws, treaties and conventions ensuring that discrimination in education is not permitted or accepted. The UK government has ratified the following human rights treaties:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by the UK in 1991)
- United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (ratified in 1986)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ratified in 1976)
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ratified in 1969)
- UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education.

This combination of social changing attitudes, legislation and government policy, has defined a shift from the segregation and isolation model that existed for so many years. Through the 1990s the closure of many special schools was a direct result of the inclusion policies, however, special schools still remain in order to accommodate statemented students that are assigned a special school setting. Despite the rejection in principle of the special school due to the very nature of its exclusive setting, the inclusion agenda states that inclusion should be the option

where possible (UNESCO, 1994). This perceived need of alternative provisions has meant that there are remaining special schools, and this has, in part, prevented the UK moving to a fully inclusive educational system where all special needs students are taught alongside their mainstream peers.

In the UK presently, the majority of students with special educational needs are attending mainstream schools in the UK and the pressure upon the schools to provide resources and support is obliged to be met by the school. Other changes continue as successive governments wrestle with the education system and the gradual fall down the international league tables. The use of the statement of special educational needs is currently being phased out for a more integrated approach involving the agencies working more cooperatively with the budget-holding parents. The introduction of a new curriculum also began in September, 2014.

Arguments remain about how successful inclusion is. There are articles, papers, news items and anecdotal stories supporting the ideas that inclusion is not working. Research has been conducted by DfE and they concluded that there is no evidence that inclusion negatively affects the academic attainment of the mainstream cohorts. (DfES, 2004)

Inclusion at the international and global level can be evaluated by the published report: European Status Report on Inclusive Education, 2009. The report, specifically designed to ascertain how European member states were progressing with their aims to achieve inclusive education reveals a stark and rather bleak picture. For example, regarding the right to an inclusive education the report states:

*“When asked if children with a disability have the right to attend their regular neighbourhood schools or the same school as their brothers and sisters, this was only the case in 81% of the*

*responding countries. In Germany, Hungary, Russia and Switzerland there appears to be no such right.” (InclusionEurope, 2009, p.6)*

The report goes on to conclude that a systemic failure is preventing the inclusion of the students:

*“It appears rather that many countries have made some attempts to make their mainstream education systems more inclusive, but without achieving the necessary level of support to make inclusive education available to all children on their territory. Where there is success it is usually ‘ad hoc’, often achieved only by the dedication of a teacher or head teacher to make inclusion possible, and often without resources or support from the education system. The result is that only a minority of children with intellectual disabilities are included in regular education with the support they need. Children with disabilities remain especially vulnerable to exclusion from education at all levels. This systemic failure is consigning people with intellectual disabilities to a lifetime of social exclusion. Local and/or regional examples of good practice demonstrate that inclusive education is possible and achievable in the specific national context, but it is clearly not a realistic option for the majority for children and young people with intellectual disabilities.” (UNESCO, 2009)*

At a more global level, the picture is not much more encouraging, where again the report states a systemic failure around the world:

*“In the vast majority of education systems around the world, success remains extremely limited, if not non-existent. Where there is some success it is usually ‘ad hoc,’ often achieved only by the sheer will and dedication of a teacher or school principal to make inclusion possible, and without resources or support from the education system. The result is that only a minority*



*of children with intellectual disabilities are included in regular education with the support they need. This systemic failure is consigning people with intellectual disabilities to a lifetime of poverty and exclusion.”* (Inclusion Europe, 2009a, p.11)

Since Warnock, the use of statements has been used to identify and meet a child’s special educational need. With the statement defining the needs, deficits, areas to develop/targets and involved agencies, schools have been able to see how support can be delivered to that child in the mainstream setting. The statement does not, however, provide the teacher with hints and tips for teaching a child with these particular needs or combination of needs. As mentioned earlier, this system of statements is imminently being replaced for September 2014 following a re-structuring of the SEN system through the Children and Families Bill of 2013. Other changes include the scrapping of School Action and School Action Plus categories; designed to detail the needs and support required for less severe special needs pupils.

Furthermore, changes included in the Children and Families Bill (2013), saw the creation of an Education, Health Care Plan (EHCP) to replace statements which run, unlike statements which end at age 16, from birth until the age of 25. Within this plan, the parents hold the budget for the student’s support, giving them control over which services they wish to use.

#### **2.94 Teacher Attitudes And Beliefs In PMLD Settings About Inclusion**

The inclusion principle, that proposes that all children will be educated together regardless of SEN or disability, is founded in the ideas of equality and equity of entitlement. These ideas are themselves embedded in notions of individual rights and, as such, are difficult to argue against in a fair and equitable democratic society.

However, the practical implications of such a principle are far reaching and have huge implications for the teachers themselves (Ben-Yehuda, Leyser and Last, 2010). The education system, still largely modelled on an outdated Victorian style of education, struggles already to achieve basic expectations of numeracy and literacy. Including SEN students to these classrooms to add further pressure to the teachers has been met with some debate. There is widespread support for inclusion at the philosophical level (Rouse, 2008) but there are suggestions that inclusion is problematic to implement because teachers are not sufficiently prepared or supported to work in inclusive ways (Rouse, 2008). Other factors of concern by teachers include teachers' efficacy to instruct, a possible negative impact on peers, behaviour problems and a lack of time and resources (Ben-Yehuda, Leyser and Last, 2010).

Research on teachers' attitudes to inclusion has shown that teachers are strongly influenced by the nature and severity of the disability presented to them, that is child-related variables, and less by teacher-related variables (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Other factors such as availability of resources both human and physical, strongly correlated with attitudes to inclusion (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Research appears to reflect the concerns teachers have about teaching severely disabled students and resourcing. These concerns mask deeper issues over methodologies, pedagogies and lack of training to adequately teach more severe categories of SEN (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002).

There are training implications for both appropriate inclusive practices and pedagogies if the policy of inclusion is to be successfully implemented. Where teachers are untrained in inclusive practices and are unclear over appropriate pedagogies then likelihood is that teachers will not enthuse over inclusion even if they agree with it in principle.

Research shows that where teachers have not participated in inclusive programmes, they had strong, negative views towards inclusion and felt that decision-makers were 'out of touch' with the realities of teaching (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). They listed a range of factors which were considered to affect the success of inclusion; lack of adequate teacher preparation, inadequate resources, class size and the extent to which all students would benefit from inclusion (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002).

However, the opposite attitude was found where teachers had 'active' experience of inclusion. The teachers' attitudes changed at the end of the implementation period when mastery of the required professional skills had been achieved (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Other research found that student teachers, on placement in a special school, *'while continuing to value inclusion from a human rights perspective, also seemed to become more convinced, during their placements, of the contribution that specialist settings can make – and less confident that inclusion can be made to work effectively, given the current systems of teacher education and school organisation,'* (Lambe and Bones, 2008).

Ben-Yehuda, Leyser and Last's (2010) research identified characteristics of teachers that were successful in social mainstreaming of SEN students which include the teacher's strong belief in inclusion, their interest and communication in the student's home background, teachers showed teamwork and collaboration with special needs teachers and teachers having the personal characteristics of sensitivity and giving.

Training remains a central issue. There is a lack of courses that translate the very academic curriculum for PMLD (Jones, 2010). Corbett (2001) and Jones (2010) promote the idea of a connective pedagogy where the needs of the learner meet the needs of the curriculum through meaningful learning experiences. Successful inclusion requires that teachers are

confident to engage in an inclusive pedagogy, '*...one which connects with the learner in their own way of learning and that then can connect them into the curriculum and the wider community.*' (Corbett and Norwich, 1999, in Corbett, 2001).

Corbett (2001) states that successful inclusion requires an inclusive educational culture and raises whether existing educational structures support inclusion. She stresses the need for enthusiastic leadership, skilled senior teachers, a receptive culture to new skills and students that are listened to (Corbett, 2001). Jones' (2005) research included the students' voice which found that the students wanted to be included, but behaviour management was seen as vital to prevent an impact on feelings of well-being and self-worth. The teacher was needed to manage activities in a skilled and sensitive way.

There is an underlying tension among teachers that recognise the philosophical value in the inclusion policy which is tinged with the very real practical problems of training, resourcing and supporting. Trainee teachers see the value in special school provision and the government acknowledge alternative provision may be necessary for some students.

### **2.95 Abuse Of The Vulnerable: Significant Factors – Autonomy, Power And Personal Morality**

The recent (2007) case of Fiona and Francesca Pilkington provides a chilling reminder that society still has the problem of people that are perceived to be weak or vulnerable may also be fair game for bullying or abuse (Capewell, Ralph and Bonnett, 2015).

Our schools, hospitals and other public institutions are attended by the weak and vulnerable and potentially create environments conducive to predatory bullying by adults or peers. Historically, institutions have attracted abusers and the vulnerable have been exploited and abused at the hands of cunning, devious predators and their cases reach headline news on a

frequent basis. In modern times schools have increased protection through the introduction of layers of formal systems and procedures. Any persons wishing to gain access to children must undergo CRB checks and sign prescriptive school policies detailing appropriate conduct, ethos and cultural values to be adopted and adhered to. Furthermore, the Labour government published 'Safe to Learn' materials (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008, in Purdy and McGuckin, 2015) which outlined legal duties for schools in relation to bullying incidents involving students with SEN and disabilities.

Teachers and their support staff are in a position of trust, authority and power over the children in their care and are entrusted to conduct themselves professionally, responsibly and in loco parentis. Teaching is a moral undertaking (Falkenberg, 2009) and combined with this, teachers have power. Kearney (1987) identifies five strands that teachers tend to use in their interactions with students. He suggests that the power is not inherent in the role, but needs to be strategically communicated through the five strands in order to be perceived to be influential (Kearney, 1987).

Where special school students have typically 'failed' in educational terms, their self-esteem is often low. Parsons (1981) suggests that teacher power can be a vehicle for building up self-esteem in pupils. Teacher power can easily be misused and cause emotional distress and hurt.

Parsons (1981) makes an important observation regarding the relationship teachers have with their students: *"Interactions between teachers and their students are powerful, more powerful than many teachers believe. Within this power lies the opportunity for building a student's self-esteem – or the opportunity for tearing it down."* (Parsons, 1981, p.24)

Interactions with teachers can leave embedded memories of good or bad and shaping us as people of the future. We remember teachers for how they treated us more than what they taught us (Carr, 2007). *"We may remember the bullying and humiliation of Mr X long after we have forgotten his teachings on the Napoleonic wars, or the sympathy and patience of Ms Y despite the fact her hockey practices are no longer of much relevance to our lives."* (Carr, 2007, p.369).

Gartrell and Gartrell (2008) describe bullying: *"Bullying often has to do with inflicting aggression on another in order to establish a perceived place of prestige by lowering the social status of the other."* (Gartrell and Gartrell, 2008, p.54). When working with vulnerable students, there is a severe power imbalance inherent in the relationship. Arguably, there is no 'need' to bully a student as there is no social competition.

Bullying behaviours are described as persistent, offensive, malicious, intimidating and insulting behaviour; abuse of power; or unfair penal sanctions (McAvoy and Murtagh, 2003). Power features in Jacobsen and Bauman's (2007) three elements of bullying; intended to harm, must be repetitive and a social or physical power differential. Victims of bullying can suffer a range of health problems including lower levels of psychological well-being, poor social adjustment, psychological distress and physical symptoms (Rigby, 1996, in Jacobsen and Bauman, 2007). Other problems may be suicidal feelings, lowered self-esteem, social isolation and depression (Jacobsen and Bauman, 2007). Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, and Hymel (2010) list victimization of bullying to be linked to illness, poor academic performance, increased fear and anxiety, and long term internalising difficulties including low self-esteem, anxiety and depression (Swearer et al, 2010, p38).

It is known that victims of bullying often become bullies themselves. To break this cycle, McAvoy and Murtagh (2003) suggest role modelling, leading by example to establish a morality of care for others. The role of a bully has an alpha male quality which presents as an appealing image for peers; they are seen as strong, powerful, a leader and popular (Swearer et al, 2010). In this sense, if adults engage in bullying, they may be trying to achieve a higher social standing which, in their perception, is achievable through mistreating disabled students.

Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale (1999) warn against institutions creating a climate for abuse. Factors include unchecked male power, weak, arms-length regulation, poorly trained staff and an ethical care and profit conflict. Poor training can combine with lay models of care, poorly paid staff and a fear of the management, giving opportunities for abuse through the culturally poor standards generated by the factors coming together. Olweus (1978, in Crozier, 1997) offers characteristics of bullies as being bad tempered, irritable, intense and having less controlled aggression, a positive attitude to violence and low self-esteem. It would be expected that characteristics such as these would prevent employment in caring professions.

### **2.96 Chapter Summary**

This chapter aimed to review some of the key points and issues within the literature relating to this research study. The role of the special school teacher is predominantly caring (O'Connor, 2008) and requires specialist training, though little is available as pre-service instruction. Special school teachers see themselves as different to their mainstream colleagues (Jones, 2004). Society has moved a long way in developing positive attitudes to disability and SEN students, and the specialised curriculum reflects this. Recent developments in equal rights has supported an international movement towards implementing the principle of inclusion though there is debate about whether full inclusion can work using the existing educational system due to the training and resourcing implications. Despite recent attempts to increase safety

from predators, abuse and bullying of the most vulnerable in society continues to occur and remains a deeply seated concern for schools and the broader society.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

#### **3.1.1 Overview**

Special education professionals work with highly vulnerable members of the community aging from 3-19 years. The responsibility of the organisation and the individual to provide appropriate care and educational experiences is great. The demands to simultaneously tailor multiple educational programmes to meet a wide range of individual needs and accommodate their emotional, medical and physical needs, is both challenging and rewarding and requires dedication and an intimate knowledge of the students and their needs. Special education teachers traverse a professional path balancing resources, time and energy in an effort to meet these unique educational challenges.

Special education teachers often have teams of support staff and low class numbers to facilitate higher quality care. In addition to this, special educationalists experience greater autonomy over curriculum coverage, rates of expected progress (set against national expectations) and flexibility in their timetabled commitments, than their mainstream colleagues. This given autonomy and freedom from the examination culture, arguably creates a 'relaxed' educational environment which facilitates a none-pressured, caring, pleasant atmosphere across the school; an environment in which the staff and the students can thrive.

Teachers and staff working in this profession strive to experience the caring, personal, intimate role necessary to fulfil their professional duties with so many diverse individual circumstances; balancing educational provision with unique combinations of physical, personal, medical and emotional needs.

I consider the work of a special needs teacher to be a unique combination of student vulnerability, intimate needs and educational provision. Jones' (2004) research shows that special education teachers perceive themselves to be different to their mainstream counterparts for a number of reasons. Reasons include being on a personal mission, personal life commitment, personal specialism, high moral value etc. (Jones, 2004)

However, there continues to be a steady stream of press releases both at home and abroad; news items that put special school into scandal as reports continue over allegations of special school students being mistreated, abused, neglected or humiliated. (Pring, 2014; Fielding, 2013; Osborne, 2011; Davis, 2009; "Police Probe," 2012; American Civil Liberties, 2015; Dean, 2014; Schwartz, 2009; Stephens & Villano, 2015). In addition to this, publications by authors such as Richard Stripp (2011) provide harrowing accounts of special needs children's unpleasant experiences in the hands of professional educators.

Further to this, the history of special education has a 'dark and sinister' past tarnished with outdated ideas, attitudes and practices to disability (Winzer, 1993; Armstrong, 2003). In the recent past, claims have been made that special school provision is too often used as a dumping ground', (Winzer, 1993, p.370).

Moreover, special schools have been, for some professionals, a place of refuge when the very high demands of the mainstream model have proven too much for individuals and a move to special school is, professionally, an alternative to leaving the profession. Arguably this move (from mainstream to special education) may also prove to be a soft teaching option for unscrupulous teachers or those that expect that looking after vulnerable and disabled children will place less professional demands upon them.

At the outset, this research originally intended to explore the experiences and culture of a special school through observation of colleagues whilst they contributed to the implementation of curriculum change. The research was expected to probe deeply into the expected benevolent nature of special school teachers and explore how their autonomy and freedoms (from mainstream constraints such as the National Curriculum and the target-driven, exam culture), their personal teacher identity and the power relations in school combine to create the special school teachers' role and contribute to the school culture.

The original design had been an ethnographic study, utilising my privileged position as a member of staff well positioned to observe colleagues. However, as the narrative of the research unfolded, the research design was modified to narrative inquiry (discussed in this chapter) using an autobiographical perspective.

In its final form, the research has two main purposes:

1. to explore the lived experiences of the special school teaching role and thus facilitate a deeper understanding of the role of a special school teacher where little research exists.
2. to examine and give meaning to the lived experiences of the special school teacher in the light of personal morality, teacher identity and professional autonomy.

The study had five main research questions:

1. What meanings can be drawn from storied personal experiences as a special school teacher?
2. To what extent do factors such as autonomy, teacher identity, morality and power interact with and influence the role of the special school teacher?

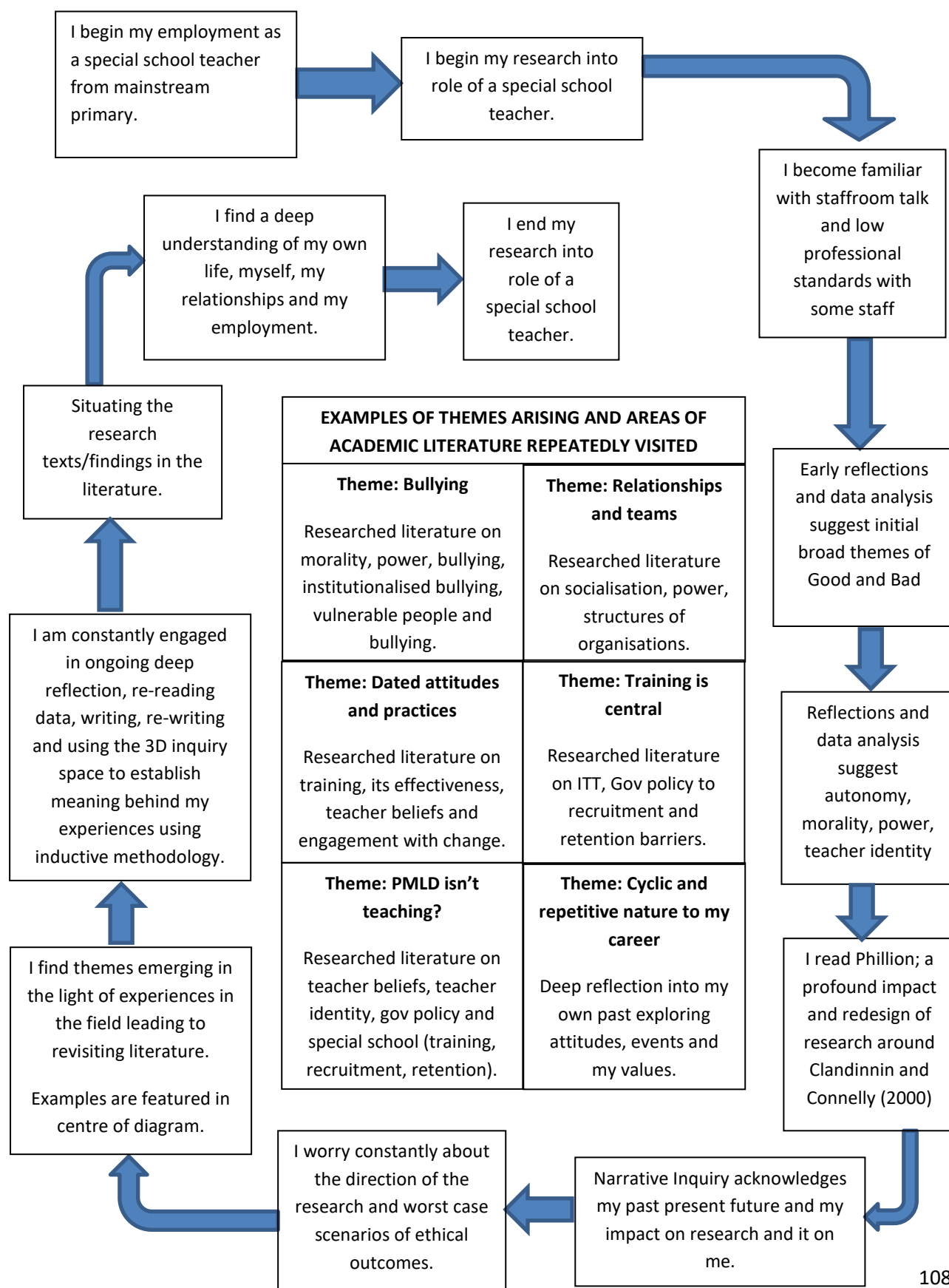
3. To what extent is professional practice influenced and shaped by past and present storied experiences?
4. How do factors such as teacher identity and personal morality shape my stories to live by?
5. How do sacred stories of school, familial stories to live by and personal histories influence emergent teacher identity and professional practice?

The research charts my own personal journey in the role of a special school teacher in an attempt to deepen the understanding of this complex role in a highly individualised context.

Within this section, I will discuss the research design and explain how it evolved into its final form, justifying my choice as the only method for this particular research study.

### 3.12 Research Design In Practice

#### 3.12.1 (Fig.7) Diagrammatic Representation Charting The 'Messy' Nature Of The Research Journey



### **3.12.2 My Research Journey**

The design was originally intended to be an observational ethnographic study of colleagues using their autonomy and moral integrity to provide curricular enrichment within a more personalised bespoke curriculum. The study was to probe deeply into the utopian, morally worthy teaching practices of the benevolent teacher teams in their caring role with the vulnerable special needs students. In essence, the study intended to deeply explore the 'grand narrative' of special school teaching. My ideas were based upon my very limited experience of special school practices and my naïve expectations.

As time passed, I became aware that I was inwardly reacting quite negatively to some staff room anecdotes and felt uncomfortable to think these 'stories' might be true. Further sensitivity led me to recognise that amongst all of the very good work that clearly exists, that there may be some less professional practice hidden from obvious view. This idea concerned me and I reflected endlessly.

In order to explore a dimension that I hadn't even considered, I looked into the literature. Further researching of recent media reports, historical and academic articles relating to special education portrayed a very different picture of special school education to my own grand narrative of special education.

Historically, special schools have been given status that corresponds with the social attitudes of the time towards disability (Armstrong, 2003). Typically, this has been out of sight, geographically hidden out of view, reflecting the social disdain for mental handicap and disability. The use of remote mansions, with its shroud of seclusion and isolation created a notion that disability was to be hidden from the remainder of society.

Ironically, the idea of care in these old, isolated buildings is now used in modern horror movies as a metaphor for dark practices, torture and/or lost souls seeking revenge on their abusers (Wrong Turn 4, 2011; Amityville Asylum, 2013; The Orphanage, 2006). Arguably, the hidden nature of the early provision for special education has engendered a sense of fear and mistrust in the public.

In current media articles there is a generous supply of abuse accusations in the British press relating to both British schools and international equivalents in countries such as Australia, Canada and America. In addition to this there is statistical evidence illustrating that students with disabilities are more likely to be victim of abuse than students without disabilities (American Civil Liberties, 2015; Davis, 2009; Dean, 2014).

The Winterbourne View case in Bristol 2011, illustrated that caring for the learning disabled offered opportunities for systematic abuse and serial procedural failings led to scandal; five staff jailed and 5 with suspended sentences. Inappropriate in-patient placements were to be reduced as a direct result (Café , 2012).

Notorious cases exist involving celebrity figures such as Jimmy Savile and Cyril Smith (both knighted by the Queen). Evidence exists of abuse at Cambridge House, a residential care home during the 1960s, then later at Knowle View, in Rochdale, during the 1980s and 1990s; a residential special school for boys with learning difficulties and behaviour problems. Other cases, in more modern settings, such as in The Lady Jane Franklin School in Spilsby, in 2012, then three further schools reported accusations in 2014; Springwood Primary School in Salford, Kingspark in Dundee and two other schools in Wigan, one a special school and the other a mainstream primary. Other reports by the Disability News Service (DNS) detailed concerns over practices in 5 other schools ("Police Probe", 2012; Pring, 2014; Fielding, 2013).

Blog conversations on the subject complain of special school teachers 'getting away with it' portraying a world of closed ranks, little or no accountability and parents that are unable to break down the walls of a profession keeping any moral or professional transgressions within (Schwartz, 2009).

Academic writings relate and analyse notorious cases of special school abuse from recent history (Winzer, 2003; Sobsey, 1994; Armstrong, 2007; Stripp, 2011; Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale, 1999; Keenan, 2012) and provide factors which facilitate abusive situations (Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale, 1999, p.205; Miller and Brown, 2014; Sobsey, 1994, p.102-9; Quarmby, 2011).

The findings within the broad variety of literature serves to illustrate that the original ethnographic research design may not be the most appropriate methodology to reveal any potential hidden practices, hidden morality, subcultures or private worlds that may exist in a modern special school setting. In order to address my growing anxieties regarding my misgivings (that perhaps my utopian ideas were misplaced), it required that I reconsider my thesis position.

My deliberations asked searching questions; I considered that perhaps we, as a society, have a problem with our weakest and most vulnerable. Are we prone to preying upon the weakest in society? Is it inherent in our make up? I felt it begged two key questions: 1. Does special education attract a particular kind of teacher? 2. Is bullying weaker or less fortunate people in our society culturally expected or acceptable? (Quarmby, 2011).

I tentatively considered a trivial example from the media; 'You Have Been Framed'; a popular show encouraging us to laugh at those people experiencing misfortune. I considered



‘Undateables’; a popular show giving an insight into the plight of special people(unfortunate) trying to date, arguably trying to encourage us as a society to have increased empathy, or is it morbidly voyeuristic into unfortunate people’s lives? Originally a point of social curiosity, the circus sideshows of the 19th century famously exhibited examples of human deformity such as Joseph Merrick, the Elephant Man (Quarmby, 2011, p.49). By the late 1800s, the displaying of such human curiosities was beginning to be viewed as distasteful.

Considering my own professional experiences, I began to reflect deeply about the comparisons I could make between mainstream and special school. I considered my previous experiences at mainstream and thought about professional colleagues and their professional conduct, then compared present colleagues to past in searching for an obvious explanation for my concerns over hidden un-professionalisms.

My thoughts led me to the idea that it must be something to do with four key areas of the role; professional autonomy, personal morality, teacher identity and the locus of power within the organisation. At the point of considering my initial ideas, I reflected deeply about myself and how these dimensions play a part of my practice as a professional in my special educator’s role but also in my previous mainstream role. These thoughts coincided with my reading two highly influential texts; Phillion (2002a) *Narrative Multiculturalism* and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) *Narrative Inquiry*.

At this point, I read the work of Phillion (2002a, 2000b, 2000c) and found the work to be helpful in resolving some of my design issues but also in modifying my approach to the research study. Phillion influenced my thoughts and her experiences were a valuable lesson for me to consider in the early stages of my research journey. Phillion experienced similar frustrations with her work. Her secure preconceived ideas about the research, ‘trapped within

the literature' of Miss Multiculturalism, didn't represent her findings in the field. The teacher under study didn't fit with the theory, school policy or Phillion's ideas about what a multicultural teacher is. I felt considerable allegiance to Phillion upon reading her work and considered my own position. I considered my own preconceptions about special school teachers being compromised by my initial research findings. My question was, 'What did she do?'

I reflected upon the profile of a special school teacher (which I felt didn't match with my teacher identity) that I never really questioned. I, like Phillion, felt I could list the traits, qualities and characteristics of people that work in the special education profession. Phillion focussed upon a narrative inquiry perspective and methodology and used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative thinking which relied upon inductively exploring relationships through constant reflection and being in the midst of lives (Phillion, 2002a). Phillion also found that the use of theory was little support in understanding the practices of the participants. Even eclectically, the theories did not fully account for, or explain the observations.

Phillion's work prompted a deep interest in my own perceptions and interactions with my special school. Questions began to emerge about my own career and how it has been shaped. I began to view my teaching career in a very different way as I started to contextualise the key moments, the twists and turns, epifonal moments and crossroads. I read a number of books relating to narrative research but Clandinin and Connelly (2000) had a huge impact upon me.

Upon reading *Narrative Inquiry* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), I felt very passionately that I had discovered the answers to my research design. The nature of the research methodology and analysis techniques appeared to sit with me most comfortably and provided thorough answers to all of my methodological issues.

The methodology stresses how important it is that the researcher knows themselves (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and this resonated very deeply with me as this was exactly where I was in my thinking and my reflections. With my enthusiasm rekindled, I wanted to re-align my research, maintaining the key ideas and concepts.

My reflections upon my ethnographic stance became that observation and description of the school was too limited a method to address the potential research data which would portray the 'reality' of the world of the special education teaching role. I became concerned that if the research methodology were to remain as ethnographic, my research may simply reinforce the traditional stereotypes by providing a rich description of what is obviously on show as best practice.

I considered my original ethnographic position and considered various scenarios whereby my research would uncover unethical practices of professional colleagues and friends and considered the professional and personal consequences of such research. I considered returning to the headteacher to suggest the scenarios and gauge her response, but after further reflection, I felt morally, ethically, professionally and personally that I would be creating a monster far bigger than I could control. Clandinin and Connelly refer to issues such as these as tensions at the boundaries when the researcher's thinking begins to overlap with formalistic or reductionist thinking (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In my reflections, I could feel considerable growing tensions. I could foresee my research, with sincere and innocent intentions, resulting in the form of an undercover, whistle-blowing role, in contrast to more formal inquiry outcomes. They point out that these tensions are 'important and noticeable at the beginning stages of an inquiry' and 'are mostly lost from sight while in the field.' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.140)

Arguably, I could have ignored any unprofessionalism, but as a person who defines himself as a person who cannot tolerate any forms of bullying, I would have felt complicit and so morally equal to the person responsible. This would have preyed upon my conscience and I would need to address the issue.

By now, I was, in any case, very interested in my own story and my own personal journey to special education as a function of my own past experiences, my current professional experiences and my personal and professional identity. I felt very excited at the prospect of my research making discoveries of myself as well as my professional role. I felt 'tingly' that I may uncover a deep understanding about my life as a journey which culminated, by accident (?), in my becoming a teacher; a personally complex journey of failure, missed opportunities, unfulfilled potential, reinvention and self-justification. I continually reflected, trying to formulate connections between my past events and subsequent paths followed, to see if I could predict any merit in the change to narrative inquiry.

I finally concluded that the personal value to a narrative approach was not in doubt, however, would my story be of any value to the academic and teaching communities? To address this, I reflected upon the ethnographic positioning and the narrative inquiry methodology and compared them in terms of my research intentions. In addition to this, I continued reading various academic's work upon the value of stories in research (Clandinin, Steeves and Caine, 2013).

Acknowledging various criticisms of narrative inquiry as being 'overly personal' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.181) and 'just recording stories' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.72) and being not scientific, there are copious powerful arguments *for* using narrative inquiry. These arguments are predominantly based upon ideas such as people being storying creatures, living

narratives and that we learn from each other's experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, in Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Clandinin and Connelly, 1989; Sikes and Gale, 2006; Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2008; Trahar, 2009; Lyle, 2009). Reissman (1993) describes the 'narrative turn' in social sciences and acknowledges the emerging significance of narrative research across a range of disciplines.

I felt that the research itself would benefit if I was excited and passionately engaged with it as my choice. I decided to re-frame my research as an autobiographical study, encompassing my deep interest in how my own narrative history connects with and shapes my professional experiences. I considered that focussing upon my own experiences as a special education teacher would give deep insights into the relationships between my professional role and my identity, morality and my autonomy. An added dimension to this revised research perspective is that I am an ex-mainstream teacher recently starting special school teaching without any specific training in special education.

I made the decision to copy Clandinin and Connelly's research methodology and analysis techniques detailed in their book *Narrative Inquiry* (2000). This change demanded a research focus upon recording my own research experiences as an ongoing narrative and using this as data for the research (Reissman, 1993; Webster and Mertova, 2007).

In reflection of the changes and the shifting of the nature and angle of the inquiry, I took great comfort from Clandinin and Connelly's comments: *"Narrative Inquiry carries more of a sense of continual reformulation of an inquiry than it does a sense of problem definition and solution. As we think about the phenomena in a narrative inquiry, we think about responding to the questions: What is your narrative inquiry about? Or what is the experience of interest to you as a narrative inquirer?"* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.124)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that narrative inquiry is about understanding and making meaning from experiences and they believe it is the best way to think about experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). After much reflection and deliberation about all aspects of my study, I felt they are correct.

### **3.12.3 The Researcher's Context, Role, Values And Beliefs**

I approach this research as a man who missed out on education as a teenager due to family difficulties and so trained as a teacher during my twenties. I attended university as a mature student and parent of three children under five years old. I worked in primary KS2, nearly always Year 6, for 12 years prior to becoming disillusioned at what my job was becoming. After leaving mainstream, I drifted via supply work into special education. My role was to use my primary training to deliver the KS3 secondary curriculum as a watered down version at a KS2 level.

I see myself as a people person. My notions of good management of a school would be to look after the staff and they will deliver for the children; High levels of morale, support and appreciation, but high expectations too. I enjoy being seen to do good deeds. Like many others, I have a dislike of arrogance and especially any forms of bullying. My teaching philosophy has always been built around my relationship with my students. I work hard to foster close, trusting bonds with my classes so they feel safe to laugh, experiment and get things wrong without fear of humiliation. I try to engender a group or team ethos so that my class identify as a group that supports each other.

As a practicing special school teacher who spent 12 years in mainstream primary classes, my views and teaching beliefs are predominantly shaped by my initial teaching experiences (Jones, 2004) in north eastern mainstream classrooms of the late 1990s. I hold clear views about

‘good’ teaching and centre my teaching philosophy on strong, positive relationships, respect and trust.

