The Rarely Heard Voice: Students with Moderate General Learning Disability
Speak of Their Experiences in Mainstream Schools

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for examination on the programme of study leading to the award of the Degree of Doctorate of Education (Ed. D) is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This study takes place in the context of policy that promotes the inclusion of students with Moderate General Learning Disabilities (MGLD) in mainstream schools. It provides in depth research on the social and educational experiences of six students who were attending mainstream schools. Students from both primary and post-primary schools participated in this study and their 'voice' was privileged throughout. This is a 'voice' that remained absent from research until this study was undertaken. The students, male and female ranged in age from twelve to eighteen. Five of the participants were young people with Down Syndrome. Observation and interviews were the principle methods used to collect data. In order to enable students with MGLD to express their views a compendium of methods were used to supplement the traditional interview format. This thesis aimed at discovering which additional interview methods enabled students with MGLD to express their views and to have their voices heard.

The findings in this study focus on four main themes, namely: identity and sense of self, friendship, curriculum and pedagogy and transition to second level. A number of complexities, tensions and contradictions arose in this study. Among the complexities was the fact that, in these schools, varying perspectives emerged as to the suitability of mainstream provision for students with MGLD. The students held a contradictory view to the adults and they spoke of the pleasure that they derived from being among students of their own age in mainstream settings.

The curricular demand in schools was also viewed as an obstacle inhibiting the inclusion of students with MGLD in mainstream settings. The findings in this study suggest that schools had difficulties when it came to including students with MGLD in the general curriculum. A 'voice' from students emerged in which they called for more assistance and for greater access to a broader curriculum. Parents' views contrasted with those of teachers in relation to what schools could do on behalf of students with MGLD.

Current inclusive policies in Irish schools necessitate closer investigation in terms of students with MGLD. The findings from this study suggest that structures and practices are common in schools that inhibit the social and educational opportunities for this group of students. This study supports a need for the continuation of special classes in schools in respect of these students. This presents a challenge for mainstream schools in an era of inclusion.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Students with an assessed moderate general learning disability (MGLD) are the focus of this study and specifically their perceptions of schooling. It was perceived in the past that students with MGLD could never be enrolled in the local school and certainly not in the mainstream class. However, practice did not proceed accordingly. These students are now in regular mainstream schools throughout Ireland. There is an absence of research that looks directly at the inclusion of students with MGLD in mainstream schools in Ireland. The purpose of this study was to make a contribution at rectifying this omission by undertaking research that would look at the experiences of students with MGLD in mainstream schools. The primary intention was to enable the 'voice' of students to be heard in terms of their social and educational experiences of mainstream schools. Their insider knowledge was afforded recognition and ways that encouraged them to express their views were utilised.

This chapter begins with a discussion on inclusion and consideration is given to practices that lead to schools becoming more inclusive. My reasons for undertaking this study are explained and my own stance concerning inclusion is provided. The two research questions that guide this study are outlined. As a way of contextualising the study key policies and legislative Acts that promote inclusion are discussed. A rationale for the importance of privileging student's views is provided. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of what is contained in subsequent chapters.

A lot has been written about what is meant by inclusion and what practices constitute a truly inclusive school. The following definition provides an explanation of the term.

> Inclusion involves change. It is an unending process of increasing learning and participation for all students. It is an ideal to which schools can aspire but which is never fully reached. But inclusion happens as soon as the process of increasing participation is started. An inclusive school is one that is on the move (Booth and Ainscow, 2002, p. 3).

The scope of the ordinary school has been extended to cater for the needs of a more diverse population. In an inclusive school all students are recognised, valued and accepted. Students with disabilities learn alongside their able bodied peers and share in all the same daily routines and experiences (Norwich, 2008). In the inclusive school all students regardless of ability or disability participate in the culture, curricula and community (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan and Shaw, 2000). Additional support may be provided if it encourages greater participation and learning. The ideology associated with inclusion believes that these students should "…take a full and active part in the life of the mainstream school, they should be valued members of the school community and be seen to be integral members of it" (Farrell, 2000, p. 154). There are no barriers in place that will prevent them from participation. Their views are listened to.

Inclusion is viewed as a continuous process. Schools must alter practices, adapt teaching and accommodate the learning needs of all students and not just those with a disability. Inclusion is a relatively recent