Interestingly, even after eight years in a special school, my teacher identity relates to mainstream more than special school. This contradicts the findings of Jones (2004) where PMLD teachers’ strong social identity defined them as different from their mainstream counterparts. This finding may be, in part, a consequence of the reported high quality training they received which I have not. However, on self-scrutiny, in the light of Jones’ work, I have, after seven years, clearly failed to engage with the strong social identity of the special needs teacher. Despite this, I recognise that I am considered by mainstream colleagues to be a SEN teacher. I was trained to teach mainstream, but have learned by experience to teach in special school. I prefer to see myself as holding good to the teaching practices and values that served me so well during my mainstream career; working hard for the children, having positive relations that I worked at relentlessly, being well-planned and prepared, and continuously empathetic to the children’s experiences in my classroom. With this in mind, I do not fully engage with the idea that I am a special school teacher. Without any SEN training or qualifications, I harbour private thoughts of ‘playing’ at it, relying heavily upon the experience of the support staff for many of the more challenging or complex students’ needs to be met.

I predicted that colleagues would expect that I would, as a practicing special school teacher, bring empathy and understanding to my research. However, due to my teacher identity harbouring allegiances away from special school, I began to feel partly fraudulent in my role of insider researcher; that deep within myself, at the outset of the research, I didn’t feel empathy and understanding for my colleagues at all. However, my attitudes and beliefs were to be opened up through the research journey.

### **3.12.4 My Morality**

My beliefs regarding pedagogy and curriculum were not always shared by my colleagues. Despite the widely held notion that teachers of vulnerable students are guided by strict moral and policy guidelines, during the research, I found that my colleagues stated motivations were sometimes not in line with school ethos or policy and also, in my view, not necessarily in the best interest of the student or students in question. This led to considerable self-analysis and constant deep reflections at every stage of the research. I reflected as to whether this was the mainstream dimension of my teacher identity affecting my understanding of my special school experiences.

This research found a contingent of educational professionals that held a private morality in contrast to my own. In keeping with this alternate morality, I found attitudes which placed the children firmly in the position of being the naughty aggressor; defiant, unwieldy, out of control and clearly anti-social. The response being that the aggressor 'needs to be controlled, held down if necessary, by as many staff as may be necessary, made to submit, comply and conform to the requests made upon them'. This ideology appeared to require holds and 'moves' to ensure that the student would always be overpowered should the need arise. I consider this approach outdated, better suited to scenes from old movies, yet the 'holds' mentality still exists today. The use of Pin Down (Winzer, 1993) was willingly applied by the staff as a measure of control of difficult students, partly due to the attitudes of the day, the culture within the organisation and the nature of the leadership. By contrast, my moral compass states that when a child is in crisis, emotionally or otherwise, they should not be forced into submission in order to 'sort out' their problems. Clearly this 'holds mentality' sees the behaviour as the problem and not the underlying causes of the behaviour. Some staff conversations have aired requests for the training of more holds in order that staff is better equipped to deal with the unrulier students. These entrenched and dated attitudes toward



disabled and impaired children may be linked to our long standing cultural disdain for the disabled (Sobsey, 1994; Quarmby, 2011).

The study school does use holds in extreme cases under extremely strict guidelines and training. When discussing the Team Teach techniques adopted by the school, the same staff members appear to use their stories to engender a macho self-image of conquest in 'trying' circumstances. Clearly, the values and morality that I considered to be normal for this profession could not, I felt, be taken for granted.

I needed to proceed with extreme caution regarding the interpretation of my experiences and listen to others, talk to others and constantly reflect upon my position within the phenomenon under scrutiny (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007). In addition to this, I felt I needed to relinquish my fixed ideas about both special education and educational research methods and think more openly and flexibly in both areas (Phillion, 2002a).

My research became a narrative inquiry focussing upon gathering data as personal autobiographical writings. I considered that it offered a much more intimate connection with the data and the research as a whole. However, the change to narrative would also present considerable complexities and dilemmas in the form of simultaneously engaging in 'living, telling, retelling and reliving stories'. (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000)

### **3.13 Charismatic Heads, Teachers And Teaching Assistants**

There are many issues surrounding a job which is so dependent on people skills. Interpersonal cooperation is essential for the smooth running of the care and education provided. Often teams change and recombine for different lessons many times each day so flexibility, adaptability and team skills are vital. However, over time, personalities emerge and

hierarchies develop within the differing combinations of staff as natural leaders take over, possibly ignoring the formal hierarchy in place.

Charisma is often considered a useful trait for teachers. It is commonly defined as ‘a rare personal quality which enables people (leaders) to influence others or attract their attention or admiration’ (Dictionary, 1995).

Charismatic staff at any level can present as a significant problem. A strong personality or even positional power gives status and authority over another to instruct and demand of the subordinate. I have previously experienced a charismatic teaching assistant, overpowering the teacher and dominating the lesson, its content, organisation and remaining staff within the team, as well as intimidating the students themselves. The special school culture in the research study is that of everyone is trusted to be good and kind, and people are expected to buy into the greater ethos of the school. With little supervision of such personalities, and where abrasive personalities are considered assertive rather than bullying, there can be a culture where strong personalities are allowed to easily dominate the weaker ones (Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale, 1999).

Furthermore, when the naturally big personalities combine with strong personal confidence, and there is a lack of competition for ‘top dog’ status, then combine it with strong positional power, there is a potential cocktail for the intimidation of weaker staff, bullying and rogue professionals to thrive. (There are anecdotes of staff that have gone to management in the past and have made things worse by doing so.) Also, there are issues regarding staff members that do not trust the management to do anything about bullies. Key characteristics of bullies are offered in a range of forms by Crozier (Crozier, 1997).

Head-strong, bullish staff can be useful when they fit with and complement the team around them, however, they may allow themselves to dominate weaker staff and there becomes a risk of bullying or at least disrupting the team and/or being disrespectful to colleagues. If left to continue, individuals' stress, left unabated, can lead to physical and mental health injuries (McAvoy and Murtagh, 2003). It seems ironic to discuss able staff bullying each other when the wider picture is that of the same staff protecting vulnerable children from the same treatment.

### **3.2 Selection Procedures**

The purpose of qualitative research is regarded as, *'...researching things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them.'* (Moen, 2006, p.5) This implies that the localised meanings of actions, as defined by the actors' view, are essential to understanding (Erickson, 1986, in Moen, 2006). This gives rise to the importance, in narrative research, of the concept of 'voices' in narrative research (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000). The narratives are influenced by the knowledge, values, experiences and feelings of the persons telling them (Elbaz-Luwisch and Pritzker, 2002) and so, in describing the setting, the location and participants, the research context is established and insight is given to the research voices.

#### **3.21 Setting Of The Research**

The purpose of this study was to examine and give meaning to my own experiences in the role as a special school teacher. There are, geographically, a small number of special schools within the local borough which I have good links with. Prior to any approaches to these schools, the opportunity presented itself to conduct the research in my own school. This informal offer by the headteacher opened up an opportunity that I was keen to follow up.

As part of the process, as the researcher, I met with the headteacher to establish the viability of such a research project. Subsequent meetings were held with groups of staff that were likely to be involved to establish an initial informal consent and approval. As a result of these meetings and previous reflections, the researcher's school was confirmed as the location for the study.

The school is given the alias Yew Tree Gardens (YTG) for this research. In the next section, I outline the contextual details relating to the school in which the research takes place. I give a brief description of the history and structure of the school, its mission statement and policies on teaching and learning.

### **3.22 The School In This Study**

Yew Tree Gardens (YTG) is situated in a village setting in the north of England. It was built in the late 1950s and has, over the last 10-15 years, had a number of extensions and improvements to the original building. The original building struggles with narrow corridors and small enclosed classrooms which make access restrictive for less ambulant students. The building was near to a rebuild under the recent Building Schools for the Future (BSF) plans but plans were halted under the new government.

YTG is a special school catering for students from age 3-19 years old and a range of special needs including PMLD, SLD, MLD, ASD, Down syndrome and CLDD. Many of the students have increasingly complex medical conditions. All of the students have a statement of Special Educational Needs.

The school has 130 students and a staff of 110. The staff comprise of 15 teachers, 75 full and part-time teaching assistants and the school benefits from a school nurse, physiotherapist and

councillor. Other agencies have close working links with the school such as a school nurse, physiotherapist and a Speech and Language Service.

The students are taught across four departments comprising EYFS, Primary, Secondary and Post-16 (FE). Non-ambulant, non-communicative PMLD students have their own class delivering a personalised sensory curriculum.

Across the school, there are 12 classes with mixed SEN students and teachers differentiate the curriculum within classes to meet the individual needs of the students through a personalised curriculum. The teachers are generally supported with a team of two or three teaching assistants.

Recent OFSTED reports have found the school to be Good with Outstanding features.

### **3.23 The Participants In This Study**

The autobiographical nature of the study focuses the research predominantly upon me as the researcher and participant under 'observation'. After the headteacher gave the initial consent for research to take place, discussions were held informally with the teaching staff and assistants. This meeting enabled initial questions to be asked and answers given regarding the focus for the study and the purposes of the research. Initial responses by colleagues were very supportive and favourable from nearly all members of the Secondary and FE departments. After these discussions with colleagues, the process of formalising the research began.

### **3.24 Informed Consent And Permission**

Research involving vulnerable children and young adults and professional educators require significant consideration to appropriate ethical procedures and conduct. Bryman (2001),

Denzin and Lincoln (2003), Silverman (2006) and Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2007) recommend that ethics linked to informed consent rests upon guiding principles such as transparency of purpose, full understanding of agreement, willing consent and the right to withdraw. Procedures for obtaining informed consent were followed in line with the university's doctoral ethics committee. The forms were developed within the guidelines of the principles and the study was approved by the university's ethics committee.

### **3.25 Assurance Of Confidentiality**

Procedures throughout this study aimed to protect the identity of the participants and confidentiality of their professional positions and reputations but also to maintain the security of the data obtained (Williams, 2003).

All of the data obtained was kept in a secure location at the researcher's home. All writings, journals and interview data were transcribed into a digital format and stored within a secure location on the researcher's home computer and backup copies on disc stored securely within the researcher's home filing system. As part of the measures to ensure anonymity the school and participants were allocated pseudonyms.

In educational settings, personal experience and discussions with colleagues, indicates that often, the use of observation can illicit feelings of vulnerability or insecurity in the teacher or teaching staff. Considering this, great care was taken to respond sensitively and empathetically to all members of staff and the data gathered relating to them.

The relationships and dialogue between the researcher and the participants was key in maintaining the validity of the data. The reflective discussions with colleagues ensured that the data recorded was in part reflexive and triangulated by other views and opinions.

In addition to the on-going reflective discussions with key colleagues, in order to further enhance the rigour and credibility of the data, the interviewees were offered opportunities to proof read the transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the records and censor any of the interviews.

### **3.26 Gaining Access And Entry**

The good professional standing and excellent relations with teaching staff and the leadership team ensured the study was permitted at the researcher's own special school. The gatekeepers in the form of the senior management, (the soon to be departing headteacher, and incumbent in the form of the deputy head), were keen for the research to take place there and were fully supportive of its aims. On a personal level, they were keen to support my own professional and academic development.

Prior to the research commencing, it became apparent that maintaining relationships with key colleagues would be crucial throughout the research in order to maintain research rigour and credibility, positive reciprocity, reasonable access to information and ensuring successful implementation of the research itself. Should relations become tarnished or strained, my professional reputation as teacher and researcher would be compromised as well as the aforementioned negative impacts upon the research itself.

As the researcher, I consulted with the headteacher on two occasions to establish the detail of the research. Initial concerns were expressed relating to teacher and student anonymity and the aims of the research. After the meetings, the concerns were addressed, the headteacher being fully informed and satisfied of the integrity and rigour of the research design, methodology and purpose. As the nature of the research evolved, I engaged in further meetings to ensure the continued support of the study.

### **3.27 Ethical Dilemmas Pertinent To This Research**

Despite the research study having a clear rationale and no initial ethical complications, this research study quickly became steeped in ethical and moral quandaries which caused a significant amount of concern, worry, as well as deep, ongoing reflection and consternation. Despite the warnings by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), as an inexperienced narrative inquirer, at the time, I had no appreciation, yet, of the significance and relevance of their wisdom.

During the course of this research journey, my personal perspective of the ethics in research moved considerably and my understanding and appreciation of ethics as a key element in research increased significantly. There follows a description and brief discussion of the significant, and sometimes on-going dilemmas:

1. My first ethical dilemma centred on the stories that were mentioned 'playfully' in the staffroom. I felt that they were, at first, joking or probably embellished for the sake of humour. I became increasingly aware of these anecdotes very early in the research journey. The stories and remarks made me feel uncomfortable and I didn't feel that they were at all funny. I was, at this time in the research journey, adopting three roles simultaneously; researcher, colleague, professional teacher and a fourth role as parent with a moral compass which infuses with each of the other three. As a researcher, I felt that these comments may be revealing a hidden, darker reality and to this notion, my researcher's curiosity was drawn. However, I also needed to appreciate that if there was a hidden layer of unprofessionalism, how would I respond? It became clear that my researcher's role would bring both privileges and quandaries.

A problem involving conflict of interests appeared to lie ahead if any negative aspects of my colleagues work were revealed. Clearly, I would not want to portray my colleagues, my school



and the vulnerable children I work with in a poor light; damaging the reputations of individual members of staff, the school in the community. I considered my ethical dilemma initially to be simply a matter of whether to continue with the research, knowing that if I did, I might surely have more difficult ethical quandaries to deal with later in the research journey. If transgressions were revealed to be 'low level', how should I react? If they were serious acts of unprofessionalism, as the staffroom joking had implied, how should I respond?

A major dilemma here was that if my research revealed serious maltreatment, my obligation to report them (under DfE safeguarding guidelines) would possibly be compromised; my loyalties to the school, the staff and my current employers would be in direct conflict with the requirement to report the incident and protect the child from abuse. The potential for these conflicts of interest presented as a very serious initial ethical concern at the very beginning of my journey.

I decided to continue with my planned research intentions, very aware that my research may be a difficult path ahead. My decision was reached as part of my very strong desire to help protect the vulnerable. I thought my research could have a positive impact in raising awareness and helping to eradicate such practices if they were real.

I had spoken to my supervisor and was reassured that nothing incriminating need appear in the final public copy of the thesis. This appeared to be a positive solution to a complicated problem.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) advise that ethical matters are NOT dealt with once and for all, as with the university forms we complete to achieve their approval. Rather they state that, *"Ethical matters shift and change as we move through an inquiry. They are never far from the*

*heart of our inquiries no matter where we are in the inquiry process,”* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.170). This guidance rang true in every sense of this research study and accurately depicts the nature of my ongoing engagement with ethical issues.

2. My ethical difficulties continued as my experiences in the field presented me with observations or comments about staff behaviours which I personally found unacceptable, but found difficult to gauge their level of unacceptability. My judgement was impaired by the new school culture, my inexperience in dealing with special students, staff around me seemingly accepting the behaviour and me operating from my instinctive internal moral compass. I consistently felt compromised as it often appeared obvious to me that my initial reaction was morally correct. However, I was mindful of Phillion’s (2002a, 2002b, 2002c) experiences in the field, which made me resist being judgemental at my first reaction.

3. I experienced further problems as I needed to ‘choose’ field texts to rewrite as research texts. At this stage of the research I am essentially creating the ‘voice’ of the research; amongst a vast array of data, I needed to choose which elements to present and decide which story to tell, to which audience and with which ‘voice’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). I could have contrived an outcome by choosing field texts which continually featured the same location and same member of staff, but realised that this would compromise his/her anonymity. I could have made other key decisions at this pivotal point in the research regarding which of the stores I would represent as research texts which had serious ethical implications. My research desire and interest was to follow up all of the maleficent incidents and present my thesis as research texts exploring only the negative behaviours but again wrestled with the ethics and obvious betrayal of my trusting colleagues. I reflected upon Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) guidance. They advise that when writing research texts there are particular challenges regarding anonymity and recommend the use of pseudonyms and

‘other fictionalising methods’ be used to ensure anonymity (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.175). Furthermore, there is an issue of how much accuracy and detail is given to each research text. Too much detail may allow identification of the characters but too little detail risks failing to achieve the ‘clear, detailed and in depth descriptions’ (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007, p.137) necessary to enhance the study’s transferability.

I in part, addressed the issue by trying to strike a balanced view and choosing half benevolent and half maleficent themes in order to portray both the positive aspects of the role as well as the negative. I felt that insight into both aspects of the teacher experience would benefit the academic audience and would prevent criticisms of my research being a ‘witch-hunting’ exercise.

4. There were to be further ethical dilemmas relating to which maleficent stories to represent and how can it be guaranteed that the characters in these stories can remain anonymous if I retell the story accurately? I read and reread Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) advice and followed their advice to change details such as names, genders, details which may be too revealing. They recommend that the inquirer considers the impact upon the characters, their families and wider community in deciding upon these issues. I felt constantly torn by the desire to be truthful in my retelling (to satisfy my aim of raising awareness of this kind of scourge) but also to protect my school and colleagues from scandal. It was an ethical dilemma I didn’t reconcile in my consciousness. Clandinin and Connelly advise that, *“Narrative researchers are never far away from the grey areas...”* and go on to state, *“they have to consider their responsibility as researchers with the participants,”* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.171). They liken it to consulting our conscience regarding the responsibilities in a friendship.

5. My final ethical dilemma related to my reading my thesis and feeling vulnerable that the narratives, which were such an integral part of the honesty and integrity of the thesis, were not sufficiently encrypted to absolutely ensure the anonymity of the characters; staff and students. I considered how this kind of research is fraught with conflicting issues and loyalties and agendas. Upon reading Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) guidance to 'consult my conscience and take account of my responsibilities as a researcher', I began to feel anxious that my attempts to use pseudonyms and fictionalising methods had not been sufficient. This would make me vulnerable to genuine criticisms of breaching ethical codes and affect my researcher's integrity. Much more damaging, though, may be the harmful impact upon the participants who had been assured that the research was completely anonymous.

### **3.27.2 My Changing Perspective**

I began the research journey with ethics in my mind as simply a series of procedural steps that need to be completed in order to satisfy the university (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.170). This was a remarkably naïve view of the subject and I feel slightly embarrassed at my honesty. This research journey has made me engage relentlessly with the ongoing dilemmas which were hard hitting because they affect real people's lives, their families and careers, relationships and reputations. I have been deeply troubled by the dilemmas and quandaries that this research has presented.

If a child was identified from my work, it may cause significant social notoriety, embarrassment, humiliation and this may easily be extended to their broader family and relatives. The likelihood may be extremely small, but a possibility which must be guarded against. Furthermore, if a member of staff was to be identified, their reputation may be seriously damaged and this itself could impact upon employment prospects in the current school or future schools. There may be action against them, investigative inquiries and

relationships across school irreparably damaged. These kinds of consequences cause serious harm to people and need to be considered against the aims of the research study. My role as researcher felt challenged at every turn by the nature of the research and was especially difficult conducting the research in my own school where I know the staff and could experience relentless divided loyalties.

I reflected on how a number of my previous research intentions had fallen by the wayside over the years because of the 'difficulties' around my research subjects like bullying, bad management, inappropriate behaviours. On each occasion, I needed to change my focus to a version more 'acceptable' or change subject completely. I understand the reasons but always felt frustrated.

My final thought was that I needed to be honest about any wrongdoing in school, but not make it the only strand of my thesis. I needed to expose the realities of the special school teacher's role, but not portray the dubious practice as bigger than it is. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) warn against smoothing over the narratives to create a 'Hollywood ending'. To that end, I feel satisfied that my research honestly reflects the experiences from the field. Despite the incredibly challenging ethical journey this study has experienced, I feel satisfied with the measures in place to safeguard the anonymities of characters.

Regarding the development of my personal understanding of ethical issues, their relevance, importance and significance, I consider this to be my most profound change during this study. I carry the sobering thought: that ironically, on deepest reflection, my desire to protect the vulnerable children from any maltreatment may have, at various stages, risked compromising the safeguarding of the children that I wanted my research to strengthen.

### **3.3 Data Collection Procedures**

In this research design, the autobiographical nature of the research design implies that the principle data collection method is that of a personal journal comprising field notes, observations, reflective writings and annotations. These writings are intended to give a rich and personalised description of the lived experiences of the researcher (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007). Other forms of data collected include interviews, anecdotal conversations (with permissions), lesson observations, personal observations, meeting notes, personal narratives and other textual materials.

Data were collected during the summer term, 2011, then until the end of December, 2011. In the next section, I will explain the justification for each data collection method.

#### **3.31 The Data Collection Tools Explained**

A range of autobiographical writing was used during the data gathering period (See Fig.1, p.46). The following paragraphs will explain in detail what they are, how they were used in the field and how they contributed to the analysis stage.

##### **1) Personal journal:**

Throughout the research journey, I wrote a personal account of my experiences in a linear, chronological, diary-like style. I tried to include contextualised elements, reasons for my next steps and brief descriptions of the factors around an event. The journal was my personal diary of the research journey which helped my stay on touch with the whole process; it became the document which charted all of the events and though contextualised events, it was very brief and superficial in comparison to field texts written from field notes. An example of a section of my personal journal can be seen in the appendices (Appendix 3).

## **2) Reflective accounts**

Reflective accounts were written as a way of me processing some of my worries, concerns and anxieties which may develop during the research process. I wanted to document my innermost thoughts but I didn't feel that some of my thoughts should be loaded up into my personal journal (which I had assigned for less deep reflection). My reflective accounts were likely to be personally or/and politically sensitive and I needed to ensure that in a written form they were safe, isolated, and separate from the general note-taking style writings. An example of a section of a reflective account can be seen in the appendices (Appendix 4).

## **3) Discussions with colleagues**

During the research process, I was able to conduct a number of professional discussions with colleagues. Some took the form of semi structured interviews which I was able to record and transcribe for later analysis and reflection. Other discussions were improvised and the key points written up afterwards from memory. Examples of transcribed discussions can be seen in the appendices (Appendix 5, 6) and improvised discussions can be seen as Appendix 7.

## **4) Field Texts (Autobiographical)**

Upon gathering data in the field in the form of observations, etc., narrative inquiry methodology requires that the field notes are written up as a field text (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.82). This process involves writing the observations with the rich detail of the event including the details which will contextualise the event. The field text should include details of relationships, happenings, attitudes, nuances and feelings which enable the event to be 'frozen in the narrative inquiry space' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.83). When writing the field texts, I was able to represent the participants in terms of the three dimensional inquiry space; that is their position 'temporally, spatially and in terms of the personal and the social' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.95). This level of rich detail enables the narrative

inquirer the opportunity to analyse the events with greater depth than would be possible from the original field notes or simple memories. Examples of my field texts are illustrated in the appendices (Appendix 8, Appendix 9).

### **5) Research Texts (re-written field texts)**

Narrative inquiry methodology aims to make meaning from experiences in the field (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In order to generate research texts, the field texts are analysed and the complex process of making meaning from the experience or event is constructed as the research texts are written.

In writing the research texts, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p.135) indicate that the research texts must be positioned socially and theoretically; that is contextualising the text in relation to the current theories and academic discourse. In addition to this, they must be positioned in terms of other ideas, ideologies and research.

My research texts, nine of which feature in the main body of the thesis, were created through a long process of analysis, coding and reflection paying close attention to the considerations when working within the three dimensional inquiry space. My final research texts attempt to give meaning to the experience or event and explore the event in terms of theory, academic literature and professional and personal experience. This balance of perspectives gives the texts an accessible quality which transcends particular isolated academic communities.

Examples of my research texts are in the body of the thesis in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

The table below defines the correlation between the research question and the data collection methods.



### 3.32 (Fig.8) Diagrammatic Representation of The Research Questions And Data Collection

#### Methods

| Research Questions  | Data Collection Methods   | Time Frame of Study  |
|---|---|--|
| 1. What meanings can be drawn from storied personal experiences as a special school teacher?  | 1 autobiographical writings<br>2 observational writings<br>3 personal journal<br>3 personal communication<br>4 reflective commentary<br>5 other salient textual materials | Lesson observations June 2011<br>Research journal May – December 2011          |
| 2. To what extent do factors such as autonomy, teacher identity, morality and power interact with and influence the role of the special school teacher? | 1 autobiographical writings<br>2 observational writings<br>3 personal journal   | SEN Base Lesson observations June 2011<br>Research journal May – December 2011 |
| 3. To what extent is professional practice influenced and shaped by past and present storied experiences?   | 1 autobiographical writings<br>2 observational writings<br>3 personal journal<br>3 personal communication<br>4 reflective commentary                                      | Research journal May – December 2011   |
| 4. How do factors such as teacher identity and personal morality shape my stories to live by?   | 1 autobiographical writings<br>2 observational writings<br>3 personal journal<br>3 personal communication<br>4 reflective commentary                                      | Research journal May – December 2011   |
| 5. How do sacred stories of school, familial stories to live by and personal histories influence emergent teacher identity and professional practice?   | 1 autobiographical writings<br>2 observational writings<br>3 personal journal<br>3 personal communication<br>4 reflective commentary                                      |  |

Data can be collected in a variety of ways in the field. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), research data gathered as part of the narrative inquiry involves composing field texts which can take a wide variety of forms (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.92). They point out *‘how important it is to note that field texts are imbued with interpretation’* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.93).

There follows a brief synopsis of the forms of field texts employed in this research.

### **3.33 Autobiographical Writings**

The primary source of data collection in this study is my autobiographical writing. This involves recording my experiences as a story, a small chunk of lived experience within a small time frame. It is noted (Molloy, 1991, in Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) that autobiographical writing is always a re-telling of the life to which it relates. The chunk of story should be more than an 'isolated, decontextualized note' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.101) and involves portraying the whole context of a life.

### **3.34 Field Notes**

Field notes were used throughout the research study as an ongoing means of recording the detail of my daily routines and events. They became instrumental in the writing of later field texts and research texts. My field notes are brief, bullet pointed notes without interpretive elements. The main function for me was that they support my memory of the facts and details of the events.

### **3.35 Journal Writing**

I employed the use of a journal to gather data in the field. The journal was used to record my specific classroom activities and some reflections of them. Many journal entries were annotated with reflections and used to support the writing of deeper reflective writing or alternative autobiographical accounts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out that journal entry is a powerful method of giving an account of their experiences. My journal also had the specific job of keeping separate any personal writings and reflection notes that I felt may be inappropriate to share separate (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

### **3.36 Conversations**

I recorded some conversations during the research in order to contextualise the remarks for later analysis. The conversations were written shortly afterwards from memory. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out that this form of data gathering is better served as transcribed recordings so the researcher is free to participate in the conversation freely and is more able to capture the interpersonal dynamics.

### **3.36 Teacher Stories**

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note that the researcher may re-tell personal stories from their past in order to situate them in the midst of the stories they are living and telling as they begin their inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.98). This study incorporates a number of short narratives from my school past which facilitates my positioning related to the study.

## **3.4 Data Quality Procedures**

In order to maximise the credibility of the research, core issues such as validity and reliability needed to be considered (Silverman, 2006). This section will address the strategies employed in order to reduce threats to data validity, reliability and discuss the generalizability. As the canons of reliability are more akin to quantitative research, this section will use the term 'dependability' (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007).

### **3.41 Validity**

There are a number of types of validity in qualitative research and threats to validity can be addressed in a variety of ways (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007). During this research study, several strategies were employed to ensure credibility including strict adherence to ethical guidelines, protection of confidentiality and identities, triangulation, prolonged

exposure in the field, ethical professionalism and sensitivity, on-going liaison with participants and gatekeepers, verification of transcripts and member checks involving on-going dialogue with main participants.

Member checks are an important feature of this research. Throughout this study, the participants were able to discuss events, meanings and interpretations, validate the researcher's written accounts and recordings, and offer feedback to the researcher to enhance rigour and credibility of the data (Silverman, 2006). Reissman (1993) refers to this as correspondence and consider that if the narrative reconstructions are recognizable as adequate representations then credibility has increased.

As a participant observer, I spent seven months in the field. Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2007) state that prolonged emersion in the field helps to reduce the influence of the researcher in that 'their presence is taken for granted' (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007).

Reissman (1993) points out that there are key issues with validity and narrative analysis; that *"A personal narrative is not meant to read as an exact record of what happened nor is it a mirror of a world 'out there'. Our readings of data are themselves located in discourses."* (Reissman, 1993, p.64). Clearly, many traditional criteria for evaluating validity using the traditional experimental scientific model are irrelevant for narrative studies, arguing that historical truth is not the primary issue (Reissman, 1993, p.64). Rather, she points out different people can narrate the same event in different ways depending upon their bias, interest or values (Reissman, 1993, p.64).

Triangulation is another important method for credibility enhancement (Williams, 2003; Silverman, 2006; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007). This study employed method and data

triangulation. Method triangulation is the use of multiple methods to gather data about the phenomenon; that the use of multiple methods strengthens the research design by reducing the weaknesses of individual methods (Brewer and Hunter, 1989, in Williams, 2003). Data triangulation involves using multiple sources to gather data.

Triangulation occurred in this study in the forms of combining observations, interviews and extensive dialogue with participants, various forms of writing including personal journal, field notes, reflective journal and transcripts from interviews and participant feedback.

Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2007) point out that reliance on a single method can distort or bias the researcher's picture of the 'reality' being investigated. It is also important to note that triangulation is not a strategy for proving a 'truth' or validating data from another source; rather it adds rigour and depth to the inquiry (Silverman, 2006) and increases researcher confidence in the data (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007).

Reissman (1993) includes the criterion of persuasiveness in her discussion of validity; referring to the reasonableness of the researcher's interpretations. Linked to plausibility, persuasiveness relates to the need to back up the interpretations with evidence from the informant's accounts and alternative interpretations have been seen to be considered (Reissman, 1993). Some observations and conversations were rearranged or cancelled at short notice and the researcher was always sensitive and responsive to the participants and their concerns as they arose.

The issue of 'good data' is addressed by Tenni, Smyth and Boucher (2008) when they state that there are particular problems with autobiographical writings as data. They point out that there is a requirement to write highly detailed accounts of our own actions, reactions and

contexts which we may inherently find difficult to do if it means we reveal our mistakes, embarrassments and self-doubts. Like Clandinin and Connelly (2000), they guard against becoming 'drowned' in a volume of data.

### **3.42 Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which the research data and findings can be generalised to alternative settings and cultures in order to identify comparison groups (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007).

Qualitative research studies are highly subjective, contextualised and unique to their individual setting, and are not considered to be generalizable in the positivist sense (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007). Reissman (1993) acknowledges that narrative analysis is not suitable for studies of large numbers.

However, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) argue that qualitative research can be assessed for transferability, for example, that a narrative's generalizability is constantly being tested for generalizability in that the reader is assessing whether, '*..the story speaks to them about their own experiences or about the lives of others they know,*' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p.229).

In order to allow others to evaluate the generalizability of the study, Schofield (as cited in Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007, p.137) suggests the researcher provides 'clear, detailed and in depth descriptions'. This study follows these guidelines and has, wherever possible, provided highly detailed accounts of situational contexts and events therein through the use of thick descriptions.

### **3.43 Dependability**

Dependability in qualitative research relates to issues of internal validity and whether the data supports the explanation of an event (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007). Methods for ensuring dependability include triangulation, persistent observation, prolonged engagement in the field, member checking, reflexive journals, transparency of research, and maintenance of systematic transparent records, databases and audit trails.

Triangulation occurred through the use of observation and interviews, multiple forms of writing such as personal journal, reflexive journal and field notes. All of these were conducted over the seven months in the field from May, 2011 to December, 2011. Transparency of the research relates to the honesty and accuracy the researcher has described how the data was collected, stored and analysed.

The keeping of detailed records and appropriate audit trails further safeguard the researcher by ensuring the confirmability of results (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007) During this study, records have been maintained throughout, using a combination of audio, paper and digital copies and meticulously keeping back-up copies of all transcribed data. A suitable coding system for archive material was of transcripts used in order to facilitate the retrieval of any data and support the analysis stage. Archives include recordings, personal journal, reflexive writings, field notes and transcriptions with all necessary details such as dates and times and other contextually relevant details.

Researchers must maintain high professional and ethical standards to maintain the integrity of the research (Silverman, 2006). As a respected colleague, I have aimed to consistently maintain the highest standards of trustworthiness and professionalism, conducting the

research with honesty, integrity and sensitivity to the participants whilst being transparent and open in my research practices.

Reissman (1993) states there are no formal set of rules to guarantee validation of interpretive research; different validation procedures may suit some research problems but not others. She summarises the position as: *“Validation in interpretive work is an ongoing, difficult issue that requires attention from narratologists.”* (Reissman, 1993, p.69). In order to embrace this inherent natural subjectivity, I turn to Clandinin and Connelly.

### **3.44 Criteria For Judging Narrative Inquiry**

In discussing their own version of narrative inquiry and the issues of credibility, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to issues as ‘persistent concerns in narrative inquiry’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.170). This refers to issues such as ethics, anonymity, fact or fiction, ownership and relational responsibilities and risks, dangers and abuses. There follows a brief summary of their main points under each heading, in order to illustrate how Clandinin and Connelly suggest that novice inquirers consider and reflect upon these concerns. Many of these concerns are perpetual throughout each stage of conducting a narrative inquiry using their methodology.

Ethics and anonymity, is regarded as problematic throughout a narrative inquiry. They point out that ethics exist as part of our own personal histories as researchers, as part of the grand narrative of social science research from our educational past (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.172). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledge the ongoing difficulties of guaranteeing anonymity especially when storying particular children, teachers or events at particular levels of school. Other concerns centred upon the writing of field and research texts which could in fact damage the individuals within them. They point out that the research landscape and the



characters within may shift and change during the course of the inquiry and to be sensitive and responsive to this (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

*'In narrative inquiry, the distinction between fact and fiction is muddled'* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.179). With this in mind, they point out that narrative is a storied account of an experience and is subjective and open to what they term 'memory construction'; the inquirer or participant putting together the story from memories. Is this a fictional account? Blaise (as cited in Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) suggests that fiction is mostly based upon autobiographical truths and suggests that what makes the 'story' a fiction is how well the truth is disguised within the story.

In discussing ownership of the stories, Clandinin and Connelly (2000), point out that where participants have contributed stories, who owns them? Furthermore, when a story is written about a school experience do they need to get permission or share the story with each character mentioned in the story? Is making the characters anonymous enough in these circumstances? Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that a more useful way of thinking about these issues may be thinking about the 'relational responsibility' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.177) aspects of each dilemma. Thought for participants, the children, their parents and the impact upon them, provides an alternative way of thinking, rather than simply who has ownership of the stories.

In considering risks, dangers and abuses, Clandinin and Connelly provide advice to listen to all critics, acknowledge that narrative inquiry is criticised as being 'overly personal and interpersonal' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.181), be careful not to narratively smooth the work into a 'Hollywood Plot' in which everything turns out well in the end, attend the stories which are not told (narrative secrets) and develop the idea of 'I, the critic' (Clandinin and

Connelly, 2000, p.182). The notion intended here is that the narrative inquirer is self-critical as they write. Finally, the term 'wakefulness' is offered to the narrative inquirer as a way of describing the need to be aware of a number of important elements of narrative inquiry methodology; constant awareness of what might be said on either side of the formalistic and reductionistic boundaries, as well as the context for our work and using the construct of the three dimensional inquiry space to ask questions of both the field texts and the emergent research texts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.182).

With regard to judging, 'What makes a good narrative inquiry?' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.185), Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that there have been a variety of criteria used and for them, they insist that it is both a sense of thoughtfulness and wakefulness. *"However, it is wakefulness that in our view most needs to characterize the living out of our narrative inquiries, whether we are in the field, writing field texts, or writing research texts and wondering what criteria to use in a particular narrative inquiry."* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.185)

The following section will detail the management of the data and my choice of Connelly and Clandinin's (2000) method of analysis.

### **3.5 Data Management And Analysis**

Data management and analysis is always informed by the research questions. In this case they are:

- What meanings can be drawn from storied personal experiences as a special school teacher?
- To what extent do factors such as autonomy, teacher identity, morality and power interact with and influence the role of the special school teacher?

- To what extent is professional practice influenced and shaped by past and present storied experiences?
- How do factors such as teacher identity and personal morality shape my stories to live by?
- How do sacred stories of school, familial stories to live by and personal histories influence emergent teacher identity and professional practice?

### **3.51 Data Management**

The data from this study were coded and stored using a system comprising the date, event, location and a descriptive label identifying the detail and nature of the data. Some interview data were transcribed from audio tapes and stored in files in a secure location at my personal address away from the research school (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

As the research proceeded and further volumes of data were collected, stringent methods of filing and recording and referencing the data was adhered to enabling simple retrieval. In addition to this, my reflective journal was constantly updated and kept with me throughout the research period. The reflective journal was eventually typed into a digital format and stored upon my home computer in a secure area.

All field observations were typed from the original handwritten form, into a digital format and stored on my home computer using date, location and event referencing methods. All of the data gathered in this study were kept in the form of three copies. The original hard copies were supplemented by the digital copies which were stored on my home computer with a third copy stored to an external digital storage disk. This system enabled the secure and organised storage of all data and facilitated the gathering of further data during the research process. Furthermore, the well-organised nature of all data collected facilitated the analysis

stage. Having multiple copies allowed the coding of one set of data according to the emergent themes.

### **3.52 Data Analysis**

The narrative inquiry methodology used in this study involves the following data analysis techniques. Being in the field generates the field texts and the field texts are analysed exhaustively in order to compose research texts. This process of moving from field to research texts encapsulates the data analysis and meaning giving process.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define my adopted analytical methodology as requiring three sets of considerations as the research process begins writing research texts using the field texts. At this stage there are theoretical considerations, field-text oriented considerations and interpretive-analytical considerations (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Theoretical considerations demand that the narrative inquirer remains focussed upon experience and using the three dimensional inquiry space to try to understand the experiences. Practical field text-oriented considerations involve stepping away from the close relationships of the participants and retelling the story from the field text (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Interpretive-analytical considerations involve 'asking questions of meaning and social significance' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.130). The researcher will interrogate the field texts for hours, reading and rereading in order to provide a summary of what is within each type of field text. *"Although the initial analysis deals with matters such as characters, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator context and tone, these matters become increasingly complex as an inquirer pursues this relentless rereading."* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.131) Clandinin and Connelly's narrative inquiry analysis methodology requires, at this stage, coding of the data. Narrative coding involves organising the data within the field texts in terms of the

names of characters, places events, storylines, gaps, silences and tensions, though constantly asking of the meanings and social significances in all of the data in order to generate research texts from the field texts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.131). The codes support the writing of research texts.

Research texts are written to illustrate and highlight particular elements of the researcher's meanings derived from the analysis of the narrative threads, themes and patterns discovered in the field texts within or across a person's experiences and within a social setting. Notably, the inquirer brings forward their own past experiences, other research and theory into consideration as part of the process. The research texts must be 'contextualised both socially and theoretically' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.135). Finally, the research text must be situated relating to existing theory and literature (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.136).

The movement from field texts within the analysis procedure is described as 'a difficult and complex transition' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.119) having many tensions relating to the writing of the research texts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.139). At this stage of the inquiry, issues may arise relating to the volume of field texts, the audience and voice. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasise that research texts can take a wide range of forms. This study is autobiographical and the research texts predominantly take this form.

As my inquiry reached the stage of analysis, following Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) analysis methodology closely, I composed twenty-three narrative accounts of my experiences using the field texts I had generated. Whilst composing the research texts, I was mindful to pay deep consideration to the three dimensional inquiry space that I find myself in as a narrative inquirer.

As noted by Clandinin, Steeves and Caine (2013), the writing process is re-storying events past in relation to other people and places. With this in mind, and where appropriate and possible, I consulted other colleagues and shared the narratives in order to confirm that they were an accurate account of the events described.

This inquiry focused upon giving meaning to the experiences of special school life and my interest was already stimulated in the areas of teacher identity, autonomy and personal morality. With these research aims as my priority, I began the detailed reading and pondering over the narratives I had created. The process of reading, re-reading and reflecting upon the narratives allowed me to begin coding as a systematic way of identifying possible threads and themes which may allow me to learn something about autonomy, morality and identity as a function of the special school teacher's role.

Using the coding to 'sharpen my gaze', I continued to reflect, analyse and re-read the research texts until I considered moments of significance noteworthy. Thinking narratively, having an awareness and consideration for the boundaries, accounting for the three dimensional inquiry space and exhaustively reflecting upon my narrative texts through my codes, allowed threads to emerge across many of the narratives. These related to the research aims and purposes and are discussed in later chapters.

### **3.53 The Data Analysis Process**

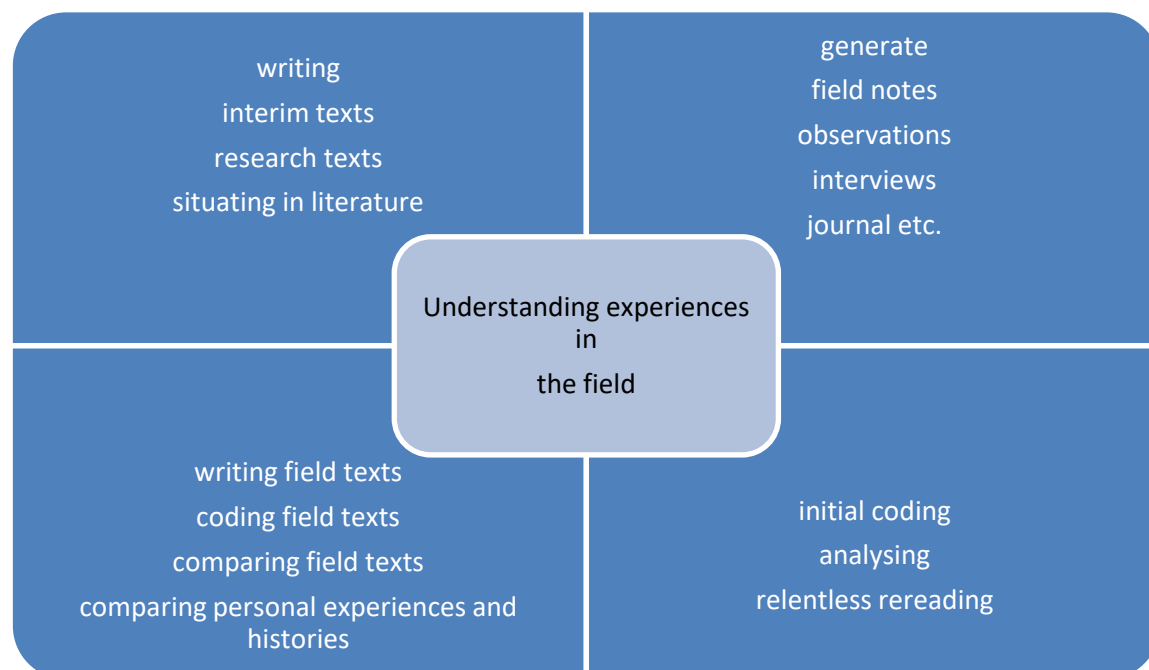
The nature of the research process and the narrative inquiry methodology meant that data was collected and analysed continuously and repeatedly. The emergent ideas and themes from this cyclic process shaped and led the inquiry in keeping with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) methodology. For example, my original plan to explore the role of the special school teacher was reshaped by the emergence of a maleficent theme as the early data was analysed

and anecdotal data, gathered from the staff room discussions, combined with some observations. The theme of maleficence, (and my initial suspicions of 'dubious professionalism'), was confirmed later through further observations, conversations from other members of staff and students' own recollections.

The early emergence of the themes of benevolence and maleficence influenced me to pursue and explore this tension, its character and its balance within the special educational setting as a function of the role of the teacher. As a consequence, as I read and reread the data, I chose events to analyse in greater detail which appeared to fall under either of the two categories; benevolence and maleficence. These became the data I intended to interrogate further and explore with full coding.

Figure 9 below illustrates the analysis process using narrative inquiry methodology.

### **3.53.1 (Fig.9) Diagrammatic Representation Of Data Analysis Process**



The diagram above represents the relationship of the features of the data analysis process to the goal of increasing our understanding of the lived experiences. Each quadrant illustrates the contribution to deepening understanding through the four key stages of analysis.

As the experience is lived in the field, the researcher generates field notes which can take a wide variety of forms (see Fig.8, p.131). The data is reread, analysed, and some initial coding may take place to verify themes or key features which may assist categorising the event or experience.

The data is then written as a field text which provides an account of the experience containing the details of the event. At this stage of the analysis, I selected particular experiences which fell into my broad themes of benevolence and maleficence to give much greater scrutiny to. Analysis tools included intense coding, narrative thinking, deep reflection and comparisons with other field texts and my personal history. At all times, my analysis of each field text positioned myself in the three dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.131).

Finally, the final quadrant illustrates the writing of the research texts based upon the insightful understandings generated from the field text analysis stage. The research texts are written based upon the original experience, offer meaning to the experience and is situated in academic discourse from the literature.

### **3.53.2 More On The Coding Process**

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) coding process involves interrogating the field text for commonalities, threads and themes. These may relate to subtle nuances of the characters' interactions, or other more obvious significances such as the characters, storylines that weave or interconnect, the location or space, the time, student, teacher confidence, political tension,



end point, tensions, continuities and discontinuities (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.131). Clandinin and Connelly even advise to be aware of 'gaps or silences that become apparent' in the relentless rereading. In this phase of analysis it is important to hold up one field text against another in order to compare the texts and also bring forward personal histories and lay them alongside the field texts to further deepen understanding and contextualise the events under analysis, (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

### **3.53.3 The Analysis Process Exemplified Through Example**

To illustrate the analysis process, there follows extracts of field notes which were used during this research. As data was generated in the early part of the research journey, each was read, reread, analysed and examined by coding for themes and narrative threads. The following examples serve to illustrate number of initial themes emerging from the data.

The initial issues appeared to be in the following areas: 1. The training of staff, 2. The attitudes of some staff to working in the PMLD classroom, 3. The treatment of PMLD students, 4. Teaching assistants being 'left' to teach without appropriate skills, direction or planning.

Each of these issues is potentially serious and this understanding began my difficult and ongoing engagement with the ethics of the research (See Section 3.27, p.123).

#### **Extract 1**

The following extract is from a semi-structured interview which shows the emergence of the idea that some PMLD students are not getting anything from their lessons, that they are left in their chairs at the back of the class and that management are not really attending to the issue, (See Appendix 4).

*"...but I think it's really good that they get the opportunity to go in there and recognising that they need a bit more..... than to be in a chair in a class cos some kids are strapped in a chair in a class and they're not getting nothing are they?"*

*"And you're that busy doing that, that the child who is in a chair or who has got that extra need.....is getting overlooked. Sometimes....see I think quite a lot of the times they are ....cos you're that busy with the other kids trying to get them to do their topic work and produce a piece of work that can go in their file and obviously if you're doing that, concentrating on them the kids all just sit there and get left, get left..."*

*"because of his language, he gets overlooked a lot I think cos of his speech...and you know...so he's another case of where he's overlooked a lot in class."*

*"because I feel as though the kids in primary are not getting their needs met, they are getting overlooked down this end of school and I think they would benefit so much and I just think why should it only be like, why is it only secondary? Why is it not primary? So these kids have to sit like till class 5 and get nothing and when they go to 7, 'Oh you can have a bit more now'"*

*"I just think that there's a lot missing at this end that could be happening...and I know it's probably staff and that or...? I dunno... but I just feel as though... with me working in there Class 5 and I've seen like the Alfie and the G and I've been in there since September I mean I'm only in part time, but what I've seen I think... they get nothing really out of some days or some sessions and I just think they're sat in that chair, I seen them like just sat at the back, why are they not....why are they not accessing.... you know going down there and getting some interaction..."*

**Extract 2**

The following extract illustrates potential issues around the attitude of some staff relating to working in the PMLD classes.

*"...then you get staffing issues of, 'oh I don't want to work in there', and 'I don't wanna be in there full time'... you do, you get things like that don't you?"*

**Extract 3**

During another conversation with a TA, I asked about how our SEN Base room could be improved and it emerged that there was a situation where TAs were expected to plan and deliver lessons for PMLD students and that there may be issues also related to training.

*PN: For me for literacy and numeracy....that is one of the weaknesses I think. Lack of planning, lack of coordination, lack of...*

*PM: Do you think that erm the teacher needs to be in there to teach or is it.....in what sense is a lack of a teacher a.....?*

*PN: If someone gave you a piece of planning, you could give me a piece of planning and NL could, and it could say the same thing but both of you have different expectations of what you want....and what you want from that planning, so I think it's hard for a TA, whether they are level 4s or level 3s, that don't get any planning, I haven't had any since Easter...*

*PM: so do you use your best ideas and do something positive off your own bat sort of thing?*

*PN: Yeah, so like P gave us that book and a bit of planning that said 'do this book today' and that was about 5 weeks ago, so then we've, I've just gone on with that and carried it on with*

*the art and different things.... But then I don't think that's fair 'cos we shouldn't do that as a TA...personally.....I don't mind doing it because I enjoy it but.... that's what teachers are for really isn't it?...and then like I say again even if you get planning you don't know what the expectations are, you don't know what people's targets are so you don't know if you are doing the right thing.*

*PM: Yeah, makes sense...*

*PN: And also probably a lack of training. I know that you can get training that's meaningless but I think some sensory training would be good to make sure you're doing the right thing for them...*

*PM: I bet we could all benefit from that like...even the teachers as well.*

*PN: Yeah*

*PM: Cos we get...well, I trained in mainstream specialist for science mainstream, that doesn't fit with a SEN Base particularly well at all*

*PN: I mean. we might think we are doing a really good job for some of them but be doing it the wrong way....you don't know*

*PM: Like oh gosh, we are so not.*

*PN: Yeah, doing the wrong thing.*

These extracts served to illustrate how I became sensitized to 'disquiet', a mood of discontent which I did not predict or anticipate. The issues emerging bothered me and remained with me, ultimately changing the course of the research and leading me, as a researcher and teacher, on a very difficult path.

#### **3.53.4 Analysis Through Coding**

A significant element to the analysis of the data involved coding. This process involved reading and rereading the texts and making notes of any emerging patterns, threads or plotlines which may be of significance; including characters' nuances, politics, locations, end points etc. These coded details within the data are analysed to determine if they could be grouped and thus indicate a commonality or emerging pattern or theme. See Appendix 8 as an example of coded text).

The table below (Fig.10) illustrates the initial coding which generated categories for further analysis and consideration. A table was filled in to support the analysis and coding of details of each text type or data.

### 3.53.5 (Fig.10) Diagrammatic Representation Of Coding Data

|    | Text type –<br>Field text (Ref Appendix )<br>detail   | Initial category<br>allocated  | Literature or<br>theme link   | Comment   |
|----|---|--|---|---|
| 1  | Teachers...were instructed to plan and teach a sensory style lesson with the PMLD children in the SEN base classroom one afternoon a week<br><br>reflected resentment at being drawn into HAVING to teach in the SEN room,  | Initiative imposed   | Teacher ID<br>Teacher beliefs   | May invoke resentment<br>Non-compliance<br>Lack of ownership<br>Divided loyalties<br>Stress levels raised   |
| 2  | after a few weeks that one teacher had not yet started teaching the sessions<br><br>Three weeks after the trial had started, the teacher had still not taught a lesson, and instead, had remained in the teacher's own classroom teaching the class as 'normal'.<br><br>reflected resentment at being drawn into HAVING to teach in the SEN room, | (Support? Preparation?<br>Training? Expectations?)   | ITT<br>Teacher ID<br>Teacher beliefs<br>CPD<br>Teacher vulnerability<br>exposed | Issues of individual responsibility<br>Personal and professional<br><br>Students rights to education<br>Staff expectation of training and support<br><br>Management of change by school leaders |
| 3  | and though levels of frustration existed, the staff didn't allow their frustrations to build up too much<br>reflected resentment at being drawn into HAVING to teach in the SEN room,<br><br>the teacher didn't particularly like the teacher who was organising and leading the trial and felt that the 'pushy' manner was 'very irritating'     | (potential tensions across staff)<br>Tensions across staff<br>Personal relationships<br>tensions | Teacher ID<br>Personal/<br>professional<br>standards/ethics                     | Relational tensions can impact significantly upon the quality of work, care and attendance of staff and students<br><br>Cliques and politics<br>Impacting on quality of professional work       |
| 4  | it did leave me and my team wondering<br><br>days I wasn't personally clear how everything was going in terms of it being set up<br><br>I was oblivious   | Lack of overview   | Communication<br><br>Work systems<br><br>Individual teacher ID                  | Tensions within team when information not shared – also across the department when relying on each other – impact?  |
| 5  | PMLD students remain in their classroom   | Students deprived of entitlement   |   | Is it safer to stay when untrained staff are planning for students they do not know?  |
| 6  | it did leave me and my team wondering<br><br>My TA had concerns   | uncertainty  |   | Builds stress and relational tensions   |
| 7  | The approach I had at this time was not ideal   | (my role as leader/organiser unfulfilled   | Teacher ID<br>Self image  | Doubting myself and my undefined role   |
| 8  | fears of being inadequately prepared and lacking sufficient knowledge or specialist skills that the PMLD students may need  | Professional inadequacies  | Teacher ID<br>Self efficacy<br>ITT<br>In-service training                       |   |
| 9  | I was happy to keep my PMLD children in my class  | (ideological/educational differences?)   | Teacher beliefs<br>pedagogy   | Undermines the enthusiasm for ensuring PMLD attend SEN room   |
| 10 |   |  |   |   |

During the analysis process, an interim text may often be written, in line with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) which serves to explore the findings in the coding and the field texts and support the writings of the final research texts. An example of an interim text is found attached to the coded text to which it relates as part of Appendix 8. These texts begin to articulate and flesh out some of the issues which present within the analysis phase; another layer of reading, reflecting and rereading.

The transition from field notes, field texts and to the final research texts is 'messy'. I have written field texts then spent time returning to the literature to read or reread previously read papers then returned to my texts. I have then sometimes written reflective pieces which allow me to explore where my analysis situates itself and which issues seem significant. Finally, the research text is created as an amalgamation of the previous writings, reflections, thoughts and analyses of the original experience. Clandinin and Connelly correctly describe the transition from field texts to research texts as, 'another difficult and complex transition' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.119).

### **3.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined the overview of the research and defined the research design. How the design evolved into its current form was then shared and the significance of Phillion and Clandinin and Connelly's work upon my thinking, described. As researcher, my role, context and values and beliefs, were highlighted, followed by a brief look at my morality and the dangers of charismatic, powerful, staff. The setting of the research was then outlined followed by the context of the study school. There followed a brief outline of ethics and confidentiality, which led to a discussion of the dilemmas associated with this particular research study. The chapter then clarified the data collection procedures. The chapter concluded with details of Clandinin and Connelly's methodology for the analysis of field texts as a transitional process of

creating research texts in order to find meaning in the storied experiences. This data analysis process was then exemplified through example.

The following chapter will present the re-storied research texts generated through Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) analysis methodology before subsequent chapters detail and discuss the narrative threads within the research texts.



## **Chapter 4: Stories Of Benevolence**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents four research texts as stories. Each story is a re-storied experience from the field and is chosen because it represents the emergent theme of benevolence encountered in the field. Using the lenses of autonomy, personal and staff morality, teacher identity and the locus of power in conjunction with deep, ongoing reflection guided by narrative thinking (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), each re-storied experience is fully discussed in the search for meaning. My personal history and narrative beginnings are considered as factors throughout the discussions in keeping with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) methodology.

The stories begin to link Jones' (2004) ideas of the special school teaching role as caring, separate and distinctly different from mainstream and staff identifying with a cause. The re-storied experiences begin to explore my personal efforts to fulfil my expected teacher identity through my personal morality and my desire to be a 'good professional' and fit into the new teaching role successfully. The stories begin to illustrate the intersections of the factors of autonomy, morality, teacher identity and the locus of power. The table below offers a diagrammatic representation of the stories illustrating the main event and its links to themes and theory.

**4.2 (Fig.11) Diagrammatic Representation Of Chapter 4 Linking Stories To Main Event, Theme And Theory**

|   | Story                | Main event   | Main Theme(s)   | Theoretical Links                    |
|---|----------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | The Nappy            | I am asked to change the leaking nappy of a 15 year old boy.   | Autonomy<br>Training<br>Teacher identity              | Teacher identity<br>Teacher training |
| 2 | Moving Group         | I try to facilitate the move to a more appropriate English group for keen, enthusiastic student.                       | Teacher identity<br>Autonomy                          | Teacher identity<br>Autonomy         |
| 3 | The Swimming Journey | Students kept in for silliness on the bus.<br>Do I support teacher or defend the students who have done nothing wrong? | Moral dilemma<br>Teacher identity<br>Personal history | Morality<br>Teacher identity         |
| 4 | Visiting Class       | I try to establish positive relationships with PMLD student and parent   | Training<br>Relationships<br>Teacher identity         | Teacher identity<br>Teacher training |

**“This section (4.3) has been redacted for reasons of ethics and confidentiality”**

**4.3 Story 1: The Nappy**



















#### **4.4 Story 2: Moving Group**

*I had taught D before, for both literacy and numeracy and he had been in my registration class for two years. I knew him very well and we enjoyed a very strong relationship. We trusted and respected each other. I knew D was a hard working lad with a strong work ethic. He didn't like to be without things to do.*

*When I first had him in my registration class I was warned that his behaviours were very violent and I needed to be extremely wary of his temper. After a year together, I was able to redefine D as a model student that year and his attitude to work developed a focus and passion for success.*

*I kept close contact after he moved up the school and he told me that he was struggling to settle into his new class. It was very different to mine. We would smile about it.*

*I remembered having a favourite teacher at schools myself way back in my junior school and I pondered as to why this man was my favourite teacher. As I reflected, I decided that, for me,*

*the reasons were simple; I thought he liked me, he treated me respectfully and he gave me responsibility and support at appropriate times.*

*The meeting to sort out the literacy and numeracy groupings for September was led by the TLR and I was one of six teachers in attendance. As I realised D would no longer be in my group for the coming year, I felt sad for me and disappointed for him. I knew I was a key influence in his behavioural and academic turn around. I hoped he would settle in his new group and continue to work hard.*

*It was months later. This day was an ordinary Tuesday, about half way through the autumn term of the new school year and everything was settling nicely into the school routines. I was waiting for the photocopier to be free when I saw D in the corridor. I was standing in the doorway and he was walking past. He asked me if he could have a word. I said, "Of course," and moved us into a more secluded part of the corridor where it was a bit more private away from others' ears. He asked me why he was not in my group for literacy and numeracy this year. (Instead, he had been placed in the second from top group. Essentially, to D, that looked like he had been 'dropped' from the top group for the start of the new academic year).*

*I thought back again to the meeting I had attended where the groupings had been sorted out. I had expressed concern that my group was getting very large and as a concession, and due to D being so young, he was dropped to the lower group. The receiving teacher was delighted as he is a model student; he works hard and sets a good example for the rest of the class. In theory, this meant that older students could remain in the top group and have a final attempt at examinations before they left at 19 years old.*

*I explained to D that, as he was so young, it had been decided to put older students into the group for an opportunity to take, or retake, exams and that he would be in school for years yet and his opportunity would come later. I remember feeling awkward about this as I certainly didn't agree with it at all. My preference would be to have profiled the students both academically and socially then assembled the group in terms of aptitude for examinations, regardless of age.*

*D's face dropped enormously. I thought he was going to accept my explanation but to my almost pleasure, he began to explain why he wanted to move back into the top group.*

*He described how the teacher was off on long term sick, the work was too easy and the supply teachers weren't bothered. I felt that he was making a very good case and wondered how I could help, knowing that he thrived on hard work. The existing arrangement might cause problems for him and the wider school if he were to return to the 'bad old days' of the behaviour I had been told about. He was finding the new location impossible to rekindle his work ethic from the previous year. All of the elements that kept him focussed were gone and I began to feel guilty and partly responsible for not objecting to him being moved from my group.*

*As a trusted and valued student, I listened to D carefully and respectfully as he outlined very maturely his difficulties as he saw them.*

*Significantly for D, being relocated in his new group at the start of the academic year, was pivotal in re-shaping his school landscape and reducing his ability to engage with education in line with his forward looking story. Though he tried for a significant amount of the autumn term to align himself with the re-shaped landscape, D found that, after his new teacher went*

*on long term sick, he was unable to reconcile his past stories with his present lived story. His attempts to follow his own story to live by were falling away, leaving him dejected and unhappy.*

*As an event in time, I saw in D, a 'moment' in his journey from boy to man. This moment represented a small moment on D's ongoing timeline as he journeyed from small, angry special school student to calm, respectful teen, and on toward the well-grounded, warm-hearted, hard-working adult of the future. I felt a great respect for his journey which had been incredibly tough at times. Here, D was beginning to negotiate his future among equals and I respected and supported that.*

*I looked forward and understood D's imagined future and realised that he was very serious about wanting to live out his imagined future story; accessing qualifications which would lead to a specific college course. I hoped that my support would give him an opportunity to re-story his future based upon his own forward-looking story of his own imagined future. I could hear the echoes of unfairness ringing in my ears.*

*In my attempt to support him, I looked back and attended the strong relationship we had built up and used my professional influence in order to reshape and compose with him an alternative school story. I felt a moral duty to attend his problem which I knew reached far beyond my professional duty. I could easily dismiss D's concerns in an instant claiming that nothing could be done. However, in my opinion, D deserved much more than that.*

*D did actually have the attributes I was looking for in my exam group. However, I also knew that I was 'carrying' a number of students and the group was already 11 strong (where ten would be the limit), so I felt a little reluctance to change things and increase the size of the class*

*further. I said to D that I would explore what was possible. D came back to me on a number of occasions over the following days for updates. His teacher was still on long term sick and I felt he was clearly in no-man's-land and in desperate need of challenge, so I spontaneously offered him a deal. I gave him the opportunity to do a Literacy Test in exam conditions with the rest of the group the following Monday. If he performed well, I'd make sure he joined my group. He beamed a smile and asked if he could take some past papers home.*

*In offering D the chance to take a test, I offered him the chance to take ownership of his destiny, a chance for him to re-story his own lived school narrative. In his success at that test D demonstrated to the school community that his commitment to his educational goals was highly influential in re-shaping his stories to live by, his present and his future school landscapes, and his personal lived story.*

*I felt considerable tensions having made D the offer. I had no authority to poach another teacher's student from their group, especially without consultation during their absence. I felt I had set up a difficult situation for myself but felt sure it was the best move for D.*

*The following Monday, D came top of the group for the test and I was delighted to meet with the assistant headteacher to ask that D move to my group immediately. He agreed as I had supporting evidence to justify the move.*

*In his new group, having rekindled his enthusiasm and desire to succeed, D spent the following three months working incredibly hard and taking past papers home etc. He epitomised an 'obsessed' academic. He gradually began getting scores on past papers that would be a pass mark. He was clearly hungry to pass the Level 1 exam.*

*I talked to D about why he was so keen to pass exams and get certificates. He talked of his career aspirations and was surprisingly clear about his exam needs. He articulated exactly what he wanted and asked me to help arrange an ICT and science qualification for him so that his chosen college course would be accessible to him when he is old enough. I was very supportive of his hunger and was very keen that the school showed itself to support this aspirational young man.*

*However, when I discussed the needs of D with my then TLR, I was very disappointed as he was quite dismissive, telling me that there were 'other issues' regarding staffing and funding. I even offered to teach the courses to D myself, if we, as a school, could offer the exam places for him, but that was thought of as 'far too contentious'. I was told to wait and he would see what he could do regarding ICT and he would get back to me. I recall arguing the point that we were an academic, educational institution; if we can't, then who? Politics and red tape seemed to halt progress and I felt embarrassed explaining to D that he must wait. It seemed that I, and the organisation I represent, had let him down, stopping his imagined future story in its tracks.*

*D's future story and his reshaped identity proved very successful, his move back to my group saw him settled and live out his imagined future story, eventually achieving the qualifications he wanted. I think our relationship became even stronger as an outcome. My group was enhanced with the addition of D. Without him, there would have only been 3 exam candidates from the group of 12, such was the low ability within the group. Most of which had never learned their times tables and struggled to write in punctuated sentences.*

*After two further years of trying to get the school to offer an ICT qualification, I was finally able to teach ICT to three boys and two of the three boys, including D, passed their Level 1 and 2*



*exams before they left. I felt very proud of them. Historically, these were unprecedented academic achievements for the school.*

*As a special needs student, D was highly motivated and gave everything to his studies. He equally, strived to mature and this event showed a major step forward in his re-storying his stories to live by. Where D's narrative past had been fraught with difficulties both educationally and behaviourally, and his reputation had been fierce some, he re-shaped his school landscape and re-storied his present whilst attending his imagined future stories. D's forward looking aspirations shaped a new school landscape for him and ultimately re-shaped relationships across the school community.*

*When D originally came to me with his concern about his learning, I felt morally and professionally bound to support and solve the dilemma. More than this, the strong relationship and trust we shared made it impossible for me to ignore his 'cries for help'. My self-image was that, for the students, I would solve their problems if at all possible and I was always keen to ensure this was clearly understood by all my students.*

*However, my role was not without tensions. I experienced tensions as my institutional narrative bumped against the teachers' grand narrative as I realised that my influence, despite generous autonomy, was limited. I realised that I needed to tread a fine line between supporting the student and not breaching the institutional narrative. To metaphorically tread on other teachers' toes, assume their authority and make decisions without following the appropriate channels would cause a lot of trouble for me. I needed to ensure that I had a concrete case to support D's move and hope I could persuade the teachers in authority.*

#### **4.41 Moving Group: Discussion**

This story illustrates how an ambitious student with a desire to succeed can influence their own future. The student's good relationship with a teacher willing to be his advocate and a listening culture are seen to be significant in overcoming inherent organisational barriers.

My relationship with D was very strong based on trust and respect. Relationships of this nature are a significant part of my teacher identity and I am known for this characteristic. (This identity draws many students to me that need supports purely based upon the other students' comments about me). Upon knowing D needed to talk about a problem, I professionally positioned myself as his support and mentor, pleased that I was chosen to help. My starting point for addressing any problem with a student was, "I will do what I can to help, if it is at all possible."

My approach to helping special students with problems reflects the stated school ethos and policies and I feel very comfortable and confident that I am supporting students empathetically, supportively and respectfully. The school website indicates that 'every person is important and has a role to play in making the school special'. There is also reference to offering and promoting equal opportunities in a school offering personalised learning, led by the individual needs of the students in a safe, secure and purposeful environment in which students can thrive. (YTG School, 2016). References to opportunities to thrive, personalised learning student led create a picture which engenders in me a very positive environment for learning and teaching. The values which underpin these published aims are close to my own values and I strongly support the school ethos as stated.

The school ethos is clearly about valuing the individual and for me this involved listening to the students. As a parent and a teacher, understanding the points of view of others has had a

significant impact upon my ability to appropriately sort out problems in a wide range of contexts. Consequently, I have made being a listener an essential feature of my personal and professional identity. I felt it was very important to listen to D to pay respect to how he was feeling. I would like to think all teachers would make this a starting point, but I am aware that the intense pressures upon staff can make something so simple very difficult to achieve. Jones (2005a) states that it is becoming more accepted and considered important to listen to students' perspectives. Listening to and working wherever possible with the students about issues relating to their education has been a basic standard that is long overdue and often even now takes the form of tokenistic school councils which have little or no impact. In a culture that respects the student voice, constant dialogue and discussion can be of significant benefit.

In the context of policy-making, where disabled children had been given a voice, the results have been very positive and have had a significant role in changing attitudes (Jones, 2005a). It is clear there are intrinsic benefits of students being involved in decisions about their education and D's story illustrates an ambitious student taking some ownership of his future and is prepared to make a claim to 'have a voice' in the discussions relating to him.

To be heard in this context would, I believe, help build up his self-esteem and nurture communication skills to support his adulthood. Sobsey (1994) promotes similar ideals in attempting to improve the experiences of the disabled. Other literature affirms the valuable contribution young people can make to a debate (Lewis, Maras and Simmonds, 2000, p.60, in Jones, 2005a). Despite the obvious benefits to including the students themselves in the discussions, it is acknowledged there is a long way to go remaining piecemeal and welfare based (Jones, 2005a).

I saw my role of teacher to include my sensitive acknowledgement and validation of students' feelings, opinions and preferences. I thought of this as a core value within my teacher values and personal values. Despite regarding these elements of the teaching role as significant, I struggle to recall any training in the importance or otherwise of pastoral issues.

Bishop and Jones (2002) suggest that in teacher training courses, issues relating to pastoral element of the teachers' role (feelings, perceptions and attitudes), may be getting squeezed out of the training of teachers in place of more target driven elements such as the acquisition of standards. Woods, Jeffery and Boyle (1997), cited in Bishop and Jones (2002), support this idea of a movement away from a child-centred approach towards a drive for standards. I consider this to be a serious movement away from an element of teaching that is essential. The need for emotional intelligence, empathy, understanding and skilful interpersonal skills, including an appreciation of students' moods and emotional fluctuations is essential to competent teaching.

I considered my professional training and considered the factors that contributed to my decision to be a listening teacher and quickly concluded that it had little or nothing to do with any training courses. I realised many of my values which I carry into my professional role originated from my past experiences as a child at school. Stuart and Thurlow (2000) propose that teachers' beliefs are formed early in a career and are highly resistant to change. I reflect upon how I value my own beliefs regarding how to treat people, rightness and wrongness in given situations; I suspect that I may need a considerable weight of argument to persuade me to change my views.

Having established their beliefs, they become the driver of decisions and practice, informing the choices made. To this effect, Rerizaglia et al (1997, in Stuart and Thurlow, 2000, p.113)

suggest that a teacher's beliefs are reflected in their decisions and actions. In reverse, to observe the decisions taken by teachers may open a window and illuminate their beliefs. This, I suggest enables colleagues to make social choices regarding social and professional allegiances and simple understandings. I suspect that I can predict a teacher's attitude to a given situation by observing their choice or decision related to the incident.

Jones (2004) found that PMLD teachers identified with a cause; they wanted to make an impact and make lives better for the students in their care. I can understand and relate closely to that. I see myself as wanting to have made an impact, a significant difference for D. For Jones (2004), it illustrated the sense of commitment to the PMLD role.

In trying to negotiate an ICT course for D, I felt frustrated that the dominant school narrative, threaded with politics, interfered with D's opportunity to experience his aspirational forward looking ambitions. However, despite the original setback, and largely on a personal level, I pursued the issue, and continued the long process of negotiating an opportunity for him. After two years, I was finally able to offer him the course he originally requested. In many ways, I became the embodiment of Jones' findings and became his advocate (Jones, 2004).

In keeping with my own experiences, Jenkins (1996, in Jones, 2004, p.166) proposes that the desire to want to make a difference starts when the person is very young, borne out of their experiences; seeds sown in youth that bear fruit in adulthood. In my case, my early childhood and school experiences left me telling myself that I would not treat others in 'this way'. From my experience, I can see that many of the key features to my intended teacher's role was imagined well in advance of training or qualifying as a teacher; my beliefs formed as deeply held core values, generated and shaped as a function and product of my early experiences. I wonder at the subsequent potential for tensions between the eventual organisational

structure a teacher may work in and their desire to function as the teacher they intended to be. How would those conflicting tensions play out? I consider the trade-off being the continued shaping and reshaping of teacher identity leading to it evolving over time as more experiences are added. This potential tension is possibly reflected in the research which acknowledges teacher beliefs and practices are so difficult to change and well established (Hollingworth, 1989; Kagan, 1992 in Stuart and Thurlow, 2000; Corbett, 2001).

**“This section (4.5) has been redacted for reasons of ethics and confidentiality.”**

#### **4.5 Story 3: The Swimming Journey**



















#### **4.6 Story 4: Visiting Class: Part 1**

*I had known D and her family a relatively short time. The daughter was seldom at school due to her medical complications. She was on my register for months before we eventually met. It was during an afternoon lesson, she arrived with her mum and I remember being surprised that there were also nurses in attendance.*

*Mum got along with me very well though I felt quite inadequate about teaching her daughter, such were her profound disabilities. On each occasion that D managed to get to class, I tended*

*to turn the lesson over to them as a speaking and listening activity in an attempt to include D as much as possible. I tried to give her personal conversation each visit and give her something to do for her next visit to make her feel part of the class and to encourage her to come back. Her mum seemed delighted with this arrangement.*

*After two or three afternoon visits a week, over two months, my staff began to grumble to me about D 'taking over' the class lessons and the point was also made that the mother should not be attending with her in the classroom. I wondered at my own positioning; that I had unconditionally welcomed D and her mum into the class and spotlighted D until she had to leave, hopefully making her feel special and welcome. Had I got this wrong?*

*I had noticed that when D was visiting my class, my staff became very subdued and 'in the background', which surprised me as their usual role was much more prominent and interactive. I remember that I wondered if they felt pushed out. In addition to this, as D's mum's confidence grew, mum was increasingly becoming the centre of attention. My staff continued to comment to me that they didn't like the situation, but I disagreed. I still felt that the benefits to D far outweighed the problems and asked that my staff put up with the situation a little longer.*

*My tension to maintain my team's allegiance and support was further strained as I allowed mum to be the significant part of D's visit. My relationship with mum was very positive and I was very keen to maintain it. Mum's relationship with D was very close and mum, I felt, brought the best out in D. I felt the relationship between mum and my team was becoming strained, their irritation was professionally masked but the cracks were beginning to show. The relationship between mum and school was at an all-time high. In the midst of these relationships, I was trying to accommodate D, her complex needs and foster a good*



*relationship, never knowing if this lesson would be the last I would see of her for months, such was her condition. I felt the balance was right but my staff disagreed. They would prefer mum not to be in due to the high level of disruption she (and I) created.*

*Professionally, I considered the arrangement very positive and I felt I was providing an appropriate experience for D and the class at a social and empathetic level. I had no training or guidelines to support my intuitive feeling that it was right for her. I felt very vulnerable in needing to provide lessons for D as she was a very specialist PMLD student and I felt devoid of creative ideas as well as being very aware of my lack of training in PMLD teaching. I knew there were teaching assistants that would support me but finding time to meet them and ask for guidance never seemed available and my motivation was lower due to me never knowing if D was actually coming into school. There always seemed to be a more pressing task than preparing for a student who probably won't turn up.*

*However, the ever-more thorny issue of mum's presence in class turned an irreversible corner. On a couple of occasions mum's phone went off in class, increasing pressures on me to change what I felt was a very positive arrangement for a very troubled PMLD student. I resisted changing anything. My staff continued to express their dislike of the current arrangement which they felt compromised the learning of the rest of the class. I remember trying hard to keep an open mind to the various perspectives.*

*I did not want to risk damaging the very good relationship we, as a school, were enjoying. This was the first time D had sustained any attendance at school and she was clearly thriving on the social side of her visits. In addition to this, mum was experiencing joy at her daughter being part of a social group after such prolonged isolation through illness.*

*My team, however, sidestepped my unwillingness to change the arrangements and they complained to the senior management. This meant that my professional autonomy, which originally facilitated the opportunity to turn the lesson over to our visitor was short-lived as my team used the backing of the SLT to authorise the removal of mum and re-establish classroom norms.*

*The potentially damaging proposal of asking mum not to accompany D to class and not use her phone in class was eventually dealt with by asking that we promote D's independence, and mum supported this idea and stopped coming to class on most occasions. However, this new arrangement carried consequences. It dramatically altered the enjoyment that D experienced in class. She became anxious without mum's presence and she was asked to join in the lesson rather than 'be' the lesson.*

*When mum no longer attended the visits, D was also significantly anxious and stroppy with her carers. She struggled to engage with the lessons and I personally found this period very challenging. Possibly because I was expected to provide appropriate lessons for her that were not speaking and listening based and I really didn't have any other ideas for her so felt very strained. My guilt also hurt because I knew she was really not enjoying coming to school anymore, but people were assuming it was because she was missing her mum. I felt that it was partly that, but more so the activities and relationship with the carers. My team were 'back in control' and happy to be simply including D, as best they could, in the lessons that she attended. The change also carried negative tensions to emerge between mum and school, possibly leading to mum's request for more for her daughter.*

*I felt sad that the change in arrangement had clearly lessened the quality of D's visits to school. I remember feeling that the lessons that she was experiencing now were not worth the effort*

*she put into getting to school; that if I was her, I would not attend. She had become an anonymous member of the class quietly doing the set task.*

*The web of relationships demonstrated conflicting and alternative plotlines both from the team's view and mum's perspective. My team perceived that their lessons were unduly disrupted by the spontaneous arrival of mum and D. The hour-long disruption left them with little to offer and they struggled to see any good in the arrangement. Their teacher refused to change the arrangements and then mum annoyed them by breaching school etiquette. This forced the issue of mum's presence to involve SLT and mum was removed. 'Normal' teaching resumed in class. From mum's view she enjoyed a huge celebratory welcome for her daughter and 'centre of attention' status each visit- 3 hours per week. She was comfortable, relaxed and enjoyed the visits very much. D enjoyed the visits and her attendance increased to levels not seen before in her history. Both views carry validity and I found it difficult to navigate and mediate these plotlines with my own.*

#### **4.61 Story 4: Visiting Class: Part 2**

*After a few weeks of D attending lessons without her mum, I learned that Mum had expressed her opinion to the deputy headteacher that there was little for D to access when she came into school. I wondered if this was a criticism of me and my team, or a natural response to D's reduced happiness in class.*

*In direct response to this, the sensory room teaching staff (the PMLD specialists) were asked to make one afternoon per week available so that D could have a sensory lesson in the sensory room rather than going to her own class for lessons with her peers. It would be a fixed arrangement and the sensory staff would have just the one child, D, for that afternoon. Mum was supportive of the idea and so the many logistic problems and timetabling issues were*

*addressed in order to make the staff and the room available. I remember at the time feeling that the pressure on me to provide appropriate lessons for her was alleviated slightly now that she had a designated, weekly sensory session with experienced staff.*

*The school was satisfied that they were doing all that they could for this particular student. Mum was informed of the arrangements and the staff prepared activities for a number of weeks in advance. However, the nature of D's condition meant that she could never be sure to attend school. During the first 3-4 weeks after the arrangement was set up, she attended once then didn't attend at all.*

*On each occasion, the sensory staff were given no notice that D would or wouldn't attend but they understood that D could be very poorly and her condition could change rapidly. However, each week the sensory staff were waiting with resources out and lesson prepared. Obviously, this began to be an irritation as the weeks of non-attendance and lack of warning or notice passed. For my part, I was oblivious to the outcome each week (as I was teaching in my classroom), until sensory staff came to tell me that again there had been no phone call and no visit. I could sense the increasing frustration and the sense that their time was being wasted in preparing resources and allocating staff and a room each week. As the location changed to the relative isolation of the sensory room, the importance of the social element of D's visit became more apparent.*

*After she had been offered 'proper' PMLD experiences, both mum and D said they would rather be in class with her friends. This was based upon the fact that they were infrequently in school and so mixing with her peers was especially important to her. In some ways I felt happy about this because it seemed to justify my commitment to the original arrangement, but resurrected the tensions across the team in addition to upsetting the PMLD staff that had organised a*

*number of lessons and resources. I reflected upon a PMLD curriculum and D's time when she is not in school. D was quite isolated due to her condition and this made coming to school for social time very important, more important than PMLD lessons from the planning file.*

*I notified the headteacher and the sensory team and the sensory room initiative was cancelled immediately. Subsequently, D made occasional visits to school and mum accompanied her in class almost every time due to a lack of carers. On these occasions, I detected an atmosphere between my staff and mum, though they were professional their personal 'extra' was not present. The success of these visits again relied wholly upon me and my relationship and interaction with them. Eventually, the visits had to stop due to medical complications.*

#### **4.62 Visiting Class: Discussion**

As I reflected over this experience, I considered how my role as the teacher located in the middle of a web of relationships. The relationships were not conflicting and everyone was an investor in H's welfare in some way. However, when tensions arose, conflicting ideas, principles and values emerged. The prevailing professional landscape held pockets of useful information which could help me as I navigated a path bereft of ideas and devoid of training suitable to teach H. My personal tensions regarding my professional inadequacy, forced me to question my teacher identity and my professional credibility, as I simultaneously tried to manage the tensions within the relationships around me.

The lack of training affected the relationship with my team because, due to a lack of confidence and time, I was not planning for D's arrival and subsequent experience. Consequently, each lesson was a speaking and listening session and my team were losing patience that D and her mum were 'taking over' each time they visited. My relationship with H was adversely affected in that my dialogue with her was lacking positive, encouraging remarks

about the 'exciting things' that I could provide for her and offer her as incentives to visit. Rather, I felt we were left discussing the exciting things she had done while she was not visiting us. This felt wrong. My image of myself was not being fulfilled. My relationship with my senior leadership team was under pressure despite them being very supportive of me, I put myself under pressure as I presumed they expected me to be knowledgeable and deliver activities for this PMLD student. In some ways, I felt 'set up' in an impossible situation as I had no training even in the education of the less complex students.

Despite my grievances over feeling inadequately prepared to teach H, I still felt considerable guilt and my emotions turned negatively inward. The burden of responsibility meant that I saw myself in a very negative light; lazy, lacking in professionalism, not caring about my students, and sometimes, that I do not have 'what it takes' to be a teacher, leading to thoughts of exploring alternative employment. Research shows that training has a positive impact on teacher retention and teacher comfort (Brownell, Sindelar, Bishop, Langley and Seo, 2002, in Jones and West, 2009). I wondered if suitable PMLD training would have prevented me feeling so negatively about myself (regarding H's lessons) and possibly provided me with the confidence to adopt a role of stronger leadership.

Though the school has designated PMLD classes, H was assigned to my class due to her highly developed communicative skills. These classes had highly skilled, very experienced PMLD experts and would have willingly support me with advice and guidance if asked. My closer colleagues, both personally and logistically, were in a similar situation to me in that they had been recruited as teachers without any special school background and found trying to teach PMLD students incredibly difficult.

Carpenter (2007, in Jones and West, 2009) draws attention to concerns about PMLD training in the UK regarding the problem of fewer and fewer teachers experiencing training courses to prepare them for working with PMLD students. However, the problem reaches beyond the specialism of PMLD to the general SEN students. Hastings, Hewes, Lock and Witting (1996) and Robertson (1999), both cited in Bishop and Jones (2002, p.58), state that the lack of training for special educational needs is highlighted as a growing area of concern. Carpenter (2007) goes on to highlight that the nature and the needs of PMLD are becoming ever more complex and challenging, implying that the need of training is actually increasing.

Reflecting upon my experience, I was left to work it out and 'get on with it'. This methodology I consider to be disrespectful of PMLD students and their needs. It overlooks the need to have a clear understanding of teaching pedagogy and rather suggests that the student can settle for less. Jones and West (2009) draw attention to the complex nature of the pedagogy of teaching PMLD students and described the need for 'dedicated education' rather than, "The hope that incidental teacher learning will take place 'on the hoof' during classroom practice. (Jones and West, 2009 p.71). My limited understanding of special school procedures and practices at the time was unsure what opinion to adopt as my colleagues were equally bereft of training. Jones and West (2009) suggest:

*"There is little controversy surrounding the idea that specialist skills and knowledge are required for teaching students with severe/profound difficulties."* (Jones and West, 2009, p.71).

Yet, as is my experience, this is not necessarily the reality. I felt professionally vulnerable and in a difficult position each time H arrived unannounced to class and felt great pressure to improvise something appropriate for H and her mum. Literature appears damming of my experience. *"Placing inexperienced teachers in classrooms with pupils they have not been trained to teach is educational malpractice."* (Jones and West, 2009)

The underlying tensions for me were over my constant internal professional questioning about what was best for H. Contextualising her particular circumstances, it would have been of little value to put together a learning program as her attendance was sporadic and subject to last minute cancellations. Her main aim, as I understood it, was to experience social bonding with her peers and I felt supported by her mum to this end. This decision underpinned my rationale for decisions relating to H and this gave me the temporary confidence to pursue the strategy of engaging in speaking and listening activities.

This experience provided an insight into how the absence of specialist training can build stresses and strains, destabilise relationships and create uncertainties where there were none. I suspect there are deeper recruitment issues underlying recent appointments if schools have been unable to find teachers with relevant training backgrounds. Where the intention may then be to train new staff in-house and through induction processes, this story raises issues with their absence. In my particular circumstances, I was not employed as a PMLD teacher but clearly, as this story illustrates, my role does involve teaching students with PMLD.

In summary, the experience was 'peppered' by my personal anxiety about providing D with an appropriate experience for the short time that she was in school; my lack of appropriate training exacerbated my anxieties and undermined my professional identity and relationships. The story raised the issue of what was really valuable and relevant for D when she attended school. My instinctive provision for D was justified as mum and D's preferred experience in school. The literature warns against untrained staff teaching PMLD and this story appears to justify that concern.



#### **4.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented four re-storied experiences which have had the common theme of benevolence. The stories have allowed discussion of each experience and illustrated significant issues relating to identity, morality and autonomy but also the inter-related factors of professional duty, school protocol and cultural expectations. A lack of teacher training appears to feature as a key factor in both the Nappy and Visiting Class stories. The dominant theme appears to be that of my straining to establish my teacher identity in my school role as a lived experience.

In summary, this chapter reveals that my personal values and ideas/beliefs related to my teaching role appear to drive my thoughts, actions decisions and judgements. I appear to make decisions which support my attempts to establish my teacher identity in school and establish and maintain my relationships with the students primarily (though also with staff in the team and wider school community). I experience power to be with my team rather than with me and my personal autonomy, though generous compared to previous teaching positions, appears to have little accountability or supervision by superiors. Significant issues have arisen relating to training and preparation for teaching in a special school, the evolving nature of teacher identity and personal values and morality, the complex nature of the web of relationships that must be maintained under diverse pressures and the need to maintain up-to-date working attitudes and practices. These issues will be revisited in Chapter 6.

The following chapter will retell five stories which are chosen due to their maleficent or oppressive themes.

## **Chapter 5: Stories Of Maleficence/Oppression**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents five research texts as stories. Each story is a re-storied experience from the field and is chosen because it represents the emergent theme of maleficence encountered in the field. As in the previous chapter, using the lenses of autonomy, personal and staff morality, teacher identity and the locus of power in conjunction with reflection guided by narrative thinking (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), each re-storied experience is fully discussed in the search for meaning. My personal history and narrative beginnings are again considered as factors throughout the discussions in keeping with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) methodology.

The stories begin to illustrate a very different side to the caring role of special school teacher and staff teams. These stories narrate events which illuminate staff practice which may be considered to be less than professional. The experiences begin to illustrate the potential links between autonomy, moral agency and power within relationships. They illustrate some of the issues which arise given the perception that colleagues may not be acting in keeping with the stated ethos of the school.

The table below offers a diagrammatic representation of the stories illustrating the main event and its links to themes and theory.

## **5.2 (Fig.12) Diagrammatic Representation Of Chapter (Linking Story, Main Event, Theme and Theory)**

|   | Story                                    | Main event  | Main Theme  | Theoretical Links                             |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| 1 | Classroom Discipline                     | Autistic boy receives 'tough' discipline on my behalf.                        | Moral dilemma<br>Training<br>Teacher identity               | Moral dilemma<br>Training<br>Teacher identity |
| 2 | Swimming for a Certificate               | Boy is stopped from swimming and prevented from achieving the certification.  | Swimming teacher morality<br>Teacher identity               | Teacher identity<br>Staff morality.           |
| 3 | Tasting Food                             | Students are made to taste food against their will.                           | Moral dilemma<br>Training<br>Teacher identity and autonomy. | Moral dilemma<br>Training<br>Teacher identity |
| 4 | Teaching Assistant's Return from Absence | Teaching assistant intimidates class of primary children.                     | Staff morality and autonomy.<br>Teacher identity.           | Teacher identity                              |
| 5 | Going for a Swimming Lesson              | Teaching assistants and swimming teacher delay lesson for no apparent reason. | Staff morality and autonomy.<br>Teacher identity.           | Moral dilemma<br>Autonomy<br>Teacher identity |

### **5.3 Story 1: Classroom Discipline**

*Dealing with behaviour of any kind can be extremely difficult to get right. Everyone is different and the cause of the behaviour can vary enormously. No more so than in a special school environment.*

*BB was severely autistic. I had taught BB briefly before. He was younger then, but still extremely difficult to manage. I have recollections of that being a tough year for the whole team. However, we found strategies that worked with BB. I did feel my heart sink for a moment when I knew I would have him again in my class, but felt a quiet confidence replace that initial reaction based on my limited previous experiences with him and my trust in my staff. Next year's team were a new combination of staff to me but still very experienced in terms of students like BB.*

*BB had grown in his teenage years. Now he was big and very strong. During transition, I had been told that he was getting worse and his wilfulness was causing huge problems for staff. He had started dropping to the floor as a protest to any movement around school or as a response to being asked to do any form of 'work'. He was too big to lift and needed to be coaxed back onto a chair and into doing work.*

*This year's teaching assistant team assigned to my class included a very self-confident and egocentric character. She, (G) was a teaching assistant who had a reputation for being a bit of a bully to staff and children and was known as a strict disciplinarian. G liked to project a personal image of 'don't mess with me, I am a tough guy'. Historically, this self-image was projected and sustained across the workplace by the nature of the interactions with other teaching assistants, teachers and students. She liked to be very dominant in every situation, and generally regarded her own opinions very highly. She had many qualities which might be interpreted by weaker or less confident staff as bullying. Others would describe the same characteristics as very positive; as strong, abrasive, confident and self-assured; A good person to have in the team, someone who will sort out all of the behaviour issues, especially of the naughty children.*

*With students, G was confrontational and often aggressive; shouting at the students in order to make her point, or to her critics, to win each battle. During lessons, teachers tended to let her sort out the behaviour as it meant they were free to concentrate on delivering and managing the lesson. Teachers tended not to address her firm methods; rather they were perhaps thankful that a potentially major issue emerging in the classroom was being sorted.*

*Of this teaching assistant, other staff said that they cannot believe she is the same member of staff that started years before as a quiet girl who wouldn't say anything to anyone. Her stories of her past have shaped her stories to live by and created the stories that she currently lives.*

*I had worked with G before and knew the benefits and drawbacks of her style. I had let her lead on behaviour in my class as I was new to the school that I didn't feel confident to understand the different ways of approaching behaviour with the many different types of student. I trusted her judgement. She had worked at the school many years more than me and I respected her experience of various kinds of disability.*

*However, I found that she tended to dominate the group with her values, standards and ethics. I had no problem with this at the time as she had good values and they matched mine.*

*As a level four teaching assistant, she would be expected to lead the class when the teacher was out, so her confidence and matching values were a positive benefit to me. As the class teacher, I was responsible for everything in the classroom. Though G enjoyed considerable autonomy to deal with discipline or challenging behaviours, I supervised her and she remained accountable to me. However, as I was the least experienced member of the staff team, I did not feel confident to overrule or correct her as the more experienced members of staff.*

*The year started in September and after a few weeks into term, BB was expected to go to his seat each morning, sit down and complete the worksheet that was waiting for him on his table.*

*The students began coming in from their buses for registration. Each student hung up their coat and made their way to their seat where a small piece of work was waiting for them. BB made his way to his seat and sat on it for a few moments. He saw the work on his table and he*

*watched as G sat down next to him. BB slipped, fluid-like, from the chair onto the floor saying, "Not doing it."*

*I remember thinking that BB was of an age where he might expect a little control over his life, and maybe this was his beginnings of him trying to assert himself.*

*G 'called' for help to get him back onto his seat and my other teaching assistant, AN, went over to support G. He placed a chair on the other side of BB so that three chairs were now in a line. The two staff, one each side of BB, promptly lifted BB under the armpits and put him back onto his chair. He immediately began pushing the table over and succeed making a huge noise. The assistants moved back and he immediately slipped back onto the floor.*

*G went over to BB and shouted at him aggressively for tipping the table over. Then she reminded him that, '...furthermore, he WILL do the work, he WILL tidy the floor, he WILL sit in his chair, he WILL stay and do all those things BEFORE he is allowed to go to the first lesson.' BB sat on the floor and stared at G while biting his fingers and the sides of his hands.*

*G decided to reorganise the table in the light of BB tipping it over. The table was re-positioned to face the wall. The three chairs were positioned in a line, only the middle one is facing the wall.*

*G nipped into the cupboard to get a 2-minute timer and sat down next to BB to tell him that he MUST stay in his seat for 2 minutes before he goes to his lessons. G then explained to BB that the timer cannot start until he is tidy and has done his work. The timer will be stopped every time he 'goes to ground'.*

*G then told BB that he will not be leaving the room until all that is done and she will increase the time if he fails to tidy up the floor.*

*G then told BB that he was getting a count of three to get back onto his chair and he did on three. While he was on his feet BB picked up the paper and pencil and put them on the table. He sat down. G and AN then sat in the two adjacent seats to BB and G told him to do his work. He scribbled on it then threw it away and snapped the pencil.*

*The timer was held up and BB was told he must wait 4 minutes in the chair before he goes to lessons. G left the space and AN stayed. The 2-minute timer ran down and then BB pushed it onto the floor. G shouted at him again and told him that she was laying the timer down; she would not put it up until he says sorry. He said sorry. G then placed the timer upright and the sands started flowing again. When it was empty, G turned it over for the remaining two minutes of the four to pass.*

*During this time, I had been watching my assistants whilst taking the register, sharing news with the class and giving out information related to the day ahead.*

*As I watched, I remember feeling increasingly unhappy at the nature of the emerging battle of wills. In particular, I didn't agree with shouting at BB. I wanted to intervene but my role of speaking to my class, and ensuring that they had their backs to the event seemed important. If I abandoned my part of the team, then the whole class would turn to watch the event and this would not be good for BB or the class. Also, if I chose to interfere with the process, I would be challenging the procedure and though I felt uncomfortable with it, G was managing BB very well and having him respect the rules. As I professionally did not feel confident to offer alternative methods at that time, I reluctantly felt that I had to allow it to take place.*

*As the incident progressed, I remember feeling increasingly uncomfortable about the way G was dealing with the situation. She appeared to getting aggressive, perhaps frustrated. I wondered if it would be better if she let another team member take the lead in the situation. I wondered if I should intervene. My tensions against my personal morality and my professional identity surfaced. I considered my own position of responsibility over the actions of my staff and felt quite useless. I considered that my role entailed upholding strong leadership, support for my colleagues and simultaneously conduct a fabulous lesson for the group. Actually, I was struggling to concentrate on even sharing the morning news items with the remainder of the class; fraught with tensions as I wrestled with judging each passing development as I am teaching.*

*I remember thinking that G will not want to lose face here. The whole class being aware that BB was challenging her and the result would become part of her narrative history and reshape her identity and how she is perceived. I had not seen G back down or seek alternative strategies and I could detect no sign of any compromise here.*

*For G this location was the perfect vehicle to pursue a goal of sustaining and enhancing her reputation as a tough teaching assistant who can deal with all behaviours in all children. Located at the back of the room behind the students – they literally hear every word and share every moment of the experience, having more sensory impact and creating a memory enough to tell peers afterwards and thus sustain the legend. (Compare this to taking student out and returning him later where nobody is able to say who is responsible for what and how it was achieved.)*



*My mind went back to the idea of BB trying to assert himself and considered that our regime doesn't allow for students to negotiate any part of their day. I (my team) have absolute power and control over him. His future story might be to continue to try or alternatively to give up and comply with the requests of the regime without question. I felt guilt that his experiences seemed empty, devoid of anything productive or educational and my understanding of autism never seemed so absent as then.*

*The bell then rang to signify the end of registration where students then move with staff to their streamed literacy lessons around school. My classroom gradually vacated of students and immediately began filling up with the next class for the next lesson. G and BB remained at the back until the 2 minutes were completed. The new students entering the room sat quietly without disturbing the scene, taking up the very positions that my students had vacated. Each student appeared to be aware of the fact there was an incident and responded by silently taking their seats.*

*After a few more moments, G informed BB that he had done his time and he now had permission leave the room to go to his next lesson.*

*I remember thinking that it was going to be a long day for him.*

### **5.31 Classroom Discipline: Discussion**

This story illustrates some of the issues that can arise surrounding the very complicated and individualised management of behaviour. Where behaviour management is typically directed through school policy, providing guidelines, exemplars and limitations, a policy cannot prescribe responses for every situation. This is especially so in the special school where each child can be so different in their physical, medical and emotional needs, their academic ability,

intellect and temperament. The staff relationships with the students may also be a significant factor with behaviour management at such an individual and personalised level.

I reflected upon this narrative and tried to understand BB's objection to following his routines that day when for the previous three he had cooperated fully. I considered the changes in our control and how autistic students do not respond well to sudden changes. I thought that this day involved a change in teaching assistant. Where BB may have been objecting to the new teaching assistant, G, taking over from her colleague, I considered it important that BB got used to working with all of the team so was happy to authorise relatively subtle changes like that to his daily routines. The disruption may equally have had its roots in an incident at home prior to setting off for school.

A related dimension to this was the friendly rivalry and competition between the teaching assistants. After AN had spent three days successfully getting BB through his morning routines, the classroom banter was that G was going to have a go and 'show AN how it's done'. This light-hearted banter existed harmlessly in many class teams regarding challenges within the assistants' day. The more serious point is that where the rivalry and competition becomes significant or too important, it can or may affect judgements when dealing with real people who may be experiencing emotional crises. The teaching assistant G, was very experienced and very confident. She was also very assertive and firmly believed in her style of discipline and control. Her reputation around school was that of wary respect, though it was generally acknowledged that she was a very effective teaching assistant in terms of her dedication and commitment to the class.

As BB's behaviour escalated and G decided to shout at him, I began to feel uncomfortable. I understood that I, as the class teacher, was responsible and accountable for my classroom, the

students and my staff. I considered that there were two simultaneous factors in play; my dependency upon G for behaviour management expertise regarding BB, which imbalanced the power and authority in our professional relationship in her favour, and G breaching the school behaviour policy guidelines and stated school ethos. I wondered whether the power imbalanced helped create the emboldened behaviour.

My lack of training and experience in dealing with students like BB created a context of diminished authority for me and the same factor empowered my teaching assistant. I was wholly reliant upon G for leadership in BB's management but could not verify whether her strategies were based on research and professional opinion or folklore and cultural and institutional traditions. Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale (1999) state that unprofessional practices can evolve as they blur with 'lay' practices. Clearly, my job involved supervising, leading and ultimately determining the difference but I needed to be trained to fulfil that important task. Furthermore, Jones and West (2009) warns against untrained teachers in specialist environments, referring to it as 'professional malpractice'. This has resonated with me during my reflections on more than one occasion. As a conscientious, caring teacher, I have constantly felt the burden of responsibility about getting decisions wrong and in special school there is so much scope for error as specialist knowledge is increasingly required to meet the needs of the evolving student cohorts (Jones and West, 2009).

Support staff shouting at students, in blatant contradiction of the school's published policy and ethos, in front of the supervising teacher, implies that the teacher is in full agreement with the teaching assistant's behaviour. In reality, I felt very concerned that students and other staff might assume that I was condoning the teaching assistants' methods. I considered that my professional identity would be tarnished by such an association. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that sometimes it is what is *not* said, that is as significant as what is said. My absence of

taking control and assuring the class that shouting at students is wrong, may have affirmed with my class that I do support those behaviours toward students. Bakehurst and Synnowich (1995, in Jones, 2004) suggest that a teacher's social self and their social identity can be congruent; that a teacher can see themselves affiliated to a particular social group or characteristics of a group. Following this model, as if in contrast, I actively resisted being associated with G's aggressiveness, (especially the shouting) as my social self disapproves of that characteristic. However, my resistance was unseen by the students.

Some of the factors discussed are cause for concern in that literature indicates that they contribute to climates conducive for bullying (Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale, 1999; Keenan, 2103; Sobsey, 1994; Quarmby, 2011). Poor supervision and accountability structures, untrained staff, power imbalances, abuse of power, ill-supported staff, are all present in this incident and equally are regarded as factors which contribute to a climate of bullying. When these practices are embedded and become institutional and cultural norms, it is easy to imagine that staff are desensitised and do not perceive the gravity of their actions. Implications for training suggested by Sobsey (1994) are relevant here; that appropriate training would engender empathy and understanding for the students and the world they live in.

I found it difficult to make assertive judgements as a result of my limited knowledge and absence of training. Osborne (2010) suggests that practitioners find it difficult to untangle indicators of abuse from the effects of the student's impairment. He also points out that there are inherent factors such as being reluctant to accept abuse is taking place, or seeing it as attributable to the difficulties of caring for a disabled child (Osborne, 2010). Difficulties identifying unprofessional behaviour can result in staff 'playing it down'. Keenan (2013) refers to this as minimilisation. Part of my 'playing it down' involved doubts about my judgements

regarding the seriousness of the event, (seriousness in terms of harm done). For example, I engaged in a moral argument with myself; did G shouting at BB really cause a problem for anyone? Was I viewing her shouting as worse than it really was because I was informed she can be confrontational? Or was it really just ok and there was nothing in it, just getting a 17-year-old 'strop' lad to do his morning work in his seat?

The intrinsic incentive to minimise the event relates to the impact on team harmony, following procedures of complaint against a colleague and the social implications that this may incur. Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale (1999) and Keenan (2013) detail the extreme difficulties in 'whistleblowing'. Furthermore, the teacher always has a disincentive to deal with heavy handed discipline when it is on their behalf, because the teacher 'benefits' from the calm it brings across the class. From my own perspective, I had an investment in the relationship with G. She was the cornerstone to my team. I would want to be certain that I wanted to pull her up about anything knowing that it might adversely affect the relationship which was very strong.

Further self-doubts emerged relating to the wisdom of asking BB to do the work each morning. Should morning work even be asked of BB? My lack of training showed itself again. Was my approach, that G was supporting, a curricular requirement of a boy with such severe autism? What was I teaching him by asking this of him? I considered Gatto's (2002) comments that he felt he was teaching "disconnections" and I wondered if I was doing something similar.

**"This section (5.4) has been reacted for reasons of ethics and confidentiality."**

#### **5.4 Story 2: Swimming For A Certificate**

















### **5.5 Story 3: Tasting Food**

*The cooking of food features prominently in the special school curriculum. Children of all ages, abilities and disabilities engage in these lessons. In addition to this, cooking features in the sensory curriculum.*

*It was Tuesday lunchtime. The children had left the classroom and I was tidying up the last of my papers from the lesson. My thoughts were on my lunch and which music should I play while I am eating? As I began settling down with my foil-wrapped sandwiches and my cold drink, Gemma my teaching assistant, entered the classroom looking very agitated. She had spent the morning working in another class, as a favour, due to staff shortages.*

*I began to realise that she was not alright and that she actually looked very upset. She paced across the classroom floor back and forth in a highly agitated way. I remember thinking that this must be serious because I had never seen Gemma be upset about anything before. I asked what had happened and she sat on the edge of the table and told me.*

*She said she had been supporting a colleague of mine in the food technology room with the non-communicative PMLD group. She added, "To be fair, it was good, very sensory, and the kids were enjoying making the food."*

*I asked what had caused the problem then?*

*"Well, it was after the food was made. She (the teacher in charge) invited all of the students to taste it. Well only one 'said,' "Yes". The rest didn't want to know. I thought, oh here we go. What's she (the teacher) gonna do here then? And you know what she did? She made them taste it; Rubbing it on their mouths when they didn't want her to. Oh, it was awful. They were*

*struggling and trying to move out of the way while she (the teacher) was telling them that after making it they had to try it. Honestly, I was fuming. One lad started crying. I just moved out of the way and thought I'm having nothing to do with this, no way. I nearly walked out. It wouldn't have been so bad but it was lemon juice on pancake and they really reacted to it."*

*I felt my feelings of frustration and annoyance building up. I imagined the scene. I imagined that our cultural universal standard is that when a person says "No," they mean "No," and we respect that. However, life isn't always that simple. I remembered too well the feeling as a child at my mother's house during access visits, sitting at the table struggling to finish my dinner because I felt full, only to be pressured into eating more than I wanted or could eat in order to achieve the goal of 'finishing my plate'. I always felt angry about that pressure that I was made to feel. I never wasted food deliberately but felt no desire to eat for the sake of it. I had always promised myself that I would never put a child through that, neither my own children at home nor children at school. Meal times would always be relaxed and without pressure.*

*I remember listening and watching Gemma as she calmed back down. She really was very unhappy about it. I remember feeling unclear about how wrong this was, as my experience of PMLD was so utterly limited to nothing and I only had my own moral perspective to draw on. I tried to corroborate my beliefs that a child's refusal was an acceptable response and should be respected, but I felt frustrated that I had neither training nor professional PMLD experience, just an instinctive reaction.*

*I asked Gemma if she had seen anything like it before and she said no. She told me that normally, in her experience, the making of the food in a sensory way is the fun part, tasting and touching and rubbing the different textures of ingredients. If students didn't want to eat the*

*food, then they didn't. Sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't. They might smell it instead or just feel it.*

*I asked her if she wanted to take it further and she looked at me and smiled for a moment though it was clear she was still upset. She said, "Nah, what's the point? You know nothing will happen." Then she started to laugh and said, "Yes, you do. I'll get moved to primary. That's what'd happen."*

*I struggled to know what to say in that respect such was the overwhelming evidence that she was right. The management did consistently move teaching assistants into the primary department if they were involved in any form of dispute with a member of the team or teacher. She asked that I take it no further and she went for her dinner.*

### **5.51 Tasting Food: Discussion**

This story illustrates some of the emotive issues that can engulf teaching and special needs education. Emergent in this experience were themes of children's rights, personal autonomy and respectful treatment set against compliance to lesson objectives, cooperation with teaching staff and moral judgements.

I considered the self-image of the teacher and reflected on her relationships around school. She was quite unpopular and regarded as quite an abrasive, bad-tempered person; notorious for rudeness and speaking disrespectfully to people in front of other staff. I wondered if she was aware of how she made people around her feel. I knew her quite well professionally and I perceived that she regarded herself as a well-planned, well-organised, business-like character who was 'too good' for her position of teacher. She was very confident and aggressive with subordinates and students alike, and had upset many staff with her methods of bringing unruly

or disobedient students under control. She had been 'spoken to' by the SLT about how she speaks to staff. She came to teaching after many years as a teaching assistant, progressing through government sponsored fast track courses. She presents herself as the school's expert on PMLD tuition. Some might say she could be a fantastic asset or a liability to a team in equal measure.

Some teaching assistants take on the training to become teachers and make the transition very smoothly. Others, in my experience, can go through a period of 'asserting themselves'. I consider this to be part of a necessary process of adjustment when former colleagues become subordinates and other superiors lose their superiority. Responsibilities change and relationships alter professionally and sometimes personally. I have felt that some new teachers struggle with the power, authority and responsibility that their new position carries and have found this to be encapsulated as a lack of professional humbleness shaped as a resistance to listen to, or to learn from colleagues. This teacher epitomised this process and characteristic.

Keenan (2013) points out that when responsibility and power are given to a person, it is very important to consider the needs of training to appropriately carry out the new responsibilities. I consider this a very important, but often overlooked, point in schools, where newly promoted staff can spend a year making costly mistakes as they 'settle in' to their new post. My argument suggests that when the teacher is faced with a decision to make, they may not feel 'settled in' to their new post enough to make a good call. They may still be overly aware that they are new and feel under scrutiny, trying to assert themselves, establish themselves and prove their worth to both themselves and their colleagues.



This narrative reveals a clear tension that professional teachers are asked to negotiate between ensuring students participate in the planned lessons and/or experiences, set against the respectful and morally upright treatment of the students. The power, authority and control enjoyed by the teachers are balanced against the individual autonomy and rights of the individual child.

In this story, the teacher asked the students their preference, then after not getting the reply she wanted, decided to insist that the students taste the food even though they have indicated that they don't want to. The issue of whether the child has the right to refuse the experience of tasting the food seems in some respects clear and in others quite murky. The Human Rights Act, 1998, to which the UK is bound, promises the right to be free from torture, inhumane or degrading treatment. Arguably, touching a piece of food on to the lips of a child may not, for some, be regarded as degrading the child. For others, not respecting a child's answer, having asked for it, would constitute degrading the child. However, each school publishes their ethos or mission statement as well as various policies to represent, for interested parties or investors, the way a student might expect to experience their schooling there. Using these published documents, the school claims to provide a safe, secure, happy learning environment, that students have the right to expect not to be bullied and that they can expect to be cared for in a safe and supportive environment. For most people perhaps the teacher's decision may be somewhere on the continuum between disrespectful, condescending and abusive, bullying.

The teacher obtained absolute compliance from the students. The hidden lesson they learned was that they have no right to refuse to try the food. In this sense, I wonder why they were ever asked if they had a preference, only to be told their opinion was not only without value, but would be discounted. For those pupils with the intellectual ability to suffer emotionally from this encounter, I feel very strongly. Osborne (2010) points out that research has

indicated there exists a widely held belief that impairment can protect a child from the damaging effects of abuse. This is, of course, a fallacy.

Gatto (2002) proposes that teachers promote an emotional dependency in our students.

*"I teach kids to surrender their will to the predestined chain of command. Rights may be granted or withheld by any authority without appeal, because rights do not exist inside a school – not even the right of free speech, as the Supreme Court has ruled – unless school authorities say they do."* (Gatto, 2002, p.6). Gatto (2002) makes the point that teachers have unusual levels of power and control over their students and they have little option but to capitulate.

The published policy for guidance on the school's approach to bullying gives a detailed interpretation including cyberbullying. The policy describes a school where bullying of any kind will never be tolerated referencing core values such as respect, safety, a listening culture where any forms of bullying will be addressed. The policy states that students will be taught in a safe, supportive environment where students have the right not to be bullied (YTG School, 2015). Using the published approach to bullying as a reference point there is a moral argument as to whether the story told by the teaching assistant is considered within the dominant school culture as acceptable practice on the continuum towards bullying.

The literature describes bullying as involving core elements. Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale's (1999) definition involves unchecked power, weak regulation and poor training. Crozier (1997) acknowledges bullying is hard to define, but involves a power imbalance and the use of force and cruelty. Sharp and Smith (1994, in Crozier, 1997) list factors of bullying as an abuse of power and a desire to intimidate or/and dominate. The DfE publication *Prevention and Tackling Bullying* (DfE, 2014) describes bullying as:

*“Bullying is behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally.” (DfE, 2014)*

They describe a related imbalance of power which can manifest in many forms such as psychological and can result in intimidation. Clearly, the narrative as retold may contain elements of these definitions. However, the school policy mentions that bullying is a repeated behaviour, *“It is felt that bullying is a repeated action- that only persistent or longstanding targeting of a victim amounts to bullying.”* (YTG School, 2015). Incorporating this factor may well exclude the teacher due to the tasting being a one-off event, arguably with honourable intent, to give the children an experience which offers no obvious lasting harm.

In reflecting on the teaching assistant, I understood her to be unhappy about the incident but she was very clear that she did not want it to be taken further. This apparent contradiction confused me. I wondered whether this was part of the bigger problem; that bullying is hard to define and establish conclusively (Crozier, 1997). The event could easily be justified from a contrasting point of view making the teaching assistant who found the experience upsetting unable to justify that it was anything more than ‘upsetting’ for her personally. The action offended her morality but did not breach any professional rules with enough clarity to be deemed ‘malpractice’.

This arguably illustrates how our personal morality can cause tensions in our professional lives especially when we are working with vulnerable children. It may also signify the importance of a unified understanding of acceptable practice amongst all of the staff as proposed by Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale (1999). Was Gemma out of touch with what constitutes acceptable practice?

It may have been that Gemma wanted to stop a repeat of the behaviour but felt inhibited. She joked sarcastically that she would be moved if she spoke out. Crozier (1997) relates a number of disincentives for tackling bullying including the school's lack of confidence to deal with it and fear of reprisals. Gemma clearly felt there would be a negative consequence for her if she advocated the pupils' experience.

Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale (1999) explain that disclosure can be hard due to problems at the organisational level. He describes problems at various levels; for the student to make a disclosure there may be issues around communication, for staff there may be issues of intimidation, across a wider staff network there may be issues relating to training and at an organisational level he suggests poor clarity of roles and contracts affecting how disclosures are handled. Keenan (2013) found systemic inhibitors to justice in the handling of disclosure at the organisational and cultural levels in the Catholic Church.

It is interesting that Gemma felt unable to discuss her concerns with the teacher either at the time or afterwards, without her thinking that she was actually the 'problem'. It might be expected professionally that this is the first thing to do if there is an issue. This may reflect the perception that she is abrasive, dominating and won't tolerate dissent from anyone, thus closing the door to positive professional relationships with the consequence of forcing the teaching assistants to comply with the lessons and any unethical practices despite their disagreeing in principle. For Crozier, the rigorous application of the school policy, which is clearly understood by all staff, is a fundamental factor in tackling issues of bullying (Crozier, 1997). It would appear that in this case, staff thinking in the same way would have been of enormous benefit.

As I reflected upon my professional role, my initial frustration centred upon my personal inability to allay or affirm her anxieties about her experience in order to make her feel better in some way. I felt inadequate in my role as teacher and a member of staff in a more senior position. I also expected that I might have been able to have given her professional insight to the teacher's perspective. I considered that this failing was due to my personal morality and professional identity being incongruent with the other teacher.

I feel quite embarrassed at my own lack of understanding of what appeared to be a very basic right or wrong event, but professionally I struggle to make a confident judgement – despite my moral certainty that it seemed wrong. I reflected on the significances of Phillion's (2002a, 2000b, 2000c) experiences in the field with Ms Multiculturism, and gained an appreciation of how difficult it can be to 'see' something clearly.

I consider that at the time, I lacked knowledge and experience of both special education and this particular school's culture and practices to personally judge the wrongness of the teacher's actions in the story. However, the teaching assistant was very experienced and, though she may not have attended PMLD courses for some time, it could be expected that she could judge the actions of one teacher against the actions of others over time and gauge a contextualised appropriateness based on her years of experience working alongside many teachers. If she was upset by the event, then I may be inclined to suggest that something was wrong.

In summary, the key thread within this story centred around issues of personal morality and professional culture and conduct. It raised fundamental questions about students' rights and how they are protected in an environment of dominance and control by teachers and their staff. Should the teacher have disregarded the choice of student? Was the aim of the lesson

to taste the food and should the student have the right to refuse? Was the teacher justified in forcing the student to taste the food in order that they have had the experience that the teacher planned for them? Is it respectful or appropriate to force an experience upon a disabled child? Or did the students just need encouraging being brave enough to try something new? Questions like these raise ethical issues about how much control a teacher should have and how much personal autonomy a student should expect, particularly over what passes into their bodies.

Where do we draw our line? Our stories to live by, shaped by our past lived stories, dictate our attitudes but are constantly re-shaped by the present lived experiences. My storied past defines my approach as respectful of the students wishes. At the point of a child getting upset, surely it has already gone too far? Surely there are ways of encouraging a child to try a food without forcing them; incentivising, patience over time, rewarding, making a game of it. PMLD students are especially vulnerable and reliant on a protector figure to guard and protect their interests and are especially vulnerable as a target group for bullying or abuse (Osborne, 2010). Crozier (1997) acknowledges that the psychological damage from incidents of bullying is worse than physical, but points out that these psychological incidents are 'easily encountered but not labelled as bullying' (Crozier, 1997). Issues such as these are discussed at length by Sobsey (1994) and he finds that negative social attitudes and cultural beliefs toward disability still inhibit the battle to eradicate abuse in all its forms against disabled people (Sobsey, 1994, p.143). In considering the blurred boundaries and difficulties in identifying abuse and abusers, he warns that the hardest abuses to guard against is the abuser who masquerades as a friend and the abuse itself that masquerades as an intervention (Sobsey, 1994, p.142).

Nevertheless, in this case, the damage was done.

### **5.6 Story 4: Teaching Assistant's Return From Absence**

*They were a hard class. Some describe it as a class 'full of characters'. Either way, the behaviour was challenging and the teacher in charge was, by her own admission, finding it a strain. None-the-less, she was maintaining order and she felt that she was teaching.*

*Her support staff were excellent. They followed the guidelines and ethos promoted by the teacher in line with the school ethos and policy. There was always such a lot to do as these children were very young and had a number of behaviour-related conditions. As a group, they required clarity and firm handling.*

*One of the teaching assistants emerged as a much stronger character than the others and was clearly confident to take the lead with all incidents of behaviour. She had her own ways of getting results and the force of her personality was clearly the cornerstone. The children were wary of her, maybe scared of her, the other teaching assistants were too, and the teacher, who liked a happy team, preferred not to challenge the behaviour management strategies employed by this teaching assistant. She told me that she felt quite intimidated by her and felt that the team would not benefit from her being upset and grumpy. In addition to this, her behaviour management would become an ongoing issue for the whole team.*

*The teaching assistant in question was absent for a couple of weeks due to illness and the teacher and the team quickly regrouped and effectively implemented behaviour strategies which they found worked. The hands-on approach was not implemented and the class team were getting results through their own brand of behaviour management and relationships.*

*The teaching assistant returned from absence after two weeks. At morning registration, she walked into the class (with a swagger akin to a celebrity) and announced to the class in front of*

the teacher, ***“I don’t know what’s been happening while I’ve been away, but it’s gonna stop, because I’M BACK, SO WATCH IT!”*** She held her finger out pointing at each child around the room. The teacher opted not to address this and remained silent.

When the class teacher related this short story to me later that morning, she clearly felt that the teaching assistant had crossed a boundary of professionalism and appropriate behaviour and I couldn’t help but wonder why then, if that is how she read the situation, had she not addressed it with her straight away or later, after the students and other staff had left the room? I wondered if she was canvassing my opinion before deciding how to deal with it. I remember feeling that I had let her down by not committing to an opinion either way; that she probably was waiting for a firm opinion to help affirm her own impressions of the assistant’s comments.

Ironically, the class teacher informed me that when the teaching assistant had been away, the class were so much better behaved, more relaxed and, in her opinion, generally happier.

### **5.61 Teaching Assistant’s Return From Absence: Discussion**

This short story is set in a professional landscape of relationships which are required to be professionally upheld and maintained under pressure. The teacher felt that she needed to keep the teaching assistant happy in order that the team was happy, but she was also aware that there was potential for the teaching assistant to become dominant over both students and staff. Her reputation was well-known; that she was emotionally intense, super-confident and verbally aggressive, an intimidating character, but professionally very effective. Literature suggests that personal qualities such as being bad tempered and irritable, intense and less controlled aggression (Olweus, 1978, in Crozier, 1997)



Staff needs training on, and knowledge of challenging behaviours (Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale, 1999) in order that they can better understand the nature of the difficulties the students face. Furthermore, Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale (1999) point out that staff often don't know what to do when the ordinary strategies fail. In this situation, some may resort to more basic methods of control such as threats and intimidation.

The storied comments by the teaching assistant have raised concerns in the teacher about her professionalism and judgement about appropriateness and she appeared to be possibly canvassing teachers for their opinions to support her in responding appropriately.

As I read over this story, I initially tried to put myself in the position of the students and reflected on how it might feel to be intimidated in such a way. I thought about my own stories of my school days where veiled threats, intimidation, physical punishments and bullying were all common methods of achieving compliance from the students. I resented it then and have no part in behaviours like that now either professionally or personally. I wondered if the teaching assistant had meant the remarks as a light hearted joke and the teacher was perhaps not quite reading the lighter side to it. Then I heard myself reminding me of how many bullies, when questioned about their behaviour, had said in their defence, "It was just a joke." The teacher certainly did not see a funny side.

The students may easily be intimidated by such remarks in jest or not. There are considerations as to whether the remarks might be considered as 'not in keeping with the stated ethos of the school.' The school certainly publicly states that they push for achievement and progress in a 'safe and secure environment' (YTG School, 2013). The school also claim 'first class facilities and outstanding quality of care'. The anti-bullying policy

references the school's aim to provide 'a safe, happy and ordered learning environment' (YTG School, 2015)

The comments carry a threat and this invites students to consider their past experiences with her and also the stories they may have heard of her. The message was that those practices will continue and this may mean more to some than others depending on the shared narrative histories of the teaching assistant and the pupils.

Furthermore, the students saw that the teacher was complicit and the adults in the room, *their* room, were united against them. The teacher's reaction or lack of it implied that she either agreed with it or was unable to challenge it. The students may have been confused as to where the authority was held in the classroom and asked the question, 'Where would they turn for help?'

I felt a moral objection to speaking to special school students in this manner. I considered that school is a place where pupils need to feel the staff are on their side with many key dimensions to the role such as protectors, supporters and counsellors as well as educators. Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale (1999) point out factors that can contribute to safe cultures include involvement of students in pastoral care and the governance and clear information about behaviours that may be expected from staff. In addition, Crozier (1997) argues that rigorous application of the school policy and the whole school explicit in their understanding about acceptable behaviour, contributes significantly to tackling incidents of bullying.

The teaching assistant's comments probably carry much more impact made in their classroom; the students' sanctuary and place of safety. The message delivered here perhaps carrying the reminder to the children that there is no escape. Gatto (2002) refers to this as the seventh

lesson of the hidden curriculum, one can't hide. He makes the point that historically and still, constant surveillance of children is needed in order to maintain tight control (Gatto, 2002).

The relationship between the teaching assistant and the students was dominated by the teaching assistant's identity. She nurtured the idea that she was tough, harsh and not to be messed with implying that if they behave, everything will be fine. This idea upholds the grand narrative of education; that if you are good, there is nothing to worry about, so be good. She relied in part from past stories and folklore and current experiences from the immediate past to ensure that the future experiences were of obedient, compliant students that acknowledged and respected her as the dominant character she was living as. The teaching assistant appeared to relish her identity, the image, the power and dominance and lived up to the notoriety it brought. Factors contributing to a climate for bullying often include a power imbalance (Keenan, 2013; Crozier, 1997; Sobsey, 1994; Quarmby, 2011). In this story, the power imbalance appears firstly between the students and the teaching assistant but equally there is a potential power imbalance in the relationship between the teacher and the teaching assistant. Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale (1999) add 'unchecked' as we consider the power variable. They refer to the lack of accountability and supervision which would normally exist within the organisational structure. Here, the primary points of accountability begin with the classroom teacher. Unfortunately, she opted to avoid challenging the teaching assistant over her remarks, potentially signalling to her that the remarks were within acceptable boundaries for this classroom thus lowering the bar of professional standards.

It may be said that the teaching assistant's comments were a clear challenge to the teacher's authority. The teacher was struggling to assert herself in her own classroom and the children would see her weaknesses. I wondered whether this was due to the overwhelming need by the teacher for strong members of staff that were good with discipline. This need may

imbalance the power between the assistant and the teacher facilitating the assistant to gain extra authority and autonomy.

The story illustrates a moment in the journey of the teaching assistant from quiet, shy beginner ten years ago, to highly confident teaching assistant who arguably for some, was becoming too assertive and too confident. This mini narrative collides with the teacher's journey from teaching assistant, promoted to teacher and beginning to wrestle with the more difficult challenges of dealing with personalities and managing relationships and being the person in charge, responsible for the staff and their actions.

The story is also illustrative of the students passage through their school years in that each day, week or year can be dominated by either positive experiences or negative ones; of how children's daily experiences can be altered enormously by a single member of staff being either absent or present.

The teacher appears to offer generous autonomy in respect of disciplining the students. The teacher appears to condone her harsh methods of pre-emptive threat and intimidation and the promotion of a powerful, untouchable dominant figure in the class. The offer of autonomy may be a falsehood; in that the teacher is not confident enough to rein the teaching assistant in should the need arise. The reality therefore would be that the dominant character and keeper of authority in the classroom is in fact, the teaching assistant. This mixture of circumstance may lend itself to a climate favourable to bullying behaviours that the teacher is unable or unwilling to address.

Research has shown a clear correlation between autonomy and increased job satisfaction in teaching staff (Moomaw, 2005; Pearson and Moomaw, 2005), but studies show poor

regulation and lack of rigorous accountability structures contribute to abusive climates (Sobsey, 1994; Keenan, 2013; Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale, 1999; Crozier, 1997).

The teacher appears to be struggling with the class and is utilising a strong character in her team to manage the behaviours. Whilst on the one hand she is publicly disapproving of the teaching assistant's methods, and in doing so morally and professionally distancing herself from the practice, she is also complicit in condoning and encouraging the behaviours in her class. This apparent contradiction may be to safeguard her own position should an incident occur, but also maintain the valuable help she needs to control a wayward class.

Interestingly, the teacher stated that when the teaching assistant was away the teacher enjoyed the relaxed and happier atmosphere in class implying that if she preferred it that way she would ensure that the classroom is set that way even after the teaching assistant had returned. It may be argued that she has a moral duty to make the atmosphere the best for the students and create a happy, relaxed and respectful climate of learning, something akin to the stated policies regarding ethos and culture.

In summary, this short narrative contained threads relating to the confidence of the teacher to deal with the teaching assistant, the teaching assistant being useful as a keeper of discipline, the question of what is 'appropriate discipline' for a 'hard' class and what is the effect upon the children in the longer term, emotional level by having the teaching assistant adopt this persona?

I consider that any form of bullying special needs children in this way, making them feel scared must be wrong, or employing a regime of fear in a classroom isn't the stated ethos of the school and therefore goes against policy and is therefore potentially a discipline issue; a nettle

that the teacher avoids grasping. The teacher is appointed in charge and responsible for the children and the room but cannot or does not want to, control the teaching assistant's methods, despite knowing that this means the students are less happy, less relaxed and enjoy school less.

**"The following section (5.7) has been redacted for reasons of ethics and confidentiality."**

### **5.7 Story 5: Going To A Swimming Lesson**



























### **5.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented and discussed five re-storied experiences from the field, chosen because they illustrated the emergent theme of maleficence and oppression. The discussion of each has raised issues and highlighted concerns with some elements of behaviour with some members of staff; teachers and teaching assistants.

The discussions illustrate concerns regarding personal choices about how staff chooses to treat students when other factors combine. Factors include teacher identity, generous personal autonomy and a lack of clear accountability. The inclusion of power which is accompanied by autonomy and an absence of supervision (or structural isolation) appears to incline some staff to treat the students in a less respectful manner than they would otherwise.

In summary, I have drawn from each story key issues and discussed them in relation to the literature. The emergent issues illuminate the need for strong leadership and clear expectations of behaviour. Significant issues have arisen relating to autonomy, power and organisational structures, accountability, levels of supervision and training in up-to-date practices and attitudes. Other factors such as teacher identity, personal morality and

dominant school cultures have surfaced. The issues and themes that have emerged from Chapter Four and Five will be drawn on in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 6: Narrative Understandings**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This narrative inquiry has illustrated how my professional move from mainstream education to special education has encompassed layers of overlapping tensions; complexities involving the nature of special education and the teaching role itself, as well as tensions relating to the transition process experienced as I moved from one educational culture to another.

The tensions I experienced are discussed in this chapter; namely, my tensions surrounding my understandings of not only my experiences and my observations, but also my career journey and its connectedness to my earlier life experiences.

The chapter is in five main parts. Part 1 discusses my tensions with morality and autonomy. Part 2 discusses my tensions with my teacher identity in the light of change. Part 3 discusses my tensions related to power and relationships. Part 4 reviews my research findings and discusses the conclusions. Finally, Part 5 discusses the significance of the research and includes implications for the future.

Significant to this chapter is the realisation that, despite the discussion covering discreet tensions, there is a layering, overlapping and deep seated connection and relatedness between the tensions.

### **6.2 Part 1: Tensions With Morality And Autonomy**

#### **6.21 My Morality**

I have always felt confident that my core moral values and ethical treatment of my students during my career has been a strength of my professional skill set.

Upon moving to special education from mainstream, like Phillion (2002a, 2002b, 2002c), I felt I could list the characteristics, qualities and traits of a special school teacher emphasising a nurturing approach before I joined the school. I had ideas and beliefs about educationalists in that field and felt that my morality would be well-matched in that 'caring' field of work (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996, p.9, in O'Connor, 2006, p.5). I considered that the highest moral standards would be always adhered to and never doubted those ideas.

My teacher identity saw myself as a teacher whose qualities are closely affiliated with Syrnyk's (2012) description. Syrnyk (2012) reports that nurturing teachers might have qualities such as inner strength, a calm and empathetic nature, self-awareness, and objectivity. She goes on to describe such personal qualities as 'maintaining a relaxed and reasoned demeanour', being 'highly attuned to the internal states of others' and 'effective managers of their own internal states, 'not easily riled', not judgemental and be able to 'work within the constraints of pupils' personal situations to do what is best for the child' (Syrnyk, 2012, p.8). I would also acknowledge the important role of caring (O'Connor, 2008) and that teaching 'centres around human interaction and emotional understanding,' (Hargreaves, 1998, p.850, in O'Connor, 2008, p.5).

Caring for the students may translate to taking up a cause or just a profound desire to make a difference (Jones, 2004). Personal qualities, values and attitudes such as these are usually explored at interview in order to ensure that potential employees are well-suited to their employment. I considered that I had these qualities and they certainly matched my pre-existing beliefs about special school teachers. Colleagues that I worked alongside in special education predominantly displayed similar personal and professional attributes.

The published ethos of the school was clearly that of individual educational programmes delivered in a context of support, with caring and nurturing staff and aims that individual potential is achieved and I was happy to move to a school with such an emphasis on nurturing.

My research experiences had a profound effect upon me in terms of me questioning my beliefs and how I justified my belief that I was right.

The experience of Phillion (2002a) had reminded me to avoid rushing to conclusions and I reflected endlessly over the moral dilemmas which emerged. I found a number of occasions where I felt unable to know what was right; a situation which left me feeling very inadequate. However, I realised that there may be right in both sides of a dilemma (Gardener, 2007) and this was often the difficulty. Gardener (2007, p.13) recognises that some ethical decisions 'draw from valid but sharply contrasting value systems' and my experiences illustrate that there was a case that could be argued in defence of both sides. Despite this, my unease continued and even in acknowledging that there may be merit in the alternative view, I agree with Gardener that the answer is not always clear cut and there is, in most cases, 'a preferred path that is superior,' (Gardener, 2007, p.13).

For me, my guiding morality with my students is that there exists a solid base of trust; my students learn to trust me completely that I only have their best interests at heart. Syrnyk (2012) describes the nurture teacher in terms of emphasising trust but also, '*Presenting oneself as an open, trustworthy secure role model, and ultimately as a person with whom relationships can be built,*' (Syrnyk, 2012, p.8).

During this research, I found tensions in trying to establish and maintain the trust within the relationships as I was pulled in different directions by conflicting loyalties, duties and professional expectations.

### **6.22 Staff Morality**

In turning my attention to the staff morality, I felt a number of tensions. My storied accounts portray circumstances in which I was uncomfortable with the actions and comments of individuals and sometimes groups of staff. I was familiar with each member of staff and though I knew none of the staff socially, I perceived that they all usually presented as good workers that worked hard in school.

When I experienced a moral discomfort with the actions of other staff, I felt in an acutely difficult position with competing tensions pulling at me and my conscience. On the one hand, I was drawn to the wisdoms of Phillion's (2002a) experiences and consequently, I wished to avoid making any form of negative judgements about my colleagues until I felt I had a more secure understanding of the culture and practices of the staff and school (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). In addition to this, I felt that I was still very much in the role of a new member of staff, being trained and socialised by the existing staff. My role in this functionalist style of induction was to adopt the existing practices and not challenge the status quo (Pugach, 1992 in Stuart and Thurlow, 2000). Further to this, I adopted a role which met typical expectations of me by my new colleagues; that I would seamlessly blend into the school, becoming an effective member of the team (Sennett, 1998). My final tension in this area was my expectations of myself and my obligations to my family and wider financial commitments; I need to make this job a success in order to keep a roof above my children's heads.

On the other hand, I felt a strong moral responsibility to protect the children/students that I perceived were being treated at best, disrespectfully, and at worst, being bullied. I constantly reflected on each scenario and poured over whether I should have intervened, done more, reported events or people or whether I was over-reacting and 'clearly not attuned to the culture or practices yet'.

I considered my pre-existing beliefs about the qualities suited to the nurturing style of special education; caring, empathy, attuned to emotions, trust and patience (O'Connor, 2008) and wondered how and why might staff begin to be unkind or act immorally toward such vulnerable students? Literature indicates that the recent changes in education toward league tables, academic progress and competition, set in a culture of accountability has placed emphasis away from teachers ethical and emotional qualities (O'Connor, 2008). These changes have forced special education to become increasingly accountable for assessing, target-setting, ensuring progress and measuring progress of their students. This may seem reasonable but Corbett (in Jones, 2005) remarked how her PMLD students were referred to as vegetables and deemed 'uneducable' in her early career. Do attitudes like this still lurk beneath the surface in existing staff, fostering negative attitudes of worthlessness?

Bishop and Jones (2002) indicate how the move to an academic curriculum affected the opportunities to offer training on pastoral aspects of teaching. This may have an impact upon a profession which relies enormously upon interpersonal relationships and trust. I consider it essential that staff members are aware of how their own behaviours can inadvertently create negative learning environments or situations (Corbett, 2001).

A number of my stories illustrated discipline and control which was, arguably, intimidatory or oppressive toward the students. I have found that teachers are expected to be able to do this



well. Over the years, I have seen teachers gain enormous respect and admiration for this single skill rather than other elements of a teachers' skill set. In a profession where control is a fundamental expectation, it is clear why good disciplinarians are thought to be good teachers (Kearney, 1987). I wondered whether the staff felt a professional or social desire or expectation to be seen to being 'strong' with discipline.

On a personal level, I became very sad as a response to my experiences with my colleagues. I began to feel let down by them and felt negatively about the profession. I began to consider that a special education job isn't 'real' teaching. I reflected on Corbett's (in Jones, 2005) experiences and Jones' (2004) findings that special education isn't valued by the wider educational community and it is 'work for martyrs'. I began to worry that I had entered a graveyard for failing teachers and that my career was essentially over already. Despite these feelings, I was under pressure to make a success of it; I needed to work in order to pay my bills (Gardner, 2007).

In considering the attitudes of the staff, I pondered about how professional did the teachers and support staff consider their work to be? Did they see their work as credible? Again, Jones (2004) research reminded me of how special educators distance themselves from mainstream and create a homogenous group, a profession within a profession (Jones, 2004). Did this once exclusivity promote a professional separation from the newer generation of 'untrained' teachers that have entered special education without the specialist training of their older colleagues? Has this influx of unspecialised teachers watered down professional expectations and resulted in the quality of education becoming patchy in some areas of special schools? Have unspecialised teachers lowered their expectations of their teams and has this invoked a general malaise in some attitudes in some departments? Typically, professional expectations are explicit and new staff usually buy into these explicit expectations, acting in accordance

with them (Gardener, 2007). However, in less professional spheres of work, where responsibilities have emerged more informally, the individual member of staff is more instrumental in determining how or which responsibilities they assume (Gardener, 2007). Did this reflect the behaviours I witnessed? If the attitudes of some of the members of staff were 'poor', then the likelihood of them performing to a good standard would reduce. Gardener's (2001) 'Good Work' project proposes that for good work to be likely, four entities need to align; the workers' beliefs, the values of the profession, the forces of the field and the reward system of the society (Gardener, 2007). Clearly, there are arguments that possibly for some members of staff, their beliefs and the values of their profession may not be aligned. In addition to this, the rewards of the society may be so limited that this may also present as not being aligned. Jones (2004) suggests that society does not value the special educators work and the teaching assistants earn a relatively low salary for their responsibilities.

Factors such as these (easy entry, low qualifications, quality of staff, low monetary reward) have long been attributed to poor work ethic and resulting output and continue the debate regarding how to ensure high standards at work (Crow, 1935).

Where access is easy, does this attract unsuitable candidates to work in jobs which would be otherwise unsuitable? Where unsuitable characters have gained employment in special education settings, are other factors necessary for their unsuitability to show?

The next section will explore the factor of autonomy.

### **6.23 Role Of Autonomy**

It is clear that the concept of teacher autonomy can mean a number of different things to different people depending upon how they view the construct (Moomaw, 2005).

Autonomy for one teacher can be isolation for another, some teachers may thrive on their freedom from interference and others may see it as their superiors neglecting their supervisory duties (Moomaw, 2005, p.15).

I felt that the school gave me generous professional 'space' to settle in and I was flattered to be trusted. I presumed that the leadership team had confidence in me. As a confident professional, I initially enjoyed the lack of interference, finding it a refreshing change from my previous teaching posts. I felt motivated to learn what I needed to and teach in my new role, considering my autonomy to be a 'special treat' while I 'find my feet'.

During the research period, I realised that many staff I worked alongside also appeared to have generous autonomy and as I lived through a number of experiences, some re-storied in Chapters 4 and 5, I began to change my view, seeing the autonomy within school as a factor in wider problems.

Teacher autonomy is linked to very positive effects such as raised teacher motivation, empowerment and professionalism (Pearson and Moomaw, 2005). In addition to this teacher autonomy is regarded as an accurate indicator of teacher job satisfaction (Moomaw, 2005). Regardless of this, I felt consistently that my experiences appeared to indicate that staff autonomy was directly related to staff behaviours that had left me feeling uncomfortable. I became concerned that the school was too liberal in affording so many staff so much autonomy. Individual staff and also staff teams appeared to have freedom from any supervision or meaningful accountability and my reaction was that professional and moral boundaries were being pushed. The stories Classroom Discipline, Swimming Lesson Waiting in Class, Swimming For a Certificate, TA returns from Absence and Tasting Food, illustrated my concerns. The culture of the school appeared to portray happy caring benevolent staff but

there was a clear undercurrent of autonomous staff enjoying generous amounts of professional freedom, engaging in what I considered at best, inappropriate behaviour and at worst, pre-meditated bullying and intimidation. Had the autonomy allowed individual members of staff to lower their professional standards unchallenged? Swaine (2012) suggests that autonomy and strong morality are potentially in conflict. In the light of his argument and my storied experiences, questions may be raised about potential dangers in allowing a combination of generous autonomy, a lack of accountability and vulnerable students.

Research by Olweus (1978, in Crozier, 1997) found that bullies tend to have lower self-esteem than average and other characteristics such as poor social skills and low self-worth. I considered whether the staff involved privately held hidden issues of low self-esteem or self-worth. Research has indicated that there is a link between low self-esteem and a lack of empathy (Keenan, 1999). Perhaps these factors applied in combination, compounding the likelihood that given generous autonomy with an absence of accountability, there may be opportunities created for staff to indulge in behaviours which fall beneath the expected standards (Crozier, 1997; Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale, 1999; Sobsey, 1994; Westcott and Cross, 1996). All things considered, members of staff that feel good about themselves and can engage in positive relationships will not engage in bullying or hurt children (Keenan, 1999).

I reflected on the accountability structures and roles of the middle-management in school, (the layer of management which would normally supervise and to which teachers and their assistants would normally be accountable to), and found them to be almost absent in their effectiveness; their roles and duties being unclear and broad. There was no specific responsibility of subordinates to these middle managers and in the absence of the senior leadership team addressing the notion of accountability, the school was running without; simply relying on individuals to remain 'professional'. I felt confident that after considerable

reflection, autonomy *and* accountability would be necessary in order to improve the school (Verschelde, Hindriks, Rayp and Schoors, 2015).

The absence of effective middle managers closed potential channels of communication about such incidents, leaving staff or students without a layer of management who might listen to their concerns. Instead there was only the Assistant, Deputy or Head teacher. I suggest that a person, staff or student, may want to 'sound out' their complaint before taking it to the top of the hierarchy which, for some students and even staff, may feel quite an ordeal. Research illustrates how students are very reluctant to tell parents or teachers about their experiences of bullying. They are increasingly less likely to tell as they get older. Reasons for this relate to fear of reprisals, feelings of shame, rejection and not wanting to worry parents (Oliver and Candappa, 2007). Given that middle management is absent and children are reluctant to tell, it can be seen how potential avenues of help may appear closed to students in a culture that may appear to tolerate or even condone disrespectful behaviours toward students.

I reflected that the school may *need* a culture of generous autonomy to support the socialisation of their newly appointed untrained teachers. Firstly, generous autonomy would be needed at the teaching assistant level to support, mentor and train the untrained teacher in the ways of the school practices, pedagogy and culture. Secondly, there would need to be generous autonomy at the teacher level to facilitate the autonomy given to the teaching assistants.

#### **6.24 Conclusion**

There are a myriad of factors which can affect the way people interact with each other in a work environment. Special education is still a profession and teachers in every class need to ensure professional standards are maintained. Teaching assistants, having more duties and

responsibilities than ever before, need to be rewarded (in line with their responsibilities) in order to keep the best employees to help keep standards high. Internal structures need to exist where autonomy is offered but not indulged overtly, there is a case here that too much autonomy presents the potential for and possibly gives rise to a lowering of professional standards in some members of staff. However, responsibility for our own attitudes and behaviours at work starts and ends with ourselves. *'In the final analysis, each individual must decide for himself or herself whether to behave in a professional manner. Many individuals who belong to authorized professions behave in ways that are distinctly nonprofessional; they aggrandize themselves as much as possible, cut every corner they can, and benefit parasitically from colleagues who behave in a more professional manner. Conversely, many individuals in the humblest of trades behave in ways that are highly professional.'* (Gardener, 2007, p.10)

### **6.3 Part 2: Tensions With Teacher Identity As A Function Of Change; Role, Setting And Culture**

#### **6.31 Change**

Upon entering a new educational organisation, it is expected that there may be differences in culture, working practices and attitudes which initially need to be understood and adopted by the new employee. Fitting in is very important. The employee is joining a new team and the expectation is that they adopt the new cultural ways of working. During the research, I experienced many moments that challenged my professional values, standards and my personal morality. I felt very confident to judge fair treatment of a child yet, during my research experiences, this basic belief about me fell into doubt.

In trying to make sense of my observations of my new colleagues, my interpretations were inherently biased by my existing beliefs about teaching and pedagogy. My beliefs shaped by

my personal values, my past lived personal and professional history, my training and the culture in which I have lived (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Much of the previous subsection related to my attempts at understanding, interpreting and making judgements about my fellow professionals in a context where I had little or no expertise. Walkington (2005) discusses a similar situation; that of novice pre-service teachers observing lessons across a school and attempting to judge good and bad practice. She points out that the pre-service teachers' post observation comments simply reflected their limited experiences and affirmed their earlier perceptions. They had limited opportunity to engage with the teachers they had observed.

As I reflected upon my experiences, in this new setting, I also felt like a novice practitioner and struggled to understand my observations and experiences and how I was to fit in. I was under pressure to be 'socialised' successfully and integrate within the new teams to become an effective practitioner. My expectations of myself were high. However, unlike Walkington's (2005) novice teachers, I brought to the role considerable teacher beliefs about teaching based upon years of experience albeit in an alternative setting. This gave me the confidence to challenge myself and my existing beliefs but in doing so caused self-doubt and a subsequent lowering of professional confidence as I questioned beliefs and values which I had held as certainties.

Walkington (2005) argues that a teacher/mentor to assist the reflection is critical in supporting their understanding. Relating this to my experiences it would be of benefit to have been able to challenge and discuss the practices and behaviours that appeared dubious with a mentor, in order to enhance my understanding of my observations. The conversations could have facilitated a clearer understanding through deep contextualisation of the events. I considered that the lack of a structured mentoring program, combined with a lack of specialist training

exacerbated my lack of understanding of the cultural values of the school and how the individual behaviours of the staff fit with those values.

My experiences followed a supervisory model focussed upon my socialization to fit in to an existing setting. I felt that the school was very keen to maintain the existing practices and that the school culture did not welcome any form of challenge. Walkington (2005) describes this as limiting to a teacher's future professional growth. She recommends mentoring rather than supervision by an experienced teacher prepared to nurture reflection, empowering decision making and challenging existing beliefs as qualities in the new teacher (Walkington, 2005).

The tensions around my understanding my role and its congruence with the school culture caused a raising of my stress levels. As I lived through the socialisation period, I found that my real experiences were far from my original expectations. Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn and Kilgore (2003) discuss a wide range of factors which contribute to a beginning teacher's stress in the first year of special education. Factors include role ambiguity. Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn and Kilgore (2003) describe how there can be a mismatch between the expected role and the actual role once they enter the profession. Furthermore, they state that teachers can experience a conflict between their own expectations and others' expectations of them, leading to stress and lowered job satisfaction (Griffin, Winn, Otis-Wilborn and Kilgore, 2003). My experiences echo these notions of uncertainty, confusion and the perceived pressure of colleagues' expectations upon me accurately. Griffin Winn, Otis-Wilborn and Kilgore (2003) acknowledge that special education classrooms have 'additional, complex challenges for novice and experienced teachers alike' (Griffin Winn, Otis-Wilborn and Kilgore, 2003, p.12). I consider that a mentor may have alleviated some of the stresses associated with my understanding but have lingering doubts that the practices in my stories could be simply explained away by a mentor.



Throughout my research I maintained a close cautionary reflection of Phillion's (2002a) struggle with understanding observations and experiences in the field. Her challenges allowed me to resist strong urges to be judgemental and overly critical and instead focus upon exploring alternative explanations for my discomfort or perplexity. I hope Phillion's influence prompted me to set aside inherent biases, moral judgements and professional criticisms and instead allowed me to more deeply reflect and explore all of the tensions which emerged in the field and re-storied research texts.

A significant issue underpinning my tensions with my change to special education and its role is deeply entwined with the nature of my expectations of the change process. I had anticipations and expectations relating to my change from mainstream to special school. I had a vision, an idea of what I would do and an image in my mind of the identity I would adopt; the teacher I would be amongst the special school community. My primary tensions relate to the differences between my expectations and my lived reality. In fact the new role, as I lived it, did not resemble my anticipated role at all, as I saw myself moving from professional educator to deskilled carer.

The literature indicates that change is not a process that teachers find comfortable; changing a teacher's embedded and deeply held ideas is very challenging for teachers (Raths, 2001; Thurlow and Stuart, 2000; Davis and Andrzejewski, 2009). Moving from one teaching role to a different one implies a difficult journey for a teacher, potentially made complicated by the teacher joining an existing body of special school professionals that see themselves as different. Jones' (2004) finding that special school teachers see themselves as a close homogenous group that distance themselves from mainstream teachers suggests that this potentially makes joining the group from mainstream even more challenging.

I brought existing tensions and anxieties to the change of role derived from previous school moves, which I found very difficult. They were, however, moves between mainstream schools. In reflecting upon my experiences during this study, I found particular elements of change significant and influential for the effect upon my new teacher's role and my attempts to acclimatise in a new professional environment. My realisation that the duties of a special school teacher would become inclusive of physical and intimate care was a significant change which immediately impacted upon my wider view of my new job. I wondered at its professional credibility. I considered Corbett's (in Jones, 2004) reflections of derogatory terms about special education and considered how highly regarded is this job? I was unsure whether to be proud of incorporating such personalised tasks to my professional skill set, or regard them as devaluing my professional training and qualifications. I considered Jones' (2004) findings that special education teachers felt that they and their students were not valued in the wider professional educational world. This realisation began to push me to consider that I may be being held hostage to my own enduring beliefs, set earlier in my training (Andrzejewski, 2009).

Was I, in fact, a living embodiment of Rath's (2001) assertion that teachers use their beliefs for evaluating and filtering new ideas? He states that in this process, the new ideas that challenge the teacher are rejected. Was I simply fulfilling Bruner's (1996, in Rath's 2001) 'folk pedagogy', holding true to my deeply ingrained beliefs?

My changing role as teacher was clearly illustrated in the Nappy story. I went through a phase of realising that my duties as a special school teacher were markedly different from my previous teaching role and now include changing nappies and intimate caring duties which

would take me from the classroom at any time into confined spaces with students. This was not what I had expected and was a surprise to me.

I have a personal history littered with experiences of change which were not positive. With this as my change background, perhaps my approach to change invites negative feelings and outlooks; my attitude and values shaped by my past experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

However, as Gardener (2007) suggests is typical, during a professional change of employment at no time did I want or intend to be negative as my intention was to fit in and adapt to the new role as quickly and effectively as possible. I wondered whether struggling with change was just my personal problem, partly due to my background and history, or whether all teachers struggle with it as the literature implies. I wondered which qualities I was missing to make my change more successful.

The change process unexpectedly situated me in a subordinate role; feeling untrained, deskilled and surrounded by subordinates that are more highly skilled than me. The socialization model was clearly in the functionalist tradition (Stuart and Thurlow, 2000); the powerful and influential school creating a continuance of existing practices and pre-existing cultural norms. The school was set up to receive new untrained teachers and use their long-serving assistants to informally coach the teacher in the ways of the school's existing practices. On reflection, I felt sure that my willingness to be humble and listen to others respectfully, allowed me to settle in as well as I did, but I am mindful that it was also because I followed the existing practices 'to the letter'. (When I didn't, illustrated in the Visiting Class story, the management supported the teaching assistants to alter my decision and get their way, the school's way, the way of the 'grand narrative' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000)).

### **6.32 Training**

My tensions with training began with my self-image and belief that I was already trained to teach. I saw myself as a good professional ready to impress my new employers. I was employed by the special school with my existing qualifications and given advice that I would be teaching a KS2 curriculum to older students; a watered down version. However, it was not long into my special school experiences that it became clear that my existing qualifications and experiences were of limited value in this new role and there was no training offered initially.

I found that I was not alone. Other colleagues were also without special education training and were finding it equally challenging. I considered the wisdom of the pre-service special education training ending in 1989 and becoming in-service training (Jones, West and Stevens, 2006) leading to a fall in trained teachers of SLD/PMLD in special education. I wondered at the value placed upon the students behind a decision like that and considered how it fit with issues of entitlement and equity raised by Corbett (2001). The Salt Review (2010) found that this change of training provision caused supply issues for special education relating to trained teachers. The perception that disabled children needed carers not teachers (Salt, 2010) appears to underpin the ideology behind the training becoming in-service, but also has echoes of low expectations in special school students and a culturally approved diminishing of their intrinsic value or worth (Quarmby, 2011). My reaction to this is mixed. I have potentially selfish views of my career path being de-valued, but I have a heartfelt, passionate connection with students that appear to be given less than a fair share of their entitlement to a high quality education (Corbett, 2001).

The experiences of Corbett (in Jones, 2005) in finding negative attitudes toward disabled students education and their aspirations further reinforced the idea that special education was being devalued. Jones (2004) reminds us that the teachers themselves feel devalued and the

notions of 'caring' not 'teaching' troubled me. My tensions regarding my role invited me to reconsider the professionalism of my new teacher position in terms of being devalued to a carer.

In acknowledging that my training was, at best, a severely ill-fitting skill-set for the teaching role, I felt that this climate of non-specialist teachers working alongside long-serving, highly skilled teams of teaching assistants combined to create teams where the knowledge and skills resided with the assistants rather than the teacher. Sennett (1998) describes how the structure of modern teams encourage the individual worth of each employee and I was grateful for their expertise at that time. However, the flattened structure appeared to prevent the teachers fulfilling their role of professional team leader with sometimes unwanted consequences. My storied experiences illustrate how teachers were not in the traditional position of authority and leadership when working alongside their more experienced, assertive and knowledgeable assistants. I found support staff emerging as the more dominant character within the team, as if seeking Sennett's (1998) need to justify themselves in the absence of real authority figures.

On other occasions, my tensions around training focussed upon being unfamiliar with school procedures, culture and even operating facilities. The Nappy narrative illustrated how my being untrained created tensions for me personally but also with the relationship with the student I was trying to support. The Tasting Food story showed how I was unable to support my teaching assistant with her concerns as I was unfamiliar with the school policies and cultural practices surrounding tasting the food that they make. In the Visiting Class story, my lack of training appeared to threaten and undermine relationships with parent, my team, my superiors and the student. In each area of problem, there is a constant strain of relationships, either directly or indirectly, as a product of the training issues. I felt further tensions relating

to the school passing me off as an expertly trained professional, as I certainly didn't feel that I could live up to that in this educational context yet. I felt fraudulent and nervous about being 'found out'. If the school were not prepared to train me then I felt it to be unethical to mislead parents that I actually knew what I was doing. I even considered how tenable my position was. On each occasion, I felt that the tensions surrounding my (lack of) training strained at the responsibilities I had to different aspects of my work; my students, my colleagues, my profession, parents, myself (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi and Damon, 2002). In each area, I conscientiously wished to uphold a professional integrity but felt challenged to do so.

Further training tensions surrounded my perception that some staff were using very dated ideas and clearly had not updated their pedagogy or philosophy of education. Jones (2005) highlights that special education teachers' attitudes were not in keeping with contemporary views, implying that they were becoming left behind. I felt that this may be symptomatic of other factors within the organisation such as low teacher retirement or movement, low impact CPD, generous autonomy and few meaningful internal structures of accountability to maintain high standards of teaching. Salt (2010) suggests that factors such as low staff turnover can contribute to stagnation (Salt, 2010). Westcott and Cross (1996) suggests that 'corruption of care' is more likely in organisations that are inward-looking and enclosed.

### **6.33 Self-Doubt**

Possibly as a result of my reduced status, skill and authority (related to my lack of training) in my new setting, I felt a prolonged onset of considerable self-doubt. This loss of self-belief and confidence affected the nature of my professional journey into special education. It effectively silenced any professional input, affected my relationships as they developed both personally and professionally, prevented me from dynamically interacting with my new role, affected my

teacher identity and altered who I thought I was. My doubts also made me question how secure I really was about my own moral judgement about issues of child treatment and appropriateness and even made me reconsider my position as a teacher.

Beliefs play an important role in a teacher making meaning from their experiences and interpreting the reality before them (Davis and Andrzejewski, 2009). As I proceeded through the research period and as the realisation of my ineffectiveness became evermore obvious, my self-belief faded, my view of myself changed, in turn raising basic questions of myself as a person and a professional educator. These questions saw me question my professional skills, knowledge and values as well as my future in education.

McLeskey, Tyler and Flippin (2004) point out that teacher attrition is significant at the beginning of careers. They cite a number of factors which increase teacher attrition. They state that teachers that are educated and are 'better prepared to teach' are less likely to leave. Similarly, where teachers are accessing high quality mentoring programs when they enter teaching are less likely to leave. Other factors include teacher involvement in decision making, administrative support, a school climate of collaboration and support (McLeskey, Tyler and Flippin, 2004).

Relating these factors to my experiences, I was clearly unable to access the elements of induction that would support and encourage me to remain in post. I did, instead, consider my position on a number of occasions. On reflection, I consider the relationships with the students that I built up very quickly got me past these moments of wanting to quit.

Gehrke and McCoy (2006) point out similar experiences to mine; beginning special teachers feeling, *'inadequately prepared for the complexities of identifying individual students' needs,*

*producing an IEP that conformed to policy, and providing the appropriate level and type of special education services,'* (Gehrke and McCoy, 2006). They go on to relate how the teachers, *'consistently relied on an existing network of professionals who were familiar with the special education process,'* (Gehrke and McCoy, 2006, p.495). Their USA-based research emphasised the importance of support for teachers and its significance in retaining teachers in post. I identify with the consistent reliance upon colleagues and found this to facilitate the forging of good relationships with new teams, though this in itself did little to alleviate my self-doubt.

### **6.34 My Teacher Identity**

Throughout the research period I felt a constant tension with my teacher identity. I had strongly held ideas about how I saw myself in my previous teaching roles as a mainstream teacher and I held a very clear 'vision' of how I saw myself in my special school teacher role of my future. This identity was consistent across my schools and it was very important to me that I did not change my identity. I recognised that my views, values and ideas were shaped by my past experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), as a child in school (Lortie, 1975, in Davis and Andrzejewski, 2009), a professional teacher, a parent of six and my existing and emerging core values and beliefs (O'Connor, 2006; Jones, 2004; Jenkins, 1996, in Jones, 2004). The deeply personal nature of the beliefs makes them resistant to change (Ertmer, 2005) and I personified that.

On reflection, I wondered why I would expect to be the same kind of teacher in a special school as I had been in a range of mainstream schools. I answered myself by recognising that in my past schools, I felt that my beliefs about teaching were incongruent with my previous schools' culture, ultimately making me leave. My hope was that I would find congruence in the special school setting as I had no desire to change my beliefs about how I wanted to teach.



Teachers are highly resistant to changing their beliefs and I appeared to epitomise this (Ertmer, 2005; Kagan, 1992, in Thurlow and Stuart, 2000; Jones, 2004; Davis and Andrzejewski, 2009).

My resistance to change and my moving from school to school provoked the idea that I may have been spending my career searching for a school which fit my teaching beliefs, identity and style. This begs the question; 'Was my arrival at a special school by chance or was it an inevitable consequence of my personal quest to work in an educational setting which matched my values and identity?' Was I fulfilling Jones' (2004) notion that I was identifying with a cause, a calling, a strength of feeling to the special education role?

Throughout the research period, rather than developing my teacher identity throughout school with colleagues and students, I found myself increasingly 'managing' my teacher identity as I interacted in social situations. In particular, I consistently tried 'positioning myself' in such a way as to ensure I was presenting myself to the students in line with my how I wanted the children to perceive me. This involved my constant careful consideration of my social communication (O'Connor, 2008). I felt that situations were compromising my attempts to present as the teacher I wanted to be.

These factors presented to me as severe challenges to my teacher identity. After my confidence had dropped, I had personally re-evaluated myself as less than I had been and my identity (how I saw myself) changed as a result. Other tensions presented a further threat to my teacher identity as I navigated social situations and dilemmas during the research period. I perceived my identity was under threat as a result of two simultaneous social interactions; the challenges described in my re-storied experiences and my self-doubt and subsequent loss of confidence.

I began to clearly understand Wenger's (1998, in Jones, 2004) view which sees teacher identity as fluid and changeable; *'developed and sustained through the constant negotiation of the meanings of experiences through their social communication,'* (Jones, 2004, p.160). In recognising the potential for my teacher identity to change as a function of my experiences, I continued to cling to my core beliefs and unwavering desire to present as the teacher I wanted to be. I recall considering that leaving the profession was preferable to teaching in a way which compromised my teacher identity.

In trying to manage my teacher identity, and in trying to avoid being caught up in practices with which I felt a moral or professional objection, I began distancing myself from the school staff and management. I tried both physically (through gesture, body language and positioning) and verbally to present as a fully autonomous teacher. I became vocal about my personal views, sharing them with students so that my professional and moral perspective was clear to all, especially the students. Ironically, I presented a 'new and different', more autonomous teacher identity to the students as a reaction to the events I was experiencing, in an attempt to preserve and present my original intended teacher identity. Arkott (1968, in Moomaw, 2005) describes characteristics of autonomous people to include 'being part of their environment, yet able to separate themselves from the environment when necessary.' (Moomaw, 2005, p.12). Further qualities defined my covertly rebellious teacher identity; refusing to conform, avoid routines, obligations, disregarding the opinions of others and defying authority (Moomaw, 2005).

It was at this point of renegotiating my teacher identity that I realised that I had adopted the perceived unfair treatment of the students as my cause, my fight, my reason to energise and engage with the students at a deep and meaningful level. Jones (2004) identifies this as part of the identity of the special school educator, yet at the time, I was trying to distance myself from

the school and perceived culture in this special setting, not align myself to it. Further reflection asked if I was actually taking the first step in trying to change the school culture, itself fluid and contingent on individuals and groups (Smyth and Hatton, 2002, in Jones, 2002, p.160).

My research reflections and analysis led me to a point of personal epiphany. The teacher identity change described above had happened in almost exactly the same way at a school earlier in my career, an event I had never thought of until during this research project. I reflected hard over all of my teaching positions asking myself if this had happened in other posts. After close analysis and reflection, I found elements of this 'rebel' teacher identity in each teaching job.

I wondered what this unusual cycle meant. Why would a dedicated teacher, whose passion for the children's best interest, present as an autonomous protector of the students against the regime and their authority? Following the principles of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative understanding, I considered the answer to lie deeply embedded in my past; my stories of school, my personal experiences of fairness and my difficulties with authority, my dislike of bullying and my wish to help and support the vulnerable.

I was left with the idea that the teacher identity that I believed was me and that I strived to present in my teaching posts always (given sufficient time) evolved into the 'rebel' identity and I had, until this point, never recognised a cycle or pattern in my career.

My identity is underpinned by my strong emotional attachment to all of my students and the very strong sense of caring for them. I consider it a powerful strength in my teaching skill set which I feel is valued and recognised in special education stated ethos. Consequently, I am

able to allow my very strong positive relationships to guide my professional practice in the special school setting, a feature that was being squeezed from mainstream teaching as I left and its value is arguably now neglected. O'Connor (2008) points out that teacher standards largely ignore the emotional dimensions of teaching and remind us that there is no economic benefit to caring. In an increasingly reductionist and rationalist view of teaching as lists of achievable competencies, public policy rarely acknowledges the role that emotions play in teachers' work (O'Connor, 2008).

### **6.35 Conclusion**

After my move to special education, I continued to see myself as a mainstream teacher working in a special school. I resisted change to my teacher identity and teacher beliefs but accommodated changes to my professional role. My lack of training caused a number of related issues regarding how I fitted into the teams in my anticipated role and this impacted upon my confidence. As a result, I felt my teacher identity change in terms of how I saw myself. Further tensions to my identity saw me present (especially to the students) an autonomous teacher identity which distanced me from the school, its management and staff, but closely aligned me to the students as a champion of the students' cause (Jones, 2004).

Despite never relinquishing the view that I was actually a mainstream teacher (due to my original training), I began to perceive that colleagues beyond the special school were seeing me as a special school teacher which caused me to consider if this may have an influence if I tried to return to mainstream.

Throughout this narrative inquiry, I needed to be mindful and reflect upon my own influences upon my interpretations and the concerns expressed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), especially relating to inherent subjectivity, dangers and abuses.

My interpretations were clouded by my previous experiences, both personal and professional, and my beliefs, both personal and professional and most significantly, by my taking the role of an untrained novice teacher with little or no relevant experience or wisdom to offer the team. My inability to make a certain decision about what normally would have been straight forward decisions had a significant impact upon my effectiveness as a new teacher and in turn increased my dependency on the teaching assistants for guidance and in some ways further imbalanced the power relations in the newly forming team relationships. This increased dependency made it more difficult to exercise any form of leadership and an absence of middle management accountability or support meant the only option was to consult with the headteacher, which for me would have been difficult as I would have felt that to be a sign of my weakness. As a new member of staff, I did not want to appear to be unable to cope or adapt to the new position.

### **6.4 Part 3: Tensions Of Power And Relationships**

#### **6.41 My Teacher Power**

The study school organised its school staff in a traditional hierarchy, led at the top by the headteacher. There was a deputy head then a supporting assistant head. The next layer of management was three middle managers (TLRs), then the teachers. Below the teachers in this hierarchy were the teaching assistants. The teaching teams consisted of a teacher and up to three assistants, one of which was a Level 4 assistant. Level 4 teaching assistants were senior assistants and may teach in place of a teacher for lessons when required. The teacher was said to have the authority, leadership and decision-making role for that team and all decisions were passed to the teacher relating to curriculum, pedagogy, student's activities and student

progress. The teacher was also responsible for allocating work to the teaching assistants and was the giver of permissions to the assistants.

I had been employed as a teacher and, on paper, the role of teacher was not only highly responsible but loaded with authority, influence and positional power. In reality, when the actual term started, the positional power, authority and influence were simply in name. Due, in part, to my lack of training, my lack of understanding of the school culture and my almost complete reliance upon my teaching assistants for guidance on pedagogical and behavioural issues, I perceived a distinct effect on my team in terms of the locus of power. I considered that the power in the team had re-located to the hands of the teaching assistants and as they were graded, the Level 4 assistant became the leader and I, as teacher, was subsumed. I felt the team had been inverted; my teaching assistants sharing the power but focalising their following through their own leader, the Level 4 assistant. I felt that I was at the bottom of the team, disempowered. The team's hierarchy of power and authority had been inverted but arguably 'flattened' (Sennett, 1998). This structure increases the individual value of the staff to the organisation (Sennett, 1998) and I readily agree that the teaching assistants were highly valuable and flexible within the team. What I found was a lack of leadership within the teams and perhaps due to the teacher being unwilling or unable to offer that leadership, it instead came from the teaching assistants. Sennett (1998) discusses a lack of authority within modern teams whilst acknowledging there is power. His view is that power without authority is negative for the team (Sennett, 1998).

The impact of this inversion of power for me was that I needed to quickly renegotiate my relationships with my team, asking of them for advice, guidance and leadership over a constant flow of questions relating to the teaching, care and behaviour management issues of my class. This reliance, in turn, caused me to re-evaluate my teacher identity and self-esteem.

#### **6.42 Teaching Assistant Power**

The team functioned well as a consequence of my adopting an appropriately respectful attitude and tone with my team, acknowledging their superior experience and knowledge relating to the special school students and their needs. However, I, like other teachers in a similar position, needed to engage with reclaiming some power, authority and influence back from the team as a gradual process.

During the research period, I noticed and observed, occasions where the teaching assistants were supporting, not only the teachers' lessons, but also their professional development and their socialisation. During this phase, the teaching assistants held considerable power within the teams. This was clearly evident with particular members of staff growing in stature and confidence as a result. Their increasing confidence combined with awareness that their teacher did not have any power (Kearney, 1987), manifested itself in three distinct ways.

1. The teaching assistant adopted a new, dominant personality or ego.
2. The teaching assistant became a self-appointed expert on all matters concerning a SEN type (e.g. Down syndrome or ASD) relating to behaviour management and pedagogy.
3. The teaching assistant would forge private links with the SLT to ensure the teacher is over-ruled if necessary.

In my re-storied experiences, I consistently found it difficult to challenge the self-appointed power of the teaching assistants when I felt that their interpretation of their role was questionable. I felt I did not have sufficient expertise, skills, experience or knowledge to 'correct' them. I wondered whether this rise of powerful teaching assistant was a natural response to the team being without a leader; in that the teacher is unable to fulfil that role. Sennett (1998) suggests that the flatter, more modern staffing structure, invites team

members to rise up and justify themselves in the absence of a leader. My issue rested not with the teacher assistant having power, but the apparent use of the power as a coercive tool (Kearney, 1987) to intimidate vulnerable students. The coercive style is far from my teacher identity and personal beliefs about teaching which rests firmly in the referent style (Kearney, 1987) for most of the time.

Interestingly, power is not inherent within the role of teacher, it is perceived (Kearney, 1987) by the students. In this way, the students are vulnerable to believe they have no power themselves to arrest the situation. I was worried about the potential damage that could be done emotionally and in terms of the students losing confidence and further loss of self-esteem. Special school students suffer from lack of academic confidence, for some, partly due to the likelihood that they failed at school then 'ended up' at the study school as a result of their failure.

The power of a teacher has great potential in that even a spontaneous, unplanned, off the cuff remark, can have huge positive benefits for a student's self-esteem (Parsons, 1981) or be equally damaging to the student. If such an unplanned remark can be so beneficial, what potential is there in planned verbal remarks? Teachers and teaching assistants need to pay heed to the idea that power can easily be abused.

#### **6.43 Misuse Of Power**

In a landscape of social change, relentless disclosures and news items of abuses, even the disrespectful treatment of vulnerable students suggests a negative attitude which does not represent the ethos of the study school, the educator position or the profession in general. When we join an organisation, our responsibilities increase to that organisation, its profession and colleagues and the community it serves (Gardner, 1997). Considering that a teacher's



decision-making and classroom practice is driven by their attitudes and beliefs (Stuart and Thurlow, 2000), a teacher's values may be revealed through their practice and decisions. Considering that a teacher defines themselves as people through the roles within their professional lives (Barber, 2002, and Nias, 1989, in O'Connor, 2008, p.4) and their decisions are inextricably linked to their beliefs and attitudes (Kuzborska, 2011; Stuart and Thurlow, 2000), it would appear that where a negative attitude is displayed toward vulnerable students, it is probably indicating that they are not in employment that matches their character or may be reflecting the broader cultural and social attitudes which have been prevalent for years towards disability (Sobsey, 1994; Westcott and Cross, 1996; Quarmby, 2011). Furthermore, where staff choose to be 'mean' to vulnerable students, it is likely they are actually not happy in themselves (Keenan, 2013) and may be finding relationships difficult (Keenan, 2013).

I wondered whether there were members of staff that were not in the 'right' job; possibly hiding their real attitudes to disability from view. Understanding that the role in this special school required staff to adopt a nurturing approach, surely the need to care about their students is a very basic requirement? *'A caring teacher has to have love, love and more love for children'* (Goldstein, 2002, p.74, in Falkenberg, 2009). In what is widely regarded as a caring profession (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996, p.9, in O'Connor, 2008), where 'emotions are bound up in individual experiences' (Hargreaves, 2001, p.1057, in O'Connor, 2008), it is easy to see how a member of staff that is well-suited to this kind of work might find that *'the ethical and humanistic dimensions of teachers' work frequently act as a source of intrinsic motivation for individual teachers, and inspire them to remain in the profession'* (O'Connor, 2008, p.4). Perhaps the opposite may be true of staff that are not suited to the work but continue to take a wage.

#### **6.44 Conclusion**

The school operates a hierarchical system where inverted team power bases and an absence of middle management accountability structures possibly promote and encourage the emergence of 'leaders' from within the team amongst the confident, knowledgeable teaching assistants. The rise of the powerful teaching assistant affects the traditional functioning of the teaching team and potentially facilitates and encourages behaviours (in some teaching assistants) which lower professional standards of conduct and care. My inability to fulfil the role as I expected made me reflect upon my teacher identity and loss of confidence.

Despite the published school ethos being that of individual educational programmes, caring and nurturing staff and individual potential achieved, my experiences placed a question mark over the standards of moral behaviour in certain circumstances, potentially illustrating employees choosing their own standards of work (Gardener, 2007).

However, as I have previously stated and never forgotten, I must continue to be mindful of judgements made. Phillion's (2002b) storied narrative, 'Seven Minutes of Silence', illustrated clearly that observing without understanding can lead to misunderstandings of what valuable moments are actually occurring and can give rise to interpretations of events which are lacking in understanding, thoroughness and insight.

#### **6.5 Part 4: Conclusion: Finding A Path Made Of Stones**

This section will briefly revisit the original research questions and highlight the key findings relating to each question. The original research questions are addressed and conclusions are drawn.

### **6.51 The Research Questions**

Using Clandinin and Connelly's narrative inquiry methodology, incorporating their constructs of thinking narratively and the three dimensional inquiry space, (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) this research had these original research questions:

1. What meanings can be drawn from storied personal experiences as a special school teacher?
2. To what extent do factors such as autonomy, teacher identity, morality and power interact with and influence the role of the special school teacher?
3. To what extent is professional practice influenced and shaped by past and present storied experiences?
4. How do factors such as teacher identity and personal morality shape my stories to live by?
5. How do sacred stories of school, familial stories to live by and personal histories influence emergent teacher identity and professional practice?

### **6.52 The Research Findings**

#### **6.52.1 What Meanings Can Be Drawn From The Storied Personal Experiences Of A Special School Teacher?**

The storied experiences shared as research texts within this thesis provided an opportunity to explore the lived experiences of a special school teacher. They provided numerous examples of differing scenarios in order to provide a broad range of experiences from which interpretation and meaning might be drawn in line with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative thinking and three dimensional inquiry space. The most significant meanings for me are listed below:

1. The change of role had a significant impact upon me personally, professionally and it affected my relationships with both colleagues and students.
2. The role altered my view of special education as a career choice.
3. My experiences as a special school teacher generated significant doubts about basic morality and the treatment of vulnerable people. I was confused by what I perceived to be dubious morality, and bullying treatment of students by some members of staff.
4. I was surprised by the significant impact of the lack of training upon my socialisation, relationships and my personal and professional confidence. I felt significant impact to my professional effectiveness within my team, causing me to adopt a passive role, reluctant to challenge the status quo, akin to a pre-service teacher (Stuart and Thurlow, 2000).
5. I was surprised by the role's absence of power or influence, as I realised that my skill-set was of little value without the coaching and informal mentoring by the more experienced teaching assistants.
6. My teaching role experienced the effect of 'powerful' teaching assistants within the teams, in part, facilitated by the 'unofficial', but essential, inversion of power within the teaching teams and the simultaneous disempowerment of the teacher; the traditional authority figure.
7. The study school was affected negatively by a lack of accountability structures, a lack of authority figures (partly due to ineffective middle managers) and a very relaxed school culture which may have contributed to dominant, unchallenged personalities rising.
8. The transition from mainstream to special education is, as Jones (2004) implies, a very different job where only some of the job specification is the same. The culture, approach, curriculum and pedagogy are markedly different.
9. The special school role requires a deep understanding of the importance of relationships, with colleagues in teams, students most importantly, the parents and management.

10. Personal morality can be a factor in the quality of professional treatment of children as some members of staff appear to practice forms of bullying and intimidation and others do not.

11. A move to special education changes how you are perceived by other education professionals which may have positive or negative connotations.

### **6.52.2 The Extent To Which Professional Practice Is Influenced And Shaped By Past and Present Storied Experiences.**

My day to day professional practice was influenced significantly by my past and present experiences.

#### **6.52.21 My Past Experiences**

My personal history and experiences create the template of the man, father, professional educator that I am today. My past has influenced the development of my teacher identity, values and beliefs (Anderson and Piazza, 1996, in Stuart and Thurlow, 2000), which are inextricably linked to my decisions in class (Kuzborska, 2011; Stuart and Thurlow, 2000). The choices I make throughout the working day reflect me as an individual man, a moral agent but as a professional responsible to a professional code of conduct (Gardner, 2007). The influences impacting on each decision reflect school policy, ethos, professional standards, personal morality and the benevolence I wish to bestow upon the student and teaching team allowing for the vast array of contextual factors which will always be present. Each decision can be seen to have my 'imprint' upon it reflecting me, my qualities, characteristics and beliefs. Where difficult decisions are taken they are delivered in a way which represents my ethos and beliefs in treating people with dignity and respect at all times.

### **6.52.22 Other Staff**

The research highlighted that the staff were a collective of individuals and that a wide range of approaches to teaching and caring for special school students was evident, some potentially dubious.

As previously stated, my personal history and experiences shaped my values, beliefs and practices. The same can be said of other staff, both teachers and teaching assistants. The hope is that each individual member, as they join the organisation, take on the increased responsibilities to the organisation, colleagues, the profession and the community which it serves (Gardner, 2007) and conducts themselves morally within those responsibilities.

It is clear that each member of staff arrives to their employment with different experiences and personal histories which have shaped them to be very different people. The role of the school policies, which define procedure and ethos, combined with the role of the employment contract and associated professional standards, which define behavioural conduct, are sufficient to engage people with ethical work (Gardner, 2007). However, there is no extra bursary for 'caring' (O'Connor, 2008) and this vital element of the job can be the element which unifies and identifies staff and offers a social identity (Jones, 2004). I believe this final element is an incredibly important dimension to the work and students can easily tell which staff care and which are just going through the motions. You cannot make a person want to care (Gardner, 2007).

During the research study, the staff that engaged in 'dubious' practice were, to me, 'highly visible' due to their outspoken beliefs about education and discipline. In addition, they presented as 'cold, procedural and efficient' in dealing with students, their style tending to be mostly coercive (Kearney, 1997), their beliefs trapped in old fashioned values such as

oppressive styles of 'care' requiring training on complex 'holds'. Others held 'old fashioned values' linked to assertive telling off, detentions, humiliation, as a means of achieving power and control (Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale, 1999).

Most other staff were the epitome of benevolence and care, 'visibly' living their role through being seen to display patience and empathy and clearly allowing their interactions to centre around their emotional understanding (Hargreaves, 1998, in O'Connor, 2008).

#### **6.52.23 My Present Experiences**

As the research period developed and my reflections continued, I felt a slow realisation come over me. In terms of my responding to lived experiences and them affecting my professional practice, I realised that I was changing my teacher identity in response to the 'dubious' practice that I was, at the time, unable to deal with. I was subconsciously distancing my association with both my colleagues and the school organisation and re-presenting myself as a free-thinking, autonomous, moral agent, independent from the responsibilities that school policy, stated ethos, colleagues and culture demand (Gardner, 2007). I distanced myself from the school and moved myself into alignment with the students themselves, presenting as a champion of their causes (Jones, 2004).

This change of identity meant that my decisions took on a different form, my relationships with both colleagues and students changed and my intrinsic motivation shifted and actually intensified (O'Connor, 2008).

After further reflection during the research period, I identified other occasions in my personal and professional history where I had aligned or re-aligned my position in a very similar way; distancing myself from the perceived 'oppressors' (or the authority), and positioning myself alongside (or with) the weaker and more vulnerable in order to support or defend them. On

each occasion, I have become highly motivated as a result of the re-alignment (O'Connor, 2008). The threads defined within my personal stories of school at the beginning of this thesis can be clearly seen within the professional posturing I have described; indicating that, in my case, the literature about beliefs, identity and values formed in childhood and being difficult to change has been borne out.

### **6.52.3 How Teacher Identity And Personal Morality Shape My Stories To Live By**

My teacher identity and morality had a significant role in my day to day decisions (Kuzborska, 2011; Stuart and Thurlow, 2000) throughout the research period defining myself through my professional role (Barber, 2002, and Nias, 1989, in O'Connor, 2008). I was very concerned and pre-occupied with presenting as the kind of professional I wanted to be seen as to both colleagues and students. I build my teaching around strong, close relationships with my students and so I felt, in order to be an effective teacher, my sole priority was to build the relationships upon the core values that I stand by.

As experiences were lived and I witnessed various examples of 'dubious' practice, I felt that my relationship with the students was under threat while I was, by association, slurred by these events. I acknowledged that my understanding of the events may be lacking, but I was sufficiently disturbed to want to distance myself personally and professionally in any case. I was sure that if the students identified me as party to these events or a person who condoned them, then I would have no credibility left with which to build a relationship built on trust, warmth and respect. At this point, my professional identity evolved as a result of my interactions, my lived experiences and the given meanings to those experiences (Wenger, 1998 in Jones, 2004).



Interestingly, at no point did I expect to alter my moral values regarding ‘dubious’ practice. My only hope was to understand it better, the reasoning behind it, the value or benefit to the students from it; I would never feel comfortable with it for myself. My beliefs were fixed and filtering these new practices whilst affirming my original ideas (Hollingworth, 1989, in Stuart and Thurlow, 2000).

#### **6.52.4 How Sacred Stories Of School, Familial Stories To Live By And Personal Histories Influence Emergent Teacher Identity And Professional Practice**

As I developed as a young professional, I brought with me an idea of what was appropriate in terms of how to treat and interact with people. I felt sure of my beliefs. Referred to as apprenticeship of observation, where values beliefs and practices of teachers are internalised during childhood (Anderson and Piazza, 1996, in Stuart and Thurlow, 2000), upon entering the teaching profession, I felt sure what kind of teacher I was going to be.

Prior to this research I had never considered or reflected about my personal values, teacher style or their origins. As a child, I grew up thinking all ‘grown ups’ think the same and we join their world. As an older child, you appreciate that some ‘grown ups’ are nice and some aren’t. I wanted to be a nice one and I wanted to take this core idea into my teaching.

However, under analysis key features of my teacher identity is clearly identifiable as a thread within my ‘Stories of School’ or other childhood events which affected me at that time.

**Fragile self-confidence;** partly a consequence of my parents separating when I was 5 years old.

**Intolerance of bullying;** a consequence of the teachers at my secondary school engaging in bullying, intimidation and humiliation of students as a means of asserting control and abusing their authority and power.

**Empathy for the vulnerable and needy;** partly a consequence of a nurtured love of people, and partly feeling vulnerable as a child.

**Dislike/distrust of authority figures;** partly a consequence of the teachers at secondary school, and managers I have worked for prior to teaching.

**Investment in children and the quality of their emotional well-being;** partly a consequence of my experiences at secondary school.

My beliefs are strong and I am full of conviction; remaining the same since childhood and my beliefs are unlikely to change (Ertmer, 2005). Interestingly, because of the research process I reacted to events differently in the field. Normally, I would challenge and argue for my version of 'right'. I found myself reluctant and hesitant to challenge (Stuart and Thurlow, 2000) due to the experiences of Phillion (2002a, 2002b, 2002c) and my associated wish to understand what I was witnessing more fully before judging, challenging and arguing for my version of right. Moral dilemmas can have elements of right versus right (Gardner, 2007) though there is typically a preferred path (Gardner, 2007).

At school as a child, feeling unfairly treated and disappointed with my teachers and education generally, I used to say to myself that I would never treat people like that; if I did get the chance to teach students I would not do as I had done to me (arbitrary rules and sanctions, humiliation and intimidation). I would 'care' about my students and try to offer them dignity and safety from unfairness and emotional abuse.

Upon looking at my teacher identity and my morality, I reflectively assert that it maps exactly upon the child I was, the young adult I was, the young parent I was and finally the trainee teacher of the 1990s with a striking congruence.

The next section will consider the significance of the research.

## **6.6 Part 5: The Significance Of The Research And Implications**

This section will discuss the significance of research findings and its relevance in the light of the broader educational landscape before suggesting implications for the future which may be arising from the research.

This section explores the significance of the research, discussing its contribution and relevance.

### **6.61 Introduction**

The findings of this research have illustrated a teacher's experience in an individual educational setting. It would be of course inappropriate to make the generalised assumption that all special schools are the same. They are not. Studies such as these are highly subjective, individualised and unique to their individual setting making them unsuitable for generalising (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2007). The individual details and characteristics of each school can be very different. Details such as, the staff, the students, the individual SEN needs, the management styles, the internal systems and procedures, the links with parents, the openness to the community, the ethos, school specialism, location and even the culture can vary enormously from school to school.

However, they are also all bonded by similarities. Special educational settings will have similar general principles, policies and goals possibly including the physical structure of the educational setting, the requirement for teachers and TAs as teaching teams, all working with

a wide range of SEN and PMLD, the levels of training and CPD afforded and the requirement that each school follows the educational policies set out by the government.

With these and other commonalities in mind, this research can offer itself as generalizable in the sense that Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2007) regard as identifying comparison groups in alternative settings and cultures. Furthermore, this research can be significant in its ‘transferability’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Denzin and Lincoln define this as whether ‘*..the story speaks to them about their own experiences or about the lives of others they know,*’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p.229).

For these readers, this research may be of huge value in suggesting plausible meanings for their experience.

#### **6.62 The Significance Of The Research**

This research is significant because it brings new and substantive knowledge and insight into the role of the special educator and has a broad relevance across a range of disciplines and interest groups.

Furthermore, the research contributes as evidence to the academic discourse of constructs including teacher identity, special school teacher training, recruitment and attrition, safeguarding and maltreatment of the vulnerable students, and school structures.

In the broader landscape, this research contributes to the contemporary debates in special education around the changing nature of students, government education policies, teachers’ working practices and schools’ movement to collaborative skill-sharing.

This research may be of particular interest to teachers who are interested in moving from mainstream to special school. This study may be invaluable as part of their preparation for the transition. Similarly, teachers who have, like me, made the journey into special education, may find this research highly relevant as a comparison to their own professional transition.

Governors, parents and school managers may find this study highly relevant in terms of school teacher performance and effectiveness in delivering high quality teaching experiences. This research has found that the absence of specialist training had a significant negative impact upon a wide range of areas within my professional role; my relationships, my teacher identity, my self-confidence, my effectiveness as leader and role model, my professional values, all combining to undermine my competence to fulfil the role of a special school teacher. The absence of specialist training remains a significant problem for teaching recruitment.

The research provides significant insight into the construct of teacher beliefs and identity. The experiences in the field demonstrated that my teacher identity operated at two dimensions simultaneously. At one level, my identity was fixed and resistant to change supporting the ideas of Ertmer (2005). At another level, my teacher identity was evolving and responding to my lived experiences in the field which supports Blumstein's (2001, in Jones, 2004) ideas around identity being a result of continuous interactions with the social environment. My experiences illuminated the difficulties I had relinquishing my previously held teacher beliefs and mainstream identity, echoing the literature of Davis and Andrzejewski (2009), Rath (2001) and Ertmer (2005) and Corbett (2001).

This research raised questions over the morality of the actions of some members of staff in an organisation which was structured to have a vacuum in the middle management zone. This lack of clear accountability appeared to combine with a stagnating workforce (which Salt

(2010), warned against) with very low staff turnover which then facilitated the emergence of patches of dubious professionalism and morality (Stanley, Manthorpe and Penhale, 1999). This may have significance for all managers and team leaders in every school who may have supervisory responsibilities or responsibility for structural organisation and deployment of staff. Furthermore, this study may be of interest to persons interested in issues relating to safeguarding systems and procedures and the 'real' difficulties in exposing and dealing with alleged or suspected transgressions.

The next section will discuss the nature of its contribution to the broader educational landscape.

### **6.63 This Research Situated In The Broader Landscape**

#### **6.63.1 Training**

The Salt report (2010) found there to be serious concerns in the special school sector relating to the training needs not being met. My research has illustrated the harmful effects of teachers working without sufficient preparation or specialist training. Despite efforts to attract teachers, attrition is still a cause for concern. My research has shown the significant impact upon the quality of the performance of the teacher in delivering high quality lessons to. It also demonstrated the negative impact upon the teaching teams and the subsequent loss of confidence as expected role fulfilment was unable to be achieved.

For new teachers wishing to enter the profession, the UCAS website (UCAS, 2017) informs undergraduates that the only way into special education teaching is via a formal generic teaching qualification such as a B.Ed or PGCE. (Working with blind or deaf students requires extra qualifications). Teachers are still expected to work in mainstream to achieve the

required qualifications then move across to special education, potentially still without specialist training or appropriate preparation for that role.

This continued lack of training for special school teaching gives this research increased significance and metaphorically, a huge voice to a profession which presides in a 'modern' society that is, arguably, culturally and socially, only just beginning to emerge from its dark past of mistreatment and abuse of disabled people.

My research experiences show that training for the role is very important for four significant reasons: 1. For the individual teacher to fulfil their duties competently. 2. To avoid the negative impact upon a teacher's professional confidence and identity. 3. To facilitate the teaching teams working together effectively. 4. To facilitate the students consistently receiving the highest standard of educational and care experiences.

I am curious that after decades of well documented problems, the training remains in-service? I considered the idea that special education is not valued even by the government due to it having little economic value, little statistical value, and educating the uneducable requires little professional expertise beyond knowledgeable care-giving? In a devalued profession, it may be easy to see that getting high quality staff is harder to attract. As the population of SEN increases and the training issues remain unresolved, this research study may not make appealing reading to prospective teachers pondering a career in special education.

#### **6.63.2 SLD/CLDD Students Increasing**

The DfE, in 2012, warned that the numbers of CLDD students would be increasing in the future. They stated that a learning profile does not exist and that new pedagogy must be developed (DfE, 2012). My research is able to illuminate how a single PMLD/CLDD student can

cause huge professional concerns for the untrained teacher and the knock-on effect the situation caused (Visiting the Classroom Story, Chapter 4, This Thesis). If CLDD students were to increase as predicted, the untrained teacher will likely feel under greater pressure and further stresses may reduce the effectiveness of the teaching team and ultimately reduce the quality of the student's experiences further.

### **6.63.3 Safeguarding**

It is not in question that safeguarding is and should always remain a very high priority for organisations caring for vulnerable children and adults. Keeping children safe is a huge responsibility and an undertaking that must be met with robust procedures and consistency.

Despite a constant stream of abuse scandals reaching the news, it must be noted that procedures have been improving since the tragic events in Soham, 2002, to keep children safe.

Despite these improvements around school safety, CRB checks, high fences, locked entrances, visible badges and security for school visitors etc., the reports of abuse continues.

My research illustrates some of the significant issues and problems surrounding suspicions of abuse; the troubles of even identifying mistreatment, the policies and procedures for disclosures and the inherent disincentives to whistle-blow on a colleague, the potential impact for the colleague, the child, the family, the school and the future of each set against the moral and legal obligation to report serious cases of abuse. My research also highlights the potential for staff to harbour personal and private negative attitudes to disability which are revealed only when opportunity arises. Furthermore, staff may hold dated views about pedagogy and discipline which may surface only given the 'right' circumstances.

An increasing accountability and awareness of our responsibility for safeguarding increases the safety of our students against mistreatment as the culture of the sensitized staff becomes that



everyone is watching each other. This must benefit students within the organisations. However, the same awareness and accountability can arguably increase the vulnerability of the staff and school as reputations are on a knife edge. A disgruntled parent might phone OFSTED and trigger safeguarding interests or a special school student may make an allegation which may irreparably damage a reputation but never be substantiated.

My research engaged with the moral dilemma facing a member of staff wrestling with the burden of trying to determine how serious the event was and asking of themselves, 'What is the 'right' thing to do about it?'

Despite safeguarding being so important, there are grey areas where care merges to bullying merges to abuse and there are difficulties in making the boundaries distinct when such overwhelming consequences await if you 'get it wrong'. School policies, school culture and staff training is expected to ensure clarity of professional expectations and contribute to safeguarding vulnerable students (Sobsey, 1994; Quarmby, 2011; Westcott and Cross, 1996). However, as my research illustrates, if individual members of the school community are willing to engage in poor quality care, or pick on the vulnerable, and others are prepared to 'look the other way' or practices are allowed to become culturally accepted by some members of staff, then the policies and rhetoric are worthless.

Issues such as these continue to rely upon individuals having the appropriate moral character to be suited to their profession or work. Employers have the responsibility to ensure that systems and procedures are in place and are used to ensure that safeguarding really works for the students it is there to protect.

#### **6.63.4 SEN Not Receiving A Quality Education And Underachieving**

My research suggests it likely that SEN students are underachieving if their experiences are provided by teachers without the necessary training in special education. In the study school, the narratives revealed lessons which were sometimes far below the high standards of care or professionalism expected in a special school; evidence which supports Hartley's (2010) claims of underachievement and not necessarily receiving a high quality education. Hartley (2010) clearly lays the blame for poor quality at the lack of teacher expertise and specialist training and the reason for underachievement as the teachers' lack of understanding of SEN (Hartley, 2010).

This research provides an argument for the training of staff involved with the care and education of SEN students and the raising of the skill levels of all special school teachers through appropriate training. A question remains as to the availability of such training, if the CLDD students present as an unknown learning profile and the new pedagogy are not yet developed (DfE, 2012).

#### **6.63.5 Special Education Teaching Has Evolved**

Jones (2004) suggested that the job had evolved over time and was now very different to the mainstream teaching role. My research supports this to be true. Furthermore, this study explores in detail how the special school role challenges the professionalisms of the mainstream teacher and examines the cascading effects across the teaching teams, the relationships and the impact upon the students. The research defines the roles to be markedly different and this itself is support for a call for specialist training for this sector.

### **6.63.6 Government Policy Of Moving Schools To A Collaborative, Sharing Model**

The government's drive to share expertise (and resources) across schools may well support the sharing of much-needed in-service training for existing teachers. Skill deficits may be plugged by introducing a system of local schools supporting each other by sharing staff expertise. The idea may contribute positively to a significant training problem if the skills are available and can be delivered in a professional manner to an appropriate standard.

Many special schools are adopting the status of having a specialism e.g. PMLD or ASD specialism. The specialist status will attract students having the condition to expect that the school has invested in resources and training to ensure a higher quality of provision for that particular area of need.

This type of status may work to raise the standards within a school due to the increased transparency which comes with such status. (E.g. the training of colleagues, sharing best practice schemes).

My research suggests that, at the time of the study, the study school was not ready to offer itself as a training school for others; teachers without specialist training, struggling to plan and provide experiences for the PMLD and CLDD in their class.

It remains an interesting dichotomy that special schools are continuously recruiting non-specialist teachers and, at the same time, the schools are invited to promote themselves as specialists in caring and educating specific SEN types. How can schools take on such specialist roles in a landscape of lack of training in PMLD? In service training has long been regarded as ineffective and not translating to classroom practice (Ertmer, 2005; Raths, 2001).

### **6.63.7 Summary And Conclusion**

This research provides evidence that the adequate training of teachers wishing to move to into the special education setting is strongly recommended. The preparation of newly qualified teachers and retraining of existing mainstream teachers would potentially avoid a complex array of related consequences which manifest as significant problems.

The findings of this research illustrate the complex interdependency of factors which play out across the professional educator's role in a special school setting and illustrate the difficulties in the transition process from mainstream to special education.

Implications for the study school are described under the next heading.

### **6.7 Implications For The Study School**

The nature of the study does not offer generalised assumptions relating to special education or broader education settings. Rather this research, as defined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) offers itself for readership and scrutiny and analysis. The implications offered in this section are limited to the study school and the research will not make broader assumptions as each school setting and its context are slightly different.

In this sense, the research experience suggests that changes may be made in the following areas to facilitate improvements identified by the research experiences to the research school setting.

#### **1. The transition process**

This may involve initial training and mentoring the new teacher for a period of weeks in order to facilitate the smooth transition of the teacher into the planning, teaching

and pedagogy for special needs students as well as familiarising the new staff with expectations, standards and cultural norms. This may follow a mentoring model.

## **2. Structured accountability**

The middle management could engage in structured chains of accountability through from teaching assistants to the headteacher.

Consider staffing structures that offer autonomy and accountability in measures which dissuade opportunity for unprofessional practices and negate opportunity for bullying.

## **3. Socialisation opportunities**

The job role in the study school relies heavily on team work and cooperation. It may be of benefit to offer team-building opportunities to the staff on a regular basis to recognise and prioritise this.

## **4. Visiting and revisiting ethos and culture of the school**

It may be of value that the headteacher leads a staff meeting on the values of the school as well as professional expectations relating to accountability and whistleblowing, making public the desire to eradicate any unprofessionalism. This may include policies such as behaviour, safeguarding and child protection.

## **5. Invest in training opportunities for all staff**

To facilitate the training needs of the staff and 'touch base' in whole staff meetings about modern contemporary pedagogical developments to prevent a stagnation of practices or attitudes.

## **6. Teachers take responsibility for their assistants**

There have been incidents where teaching assistants have become dominant in the classroom and the teacher has not reclaimed the role of final authority and decision-maker.

### **6.8 Closing Remarks**

This research has raised profound professional issues and personal issues.

From a personal perspective I have opened doors into understanding myself infinitely better than I could ever have imagined. Using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry methodology, I have reflected endlessly over aspects of my professional and personal experiences and found a rich understanding of how my past, my present and my future fit together as a seamless jig saw. This understanding has given meaning to otherwise random events in my history which I now have the clarity about their connectivity and relatedness. I understand how my past has shaped my life to date and continues to influence my present and future.

At a professional level, I have learned to have patience and never rush to assume an understanding of anything; and even this small token of wisdom helps define my teaching on a daily basis. Furthermore, I have found a window into the complexities of my profession and glimpsed at how the myriad of factors interconnect and influence each other. I have seen professionals operate at high and low levels of professionalism and wrestled with the implications for my professional journey.

I have learned why I have struggled at many points in my career and what pressures and tensions existed at the time. I have developed an understanding of how school structure, procedures and knowledge can dynamically interact to create circumstances in which bullying behaviours from dominant personalities can thrive regardless of the stated policies or school culture.

I have learned that we are all autonomous moral agents and we have an individual responsibility to do 'good work'. I have begun to understand factors which influence individual choices of morality and can see how these factors impact upon other related factors. I have learned not to underestimate the powerful significance of ethics in research and that clarity and simplicity are easily replaced by consternation, divided loyalties, absence of certainty and ethical 'murkiness'. I have learned that carrying a burden alone is not the path to solutions.

#### **6.8.1 A Final Thought**

*"The worker has a set of values that she can state openly. These values draw chiefly on the longstanding values of the domain, though they may be nuanced in various ways. The worker attempts to operate according to those values, even when they clash with immediate self-interest. The worker recognises issues of moral complexity, wrestles with them, seeks advice and guidance, reflects on what went right, and seeks to right the course in the future when similar circumstances arise. Put generally, she takes the challenges of responsibility seriously and seeks to behave in as responsible a way as possible."* (Gardner, 2007, p.13)

*"Individuals who feel good about themselves and are able to engage in constructive relationships do not need to engage in destructive behaviours including the abuse and hurt of minors."* (Keenan, 2013, p.247)

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**Appendix 1: Ethics Application Form/Approval**

Shaped by the past, creating the future

26 January 2016

Philip Masterson  
EdD

p.r.masterson@durham.ac.uk

Dear Philip

**Narrative Agency: An Autobiographical Study into a Special School Teacher's Experiences**

I am pleased to inform you that your application for ethical approval for the above research has been approved by the School of Education Ethics Committee. May we take this opportunity to wish you good luck with your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P. M. Holmes".

Dr. P. Holmes  
Chair of School of Education Ethics Committee

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## Appendix 2: School Request to Conduct Research

Dear (*Head Teacher*),

My name is Philip Masterson and I am a doctoral student at Durham University. I am at the research stage of my degree and would like, with your permission, to use the school as a setting for my research.

The study aims to chart the professional experiences of a special school teacher over a research period as they carry out their duties and responsibilities in the role of special school teacher.

The study objectives are:

1. To chart and examine my own personal experiences of my professional role as a special school teacher in order to give meaning to and thus develop a deeper understanding of experiences of the special school teacher's role.
2. To analyse research data and pursue emergent themes in order to gain deeper insight into the meanings of the lived experiences.
3. To consider the lenses of teacher identity, autonomy, personal morality and power in relation to the role of the special school teacher.

The study is an autobiographical narrative study of my own professional experiences in a special school setting. The setting will preferably be the secondary department within the school; the focus being the researcher's teaching role, his interactions and professional experiences with staff over the research period.

Data collection will be predominantly via personal journal, observational field notes and reflective journal. However, memos, other observations, meeting minutes, conversations with students and staff may also be collected. Other data may include school data such as attainment records, assessments and reports.

All data gathered is kept in a secure location (locked filing cabinet) at the researcher's home address. While in school, data will be kept in a personal brief case in a locked cupboard. The management of the paper-based data will be through a rigorous record-keeping system of categorising, labelling, dating and filing the data. Digital data will be copied and located in a designated external hard drive with pen drive back up copies.

The research will form the basis of my doctoral thesis. The final thesis will be fully anonymous; the school, staff and all identifiable details will be changed and made unrecognisable to ensure anonymity.

It is hoped that the above research proposal and the details of the methodology will meet with your approval. Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to ask me. Should a meeting be appropriate, I am available at your convenience.

Yours faithfully  
(PRMasterson)

### **Appendix 3: Example of field notes: conversation re-written from memory**

(Re-storied from conversations with my TAs.)

I am taking my PPA time and my cover teacher is returning to class with my special needs students after they have been for their weekly swimming lesson. They return to class with about thirty minutes in class before lunch time.

The students and class TAs are looking forward to listening to some folk music which they have recently heard in their music lessons (with me). On returning to class, one of the TAs begins to put the song on using the computer but the cover teacher asks him to stop. The cover teacher takes charge of the computer telling the students that the 'rubbish' they want to listen to is not going on. Instead, the teacher puts on his own favourite band and proceeds to tell the class that this is 'real' music.

The teacher then sits, arms folded, for almost the full 30 minutes, commenting provocatively to the students about what 'real' music is, as they are made to listen to the teacher's choice of music while the students sit at their tables.

On a separate occasion, but in the same PPA cover period, the students asked the same cover teacher to watch some football clips for the 30 minute period leading up to lunch time. The teacher told the students that football was 'definitely not going on the screen'; rather, rugby was going on. The cover teacher declared that rugby was the best sport, referring to it as a man's sport, unlike football, which he described to them as 'a girl's game'.

He proceeded to put rugby clips on the screen for the full 30 minutes and again sat staring at the students in the teacher chair with his arms folded while they were made to watch sitting in their seats.

On both occasions the cover teacher made it clear to the TAs that no alternatives should be offered to the students. The teacher wanted them to watch his choice on the screen.

Other occasions saw the children having to watch footage of aeroplanes landing on aircraft carriers, various trains and military ships; none of which related to the interests of the group or topic work being covered in their class.

#### **Appendix 4: Example of transcribed conversation/semi structured interview with colleague (TA)**

(Re-written from voice recording.)

Context: Conversation related to how best to teach the PMLD, autistic and low ability students in special school. School was trialling a sensory room for PMLD and low ability students. I wondered what staff thought about how we meet the needs of the students in school. Presiding questions:

Are their needs being met in class? ; Would a special classroom with a designated sensory curriculum and staff be better (Referred to throughout the conversation as 'SEN Base')?

Questions from my prepared list are in blue italics, other questions (in black) are improvised and conversational.

Transcript of semi-structured conversation/ interview

Interviewer: Phil Masterson (PM)

Interviewee: HG

Location: MM office

Time: 2-3pm Friday

*PM: What do you think of the idea to have a specially designated classroom for students that would benefit from a sensory curriculum rather than have differentiated lessons in their usual classroom?*

HG: I think it's a very good idea to use the classroom as a SEN Base because it's given children who might be in a class and not getting involved in a task that's going on, the opportunity to come out of that class and get involved in things that might be at their level... and something that they can really get into.

*PM: What do you think a classroom like that should be used for?*

HG: Do you mean... what subjects or what activities are suitable for the children..?

*PM: Both.*

HG: Right. I think it should be used to suit each individual child's needs and I think for children with autism, when I've been in the class what I think there should be, I think there should be maybe sectioned off areas, small sectioned off cubicled areas so that child can be, with autism, more on task because sometimes I think when you're in there, the child with autism, there's too much going on for that child to focus on what's being asked of them. I think there are too many distractions sometimes in the class and I think if you've have small like cubicled areas with the task set up, and they're go in 1-2-1 with a person then they're obviously more on task and I think they would work better in that situation rather than at the moment they're going all sitting

round the table I think that's a good idea who's in the room and then I think they could break off and ask them to do individual tasks I think that might be better.... If they were sort of in their own area doing that, where there's maybe visual screen where they're not getting distracted... but I think it's really good, I think it's like er a lot better for them and they're getting a lot more out from sensory wise they need a lot more sensory things I feel particularly for the children with autism that there's still a lot of distraction in there.

*PM: I could get into a right conversation about that just because it matches some of the things .....RB in my class...we tried to partition a little bit of the classroom and all that sort of thing...*

HG: Did it work though?

*PM: Erm, not in the first instance no...it was quite difficult to get him to...*

HG: but if it's become a routine, if they were going in there and they were doing that then it would become like a routine thing they would know what they were going to and obviously it would take a child a few weeks to know that 'I'm going in there and I'm going to do that' and it would become routine with autism it takes a few times it's just routines isn't it?

*PM: I don't think we pursued it enough because we were not sure if it was the best thing for him at the time...*

HG: I don't say total exclusion I just think if a child is asked to paint, there's your painting table, there's your painting area, you do your painting there, whereas at the minute, when RB is painting, he's running wild in that room, he's smearing the walls he's smearing the mirrors, he's looking at himself in the mirrors .....do you know what I mean? If he knows that that's your area there, you stay in that area and do your painting and if you're going to smear that's your area you smear at the end that's your area you clean.

*PM: It's one of the things that's come up about the mixture of kids we've got in there, which one of the questions comes onto later, about the autistic kids have got quite a different requirement in terms of the classroom to other special needs and yet we try at the moment to deal with them all in the same room (HG: Same way)... what you're saying there, I dunno... I think it's like really important, something that we've almost overlooked.*

HG: I feel as though it's been overlooked, me. When I go in there I can see that, . I feel like yeah we're dealing with them all the same, but they've all got different needs, there's SR and yeah we can deal with her the way we are dealing with things but the kids that have got severe autism I think you need to be dealing with them different.

*PM: I couldn't agree more, even a different kind of room...*

HG: I mean SEN Base is a good idea but for me the autistic kids still need that little bit different...

*PM: So it sort of depends who you're putting in there doesn't it? In principle it's a good idea but it depends which children you're putting in there as to what you provide for them.*

HG: Yep.

*PM: What do you think is the best thing about the SEN Base at the moment?*

HG: at the moment, the best thing about it is that it is acknowledging that these kids need something more than a classroom, that they need a different room to function in and they do need different things to stimulate them so they need more sensory so I think SEN Base is going to give them that opportunity, hopefully it'll develop and it'll get more and more and they'll get more equipment and more, you know, more focussed on things, but I think its really good that they get the opportunity to go in there and recognising that they need a bit more..... than to be in a chair in a class cos some kids are strapped in a chair in a class and they're not getting nothing are they?

*PM: It sounds a bit medieval....*

*PM: Thinking about the children, why do you think a SEN Base is necessary?*

HG: Again, it's to give them what they need isn't it? It's to them...to recognise their needs and to focus on their needs and to give them 1-2-1 attention so they're getting some interaction of an adult and they're getting like time to spend and do some activities what they like... you know that they can get something out of.

*PM: You were on about when they were in a normal sort of classroom situation they're not really erm...*

HG: I think when you've got that many kids in a class, I know it's not many say 12 in a class but the other kids demand your attention, it'll be like 'can you help me do this? can you show me what to do here? Can you spell this? Can you get a dictionary? Can you write a word? And you're that busy doing that, that the child who is in a chair or who has got that extra need.....is getting overlooked. Sometimes....see I think quite a lot of the times they are ....cos you're that busy with the other kids trying to get them to do their topic work and produce a piece of work that can go in their file and obviously if you're doing that, concentrating on them the kids all just sit there and get left, get left....tend to take a back seat.....so I think them going into SEN Base there's more staff, they're getting sort of 1-2-1, and they're getting that more focus on them you know? They get a better relationship with them and things like that.

*PM: For you, what type of children should access the SEN Base?*



HG: erm... all pmlD children. Children who can't really speak up for themselves and children more autistic erm, I think cos...I'm particularly more for autistic...I think they find it confusing... if something changes in the class that's normally routine it throws the autistic kid and they have the screaming 'abababs' and it'll take hours maybe to calm them down and get them understanding, and I feel like....for them, they'll benefit a lot, benefit a lot from being in there with a set routine and it's happening exactly as they are told its gonna happen, rather than 'oh we're gonna do this' and then 'oh we've changed the plan' so the kids with autism that just throws them totally....you can't just say 'oh we've changed the plan' with an autistic kid because then they're just like..... that's no good for them....in ordinary classrooms it can happen all the time.

*PM: It happened today, we were supposed to have the tooth lady in and 5 minutes before they're due to arrive they pop down to say sorry can't make it today and all of a sudden it's change and then you get the particular autistic kids that react more than any of the others.*

HG: It should be like, as I say, for the like of JC...I thought that was really good when JC was brought in there the other day, I just suddenly thought why hasn't he been accessing this anyway? When I saw him in there I just thought...Why hasn't that kid been coming in here?.....Why has he been overlooked? Because he's another one isn't he...because of his language, he gets overlooked a lot I think cos of his speech...and you know...so he's another case of where he's overlooked a lot in class.

*PM: When he came back to class at the end of the afternoon, he absolutely loved it..*

HG: He seemed as though he'd had a wail of a time I think...I think he loved like the banter and everything.

*PM: He hadn't got silly 'cos sometimes you can try to have a bit of 1-2-1 fun with him and he goes completely....*

HG: I think he liked it because he got attention didn't he and he got like.. it was more to his level rather than being the one and I think that's part of JC, that's why he gets angry cos of his speech and can't communicate, don't understand what he says so of course he gets disturbed doesn't he?.... so if you're in SEN Base you can maybe spend more time... and maybe spend more time getting him to use his signing to communicate with you but when I saw him in there I thought why hasn't he been coming in here but there's probably other kids that have been overlooked like that... that maybe should be dipping in and out....maybe not as much but get some sessions in there

*PM: Thinking about....well there's two things one of them was in D school we opened up a little nurture group we called it..... kids that were struggling in mainstream, the trouble makers really they got put in there we started with a group of 10 kids, within 2 years we had 33. 33 kids in there. But I imagine in some ways if we started thinking a lot about that SEN Base, you could end up saying 'pop him in, pop him in..' so you could end up with more especially when we're trying to do it staff intensive; almost 1-2-1....*

HG: but are primary going to be invited to join that, because I feel as though the kids in primary are not getting their needs met, they are getting overlooked down this end of school and I think they would benefit so much and I just think why should it only be like, why is it only secondary? Why is it not primary? So these kids have to sit like till class 5 and get nothing and when they go to 7, 'Oh you can have a bit more now'. Why should they not be dipping in now?

*PM: Normally with interventions of any kind it's the youngest so that they're better by the time they get to secondary...*

HG: I just think that there's a lot missing at this end that could be happening...and I know it's probably staff and that or...? I dunno... but I just feel as though... with me working in there Class 5 and I've seen like the Alfie and the Genelle and I've been in there since September I mean I'm only in part time, but what I've seen I think... they get nothing really out of some days or some sessions and I just think they're sat in that chair, I seen them like just sat at the back, why are they not...why are they not accessing.... you know going down there and getting some interaction or getting some something in the SEN Base...

*PM: Well maybe if it gets evaluated along the way.*

HG: I know but it's so obvious that management should...

*PM: I think it's a really good point that..... I don't suppose this stuff is ever gonna get to there this is going into a book, but the book is never going to be read by people here I mean we'd have to pick different channels to put things...like really good ideas like that back into the mix so that management can have a think about that and say that SEN Base is successful but why aren't we doing it down there?*

HG: I think like it's the life skills that should be taught from class 2 for the kids coming in, so a life skill is for these kids isn't it? Getting the sensory experiences. So from class 2 they should be getting sensory experiences 'cos they're never gonna get their button holes or their laces taught... so why aren't they doing sensory from class 2, getting brought down for dip in dip out sessions, you know if there's gonna be a timetable and it's gonna be sessions ran properly in there, then they might be able to dip in for some of them, from like from the outset, rather than wait till they get to class 7 saying, 'oh you're old enough now you can start going into SEN Base' .....to me that's like....why wait till you're older?

*PM: What kind of balance do you suggest regarding time spent in SEN Base and their respective classrooms?*

HG: Depends on their ability really, as to how long they should get in there you know I think, I mean yeah bring 'em in, let them do their registration with their peers in their class, which I think is good 'cos then the kids in their class as well can show a bit of respect and show a bit of understanding that so-and-so needs more than what I do and

we have to give them the milk, we have to help and stuff like that, so I think that's good, so I think some of the SEN Base kids should be having quite a lot of time in there. I don't think they want to put it as a full time class do they, make it back to the old way having them in there permanent....

*PM: What would be wrong with that then do you think if they set up the old....what was it class 7 they called it...?*

HG: I think it would be a bit stagnant...I think it would get...they get a bit excluded from the rest of the school don't they? I know when I was here when it used to be the old class 7, it was sort of like, 'oh that's class 7' then you get staffing issues of, 'oh I don't want to work in there', and 'I don't wanna be in there full time'... you do, you get things like that don't you? And you also get.. the kids... sort of like...1 and 6 they get to be a separate unit to the school, where this is sort of integrated into sessions they're still sort of a member of the other part of the school.

## **Appendix 5: Example of Personal Journal Entry**

Context: an extract from my journal from the early stage of the research and my attempt at teaching a PMLD lesson extra to my normal classroom lessons. The PMLD group was a mixture of familiar and unfamiliar students with a varied mixture of complex needs. Journal entry includes reflections and some reflective analysis of my experience.

Journal entry after teaching a mixed PMLD group for the first time in a designated classroom (SEN Base). Written from memory same day. 4<sup>th</sup> June.

I began teaching in the SEN room. I had spent a lot of extra time preparing for the extra teaching imposed on me through this initiative. I was beginning to resent the extra workload already, and my support staff was not wholly happy to be left with the remaining class members while I was visiting the SEN Base to conduct lessons. (Mainly due to certain children having behavioural issues that I have a particularly good behavioural control over.)

Without formal guidance, I had planned to assess the SEN Base students, observe them and understand the teaching objectives typically used for children at this level.

I arranged that the students were given freedom to engage in structured 'play' in a classroom set up with areas; much like a EYFS setting would be comprising of a home area, a drawing area, a music corner, painting etc. My intention was to observe them but work with individuals at the main table one at a time. The supporting TAs would ensure the remaining children were catered for while I did planned work with individuals. When I shared my intentions with the TAs they were very positive and enthusiastic with their support.

I noticed during my first visit to the classroom that there was a small display showing P level objectives and I asked the TAs about these. Were they for the children that were part of this trial? Were they decoration for an OFSTED visit? Were they for the children that used to use the room? They were not sure of the answer but the levels were useful (WHY?) in that they did apply to the ability level of some of the group we would be teaching.

The extra planning was a burden but I did it and shared it with my TA support staff from the SEN Base, prior to the day of the lesson. I felt that the lessons went well; the students were well behaved and responsive to me and my TAs were very supportive of my approach. I managed to work with most of the children at the middle table and made positive connections with each one.

### **Reflections of practice**

Despite the lesson going well however, I had mixed feelings and reactions to the experience:

Reflecting on my more positive thoughts, I felt that it was very interesting to experience how these children behave in a group where they have many classroom norms removed. Most of the group I didn't know and so was unable to make any comparison, but I could with the two children from my classroom.

At a functional level of managing the children and the classroom, I felt that I needed constant advice from the TAs who work with these children on a regular basis. The TAs were able to

feed me with appropriate information regarding their physical well-being and so guide me when there was a likelihood of seizures or other behavioural issues.

This reliance on the TAs was an unusual feeling for me but in this new teaching environment and context, I embraced the situation and felt afterwards that this proved very good for initial team-building.

I felt that as far as the content of the lesson was concerned, the timing of breaks, changes of activity, discipline and when to involve myself in other areas of the room, I needed to have control of the classroom but only had my common sense and experience (and advice given) to rely on. It felt like being a supply teacher when every moment is thinking on your feet using the smallest amount of knowledge and experience. I guessed that this experience was good for my professional development though perhaps not my stress levels!

Professional/personal – what is valid on reflection? Why?

Reflecting on the more negative aspects of the experience so far, my most profound reaction to the first lesson was that I felt so professionally unprepared. Certainly, I found that there were issues with my personal levels of confidence to teach a hands-on curriculum and I didn't feel that I had an abundance of ideas to offer the children. Thankfully I was well supported by the TAs and my honesty about my feelings of inadequacy cemented a good working relationship from the start.

My anxieties mostly centred around the children with medical issues. Future lessons may involve taking these children off site and consequently the responsibility would be onerous to say the least.

Competence to teach such lessons to these children as a group also prayed on my mind. I tend to think that the TAs are standing there expecting you to know exactly what you are doing in every moment of every lesson and I think in this case it just wasn't true.

I felt that, despite my planning to assess the children during the first lesson, I still had no idea where to pitch in with these children at an academic or cognitive level, or even at a conversational level! As the lesson progressed, I soon engaged with the children at an appropriate level in order to complete the tasks of the day, but I needed to learn as I went.

I felt that if the children responded to me that would be successful in my first lesson. Other expectations? For the first lesson I hoped to establish good working relationships with all of the staff and children, but over the following 6 weeks I felt much less clear. I was also unclear about what targets to set and which experiences to provide to facilitate progress. I wasn't clear whether 'endless' repetition of the same thing is the model for these SEN children or whether the same thing in different ways is better, or even a carousel of experiences that are all different. Who would guide me? What should I expect as progress or am I providing experiences?

I felt unsure about classroom organisation and didn't really have any help with this so, again, I thought hard, used my common sense and decided for myself using the limited experience I had gained of lower school and recent work in a special needs units.

My frustration at the above(???) was compounded by the lack of assessments and appropriate objectives. The planning process had been difficult enough but now I felt in a situation that was increasingly annoying due to the lack of cohesive strategy.

As the workload increased, all of it in addition to the usual expectations relating to the class duties and responsibilities I have, I became irritated. I asked myself “Why am I being asked to do this?” I knew that the students in my class were missing me and causing problems for my TAs, and this added to the stress.

I wondered if this trial was part of a wider initiative that the management had not yet been shared with us. Did this fit with a vision of the school?; a vision for the teaching staff? I considered whether management were happy with progress or if they even knew what was going on. I was frustrated that I didn’t know which it was and felt out of the loop regarding my personal efforts and how they were contributing to the whole school initiative.

My considerations left me to ponder the lack of communication surrounding the initiative and the effect it was having on my enthusiasm to participate, even after only one lesson.

So after one single visit to the SEN Base, I was full of thoughts varying in their positivity and probably equally weighted by their negativity. I needed to look ahead to the next lessons and ensure that my very reflective disposition would ensure that future lessons would be of benefit to the children.

First I needed to complete my self-evaluations in terms of future organisation.

### **Organisation in the SEN room**

After my first lesson in the SEN room, I decided to continue to set up the class into play areas for future lessons where children would be expected to ‘play’. This would allow me to spend time picking a child and working with them on a one to one basis on the main middle table.

I introduced an afternoon break and a story to end the afternoon so that my lesson ended like x’s lesson. (X had informed me in casual chat that she ended the afternoon with a story and the children especially enjoyed it – typical in many schools.) I was unaware how the other two teachers involved were ending their lessons but I thought it useful to have some similarities for the sake of the children.

I had mentioned it prior to the trial beginning, but I felt more concerned having taught my first lesson in the SEN Base, that the children needed to feel that the behaviour was responded to by each teacher in the same way.

I had a meeting with x and discussed with her my concerns that we, as staff, should be ensuring that our discipline strategies and behavioural expectations should be consistent. She agreed, though to my knowledge nothing was done by anyone to ensure that this was the case. Each teacher had a very different style and very little experience with these particular children, especially in this combination, other than the teacher who did the cooking lesson.

The TAs supporting the lessons did know the children better than the teachers so their knowledge and lead was essential to sustain consistency. However, there also were issues

about the development of a classroom where the TAs were being the disciplinarians and the teachers were potentially taking a back-seat.

### **My personal experiences from the teaching process**

**RE:**

**Planning** – confidence? Knowing children? Like supply? Coordinated block of work? Where are objectives coming from? Teacher given area from planning grid imported. Support in using it? What are my aims here? What are school's expectations of me? Talked to TAs who worked in there often. Existing objectives on wall from p levels. Are all staff thinking same? (talks with TG suggest that p levels are generic at this low level – we're all learning)

**Curricular experiences** – what are we teaching? What kind of activities are we trying to offer? We know the reason these children are attending the SEN Base is because they typically struggle to access the average 'watered down' mainstream style lesson due to their personal needs being greater. But what are we doing then? (obviously later the term – sensory curriculum was used and the room given a task)

We considered our task to be to offer simple practical lessons, which would allow these students to enjoy their lessons and not be stressed.

**Lesson structure** – 2hrs my session (others had single lesson) various structures trialled. Generally settled on: Who's here? Designated play. Select one from play zones to do focussed work. Outdoor break 15mins. Play. Story. end. TG and I tried to make our lessons have same discipline, same structure and not same content – painting etc

**Discipline** – same as other teachers?

Expectations discussed with TG and I and she says a meeting will be arranged so that uniformity can be gained across the different teachers.

NB each child has a handling plan which documents procedure for the children – however, it is generally said that speaking to the people that teach the child is the best way of getting the best, most up to date methods and information. The plans are updated annually.

**Feedback** – as a group of colleagues it never happened. Though TG and I talked frequently about our concerns and experiences in order to improve the trial. Our discussions were broadened out to the other teachers via TG visiting them to relay our ideas (to tell them what we had decided)

TG was leading the initiative as far as I could tell through her own enthusiasm, rather than a position offered her. She also harboured fantasies of the teaching position within SEN Base, so had other reasons to lead and make it a success. My support was through professionalism and friendship to TG.

Discussions with TG regarding all aspects of the project were ongoing and fruitful.

Personal professional development, getting to know the children, etc all positive

TG positioned at helm of initiative and coordinator of the trial. Locus of positional power.

### **Reflections of children's' experiences**

It is hard not to make direct comparisons for the children that are in my ordinary class and visit the SEN Base at this stage because I know personally the difficulties involved in catering for a wide diversity of needs in every lesson. Reflections based on my personal comparisons are favourable for the SEN Base. I genuinely think these children thrive in the more relaxed environment of the SEN Base, where the tasks and challenges are more staff intense and the in-between tasks time is longer and better resourced than in my ordinary class. Another observation is that the children in SEN Base simply have much more room to move around and 'play' when their task is complete. During these lesson phases, the SLD child may be free to 'play' and this poses no distraction to other SEN students that may have to continue working – this would be the case in the ordinary classroom.

PMasterson.



## Appendix 6: An example of a Reflective Account

### Reflection on hearing staff comments and tales in the staff room and observing language toward children

*I feel that I need to write this as an important part of my research journey but feel sure that I cannot write in my journal. I can read and reread this back to myself and consider exactly how best to manage my growing concerns.*

*I have been overwhelmed by the welcome from the staff at this school when I started and continue to enjoy exceptionally good relations with the vast majority. I am now accepted as part of the furniture and feel trusted and respected in this teaching and caring community. However, since I have started my research, the high regard I am held in and the high levels of trust I am afforded seems to offset the research somewhat.*

*The staff has been offered to proof read and share my research at any point, yet do not. They remain blasé and nonchalant regarding my work and some members of staff appear happy allowing themselves to be seen in less than favourable light.*

*The situation at this stage is making me puzzled and increasingly uncomfortable as I feel very enthusiastic and loyal to my research, wishing to honour the truth of my findings. I am beginning to feel that some members of staff are revealing themselves in such a way as to put me in a difficult position. Some of the stories which they find 'funny' in the staff room are bothering me and some of the verbal exchanges with the children I see as bullying. I think they may be so used to talking that way they are de-sensitised but I am concerned.*

*If my research begins to reveal events like this what do I do? Worst case scenario is that I end up in a lot of trouble with my Head teacher, possibly losing my job, possibly ruining my career, relationships and potential to earn and keep my family. I feel loyalty to my work rather than allegiance to the school or the staff but I do not want my work to cause damage to people. My thoughts are that it is the responsibility of the management to weed out problems of this kind if it really exists. My research may show the extent of it from the inside? I don't know whether to back off and just play safe by ignoring anything bad and just write about the good I find but I know I could never feel I have done a piece of research worth putting my name to. Anyway, what about the children? Who is going to fight for them? I cannot brush things under the carpet and pretend I didn't see or hear.*

*My curiosity and loyalty to the children drives me on to wish to see the extent of any malpractice.*

*I find it strange because my position as insider researcher is allowing this more 'honest' view of the school. Clearly when we have visitors, everyone is guarded and shows their best side. But why aren't members of staff showing their best side all of the time or at least to me when they know I am researching, observing and recording?*

*This work might turn out much more difficult than I thought, much more complex or even impossible to continue with. I may need to speak with my supervisor on our next meeting. PMasterson.*

## **Appendix 7: Example of a Field Text**

### **Written from field notes (journal, notes, annotations) and memory**

As part of the curricular changes and in particular the changes underpinning the use of the SEN base as a PMLD resource for a sensory curriculum, the teachers in the secondary department were asked to plan and teach a sensory style lesson with the PMLD children in the SEN base classroom one afternoon a week as a trial.

Each teacher was allocated an afternoon or morning to plan and teach in the SEN room with an attached curriculum area as their focus e.g. PE, Music, Art or Communication.

Despite not speaking directly to people about the proposals for teaching in the SEN base, I became aware, after a few weeks that one teacher had not yet started teaching the sessions. The teacher had been given a single lesson per week and PE as the attached curricular area. Three weeks after the trial had started, the teacher had still not taught a lesson, and instead, had remained in the teacher's own classroom teaching the class as 'normal'. This meant that the other teachers who would send their PMLD students to that lesson from the secondary department actually kept the PMLD children and the TAs who would support the lesson also remained in their classrooms leaving the SEN room empty.

I was oblivious to this lesson not taking place and I was happy to keep my PMLD children in my class anyway; it was early days I wasn't personally clear how everything was going in terms of it being set up. From my own perspective, I felt that as long as I had planned my part of the jigsaw then my responsibility to the trial was fulfilled and other colleagues would be doing the same. I thought the leader of the initiative was keeping an overview and with that in mind, if my PMLD were asked for during the week, then I would let them go, but if not, they would have the planned lessons in my room.

The approach I had at this time was not ideal because it did leave me and my team wondering whether they would be supporting PMLD in my class or, if they were out in SEN room, be asked to support the remaining students in other ways. Everybody was very patient and supportive about these relatively minor issues, and though levels of frustration existed, the staff didn't allow their frustrations to build up too much.

Upon realising that one teacher was not yet taking her turn teaching in the SEN room, I presumed and trusted that the teacher had good professional reasons for not having joined in the trial yet so I was not really interested in the details. I felt very busy keeping up with my role of planning my SEN room lessons and keeping an eye on the class I was leaving behind. My TA had concerns about me leaving the classroom because there were students that responded well to a male in the room, but were less responsive to females. This was

not uncommon in the student cohort in our key stage and so this was an issue that my team needed to be sensitive to during the trial period.

When I chatted to the teacher (who had not started her lessons in the SEN room yet) about how she felt about the initiative, she was candid about her professional and personal feelings. They reflected resentment at being drawn into HAVING to teach in the SEN room, fears of being inadequately prepared and lacking sufficient knowledge or specialist skills that the PMLD students may need, a clear unhappiness that many of the students were unfamiliar to her and had complex needs – some serious medical conditions, and that planning for this kind of student was difficult even if they are in your own class but to plan for other PMLD students is extremely challenging and hard to ‘get right’.

Underpinning these feelings of professional inadequacy was a personal political stance that the teacher didn’t particularly like the teacher who was organising and leading the trial and felt that the ‘pushy’ manner was ‘very irritating’.

On week 4 of the 6 week trial of the SEN room, the teacher did go to the SEN room to take the lesson.

### **Initial thoughts for me**

Is it better that a professional avoids teaching if their current confidence suggests to them that the students will not have a very positive experience? Is it appropriate, to delay starting those lessons until they feel appropriately equipped emotionally, professionally and suitably resourced to tackle the new challenge – especially in the absence of training or guidance from fellow professionals, experts or management? Or are they professionally obliged to just get stuck in and get on with it? Could the leader have done more to support the professional tensions and anxieties? Consider the duty of care and obligation to provide experiences for the PMLD students in a safe context. Is it better that the student does not experience what may be an inadequate professional leading a lesson? Where are the lines of responsibility?

## Appendix 8: Example of a Field Text – coded

(Coding categories in red)

(Unused in the final thesis-Written from field notes (as journal, notes, annotations) and memory June 2011)

As part of a plan to use an empty classroom to provide a separate opportunity for PMLD students to experience sensory lessons targeted specifically for them, the teachers in the secondary department were instructed to plan and teach a sensory lesson with the department's PMLD children to be taught by them in the SEN base classroom one afternoon a week initially as a trial. (initiative imposed upon department)

Each teacher was allocated an afternoon or morning to plan and teach in the SEN room with an attached curriculum area as their focus e.g. PE, Music, Art or Communication. (initiative imposed upon department)

Despite not speaking directly to people about the proposals for teaching in the SEN base, I became aware, after a few weeks that one teacher had not yet started teaching the sessions. (Support? Preparation? Training? Expectations?) The teacher had been given a single lesson per week and PE as the attached curricular area. (initiative imposed upon department)

Three weeks after the trial had started, the teacher had still not taught a lesson, and instead, had remained in the teacher's own classroom teaching the class as 'normal'. (Support? Preparation? Training? Expectations?) This meant that the other teachers who would send their PMLD students to that lesson from the secondary department actually kept the PMLD children (students deprived of entitlement?) (potential tensions across staff) and the TAs (short notice adjustments to expected routine – impact students autistic esp?) who would support the lesson also remained in their classrooms leaving the SEN room empty (wasted resource) .

I was oblivious to this lesson not taking place and I was happy to keep my PMLD children in my class anyway (ideological/educational differences?); it was early days I wasn't personally clear how everything was going in terms of it being set up (lack of overview). From my own perspective, I felt that as long as I had planned my part of the jigsaw then my responsibility to the trial was fulfilled and other colleagues would be doing the same. I thought the leader of the initiative was keeping an overview and with that in mind, if my PMLD were asked for during the week, then I would let them go, but if not, they would have the planned lessons in my room. (lack of overview) (presumption that someone else is taking care of the detail)

The approach I had at this time was not ideal(my role as leader/organiser unfulfilled) because it did leave me and my team wondering (lack of overview) whether they would be supporting PMLD in my class or, if they were out in the SEN room, or be asked to support the remaining students in other ways(uncertainty). Everybody was very patient and supportive about these relatively minor issues, and though levels of frustration existed, the staff didn't allow their frustrations to build up too much.(tensions across staff)

Upon realising that one teacher was not yet taking her turn teaching in the SEN room, I presumed and trusted that the teacher had good professional reasons for not having joined in the trial yet (professional trust in colleague) so I was not really interested in the details. I felt very busy keeping up with my role of planning my SEN room lessons and keeping an eye on the class I was leaving behind. (lack of overview) (presumption that someone else is taking care of the detail) My TA had concerns about me leaving the classroom because there were students that responded well to a male in the room, but were less responsive to females. (tensions across staff) This was not uncommon in the student cohort in our key stage and so this was an issue that my team needed to be sensitive to during the trial period. (following usual systems and procedures)

When I chatted to the teacher (who had not started her lessons in the SEN room yet) about how she felt about the initiative, she was candid about her professional and personal feelings. They reflected resentment at being drawn into HAVING to teach in the SEN room, (initiative imposed upon department) fears of being inadequately prepared and lacking sufficient knowledge or specialist skills that the PMLD students may need, a clear unhappiness that many of the students were unfamiliar to her and had complex needs – some serious medical conditions, and that planning for this kind of student was difficult even if they are in your own class but to plan for other PMLD students is extremely challenging and hard to 'get right'. (Support? Preparation? Training? Expectations?) (professional inadequacies)

Underpinning these feelings of professional inadequacy was a personal political stance that the teacher didn't particularly like the teacher who was organising and leading the trial and felt that the 'pushy' manner was 'very irritating'. (tensions across staff) (personal relationships tensions)

On week 4 of the 6 week trial of the SEN room, the teacher did go to the SEN room to take the lesson.

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## Appendix 9: Example of an Interim Text

**(reflective texts which support the writing of research texts taking the form of initial thoughts written in conjunction with Fig.9 p.145)**

In this event, there are themes of teacher confidence relating to the teaching of PMLD. One teacher in particular finds the idea extremely challenging yet appears to find little support mechanisms in place and appears to withdraw. There appears to be evidence of impact from the negative feelings the teacher has toward the leader. This relationship with the leader may have impacted upon this decision NOT to ask for support and show what they see as their own professional inadequacy before a colleague they does not feel comfortable with; Possibly illustrating the impact of relationships within organisations upon quality of work.

There may be issues relating to the management of a change or setting up an initiative which potentially put teachers out of their comfort zone. Getting the teachers 'on board' over teaching the PMLD may have benefitted the overall engagement by the staff and supported more dynamic communication rather than it being imposed. Management may not have felt there to be any specific need of support considering that the pool of teachers and the highly experienced TAs contained all of the information relating to each students care; but perhaps the coordinating of this information across the teaching teams may have raised teacher anxieties regarding their less-familiar students.

The teacher support for the teaching of PMLD was not obvious but the teachers did have some of the PMLD students in their class anyway but others were unfamiliar leading to teacher anxieties over their own lack of knowledge and expertise.

As a professional teacher, my team were without the necessary information to know whether our PMLD students were indeed having a lesson in the SEN base. We felt frustrated by the situation collectively which brought us together as a team. However, I felt that I should have been finding out the missing information even though it was not my specific duty, and so I had hidden feelings of letting my team down which in turn led to irritation at other members of staff who should have been providing the information.

The teacher who was reluctant to begin the lessons was low in confidence and in her own mind felt unskilled and vulnerable to be responsible for the PMLD students despite the support of strong and knowledgeable TAs. I wondered if there was an element of 'politics' at play here where two members of staff are struggling to get on. This may be at the root of the issue of her delayed start to the teaching leading to considerations of her professionalism. However, the reason may also be related to her lack of training in PMLD, her limited experience as a teacher (less than 5 years) and her

awareness that teaching and planning for unfamiliar PMLD students is a very serious responsibility relating to her professional duties of care.

Is it better that a professional avoids teaching if their current confidence suggests to them that the students will not have a very positive experience? Is it appropriate, to delay starting those lessons until they feel appropriately equipped emotionally, professionally and suitably resourced to tackle the new challenge – especially in the absence of training or guidance from fellow professionals, experts or management? Or are they professionally obliged to just get stuck in and get on with it? Could the leader have done more to support the professional tensions and anxieties? Consider the duty of care and obligation to provide experiences for the PMLD students in a safe context. Is it better that the student does not experience what may be an inadequate professional leading a lesson? Where are the lines of responsibility?

The underlying themes appear to relate to the readiness of special school staff to teach PMLD effectively, the personal confidences of some staff to teach PMLD with confidence, the impact of personal relationships across teams and departments, communication and implementation of departmental changes.

These issues imply a potential need to explore further areas such as teacher efficacy and identity, in service teacher training and professional development.

## **Appendix 10: Example of a Research Text**

(Re-storied/written from field text)

### **5.5 Story 3: Tasting Food**

*The cooking of food features prominently in the special school curriculum. Children of all ages, abilities and disabilities engage in these lessons. In addition to this, cooking features in the sensory curriculum.*

*It was Tuesday lunchtime. The children had left the classroom and I was tidying up the last of my papers from the lesson. My thoughts were on my lunch and which music should I play while I am eating. As I began settling down with my foil-wrapped sandwiches and my cold drink, Gemma my teaching assistant, entered the classroom looking very agitated. She had spent the morning working in another class as a favour due to staff shortages.*

*I began to realise that she was not alright and that she actually looked very upset. She paced across the classroom floor back and forth in a highly agitated way. I remember thinking that this must be serious because I had never seen Gemma be upset about anything before. I asked what had happened and she sat on the edge of the table and told me.*

*She said she had been supporting a colleague of mine in the food technology room with the non-communicative PMLD group. She added, "To be fair, it was good, very sensory, and the kids were enjoying making the food."*

*I asked what had caused the problem then?*



*"Well it was after the food was made. She (the teacher in charge) invited all of the students to taste it. Well only one 'said' yes. The rest didn't want to know. I thought, oh here we go. What's she (the teacher) gonna do here then? And you know what she did? She made them taste it; Rubbing it on their mouths when they didn't want her to. Oh, it was awful. They were struggling and trying to move out of the way while she (the teacher) was telling them that after making it they had to try it. Honestly, I was fuming. One lad started crying. I just moved out of the way and thought I'm having nothing to do with this, no way. I nearly walked out. It wouldn't have been so bad but it was lemon juice on pancake and they really reacted to it."*

*I felt my feelings of frustration and annoyance building up. I imagined the scene. I imagined that our cultural universal standard is that when a person says "No," they mean "No," and we respect that. However, life isn't always that simple. I remembered too well the feeling as a child at my mother's house during access visits, sitting at the table struggling to finish my dinner because I felt full, only to be pressured into eating more than I wanted or could eat in order to achieve the goal of 'finishing my plate'. I always felt angry about that pressure that I was made to feel. I never wasted food deliberately but felt no desire to eat for the sake of it. I had always promised myself that I would never put a child through that, neither my own children at home nor children at school. Meal times would always be relaxed and without pressure.*

*I remember listening and watching Gemma as she calmed back down. She really was very unhappy about it. I remember feeling unclear about how wrong this was, as my experience of PMLD was so utterly limited to nothing and I only had my own moral perspective to draw on. I tried to corroborate my beliefs that a child's refusal was an acceptable response and should be respected, but I felt frustrated that I had neither training nor professional PMLD experience, just an instinctive reaction.*

*I asked Gemma if she had seen anything like it before and she said no. She told me that normally, in her experience, the making of the food in a sensory way is the fun part, tasting and touching and rubbing the different textures of ingredients. If students didn't want to eat the food, then they didn't. Sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't. They might smell it instead or just feel it.*

*I asked her if she wanted to take it further and she looked at me and smiled for a moment though it was clear she was still upset. She said, "Nah, what's the point. You know nothing will happen." Then she started to laugh and said, "Yes you do. I'll get moved to primary. That's what'd happen."*

*I struggled to know what to say in that respect such was the overwhelming evidence that she was right. The management did consistently move teaching assistants into the primary department if they were involved in any form of dispute with a member of the team or teacher. She asked that I take it no further and she went for her dinner.*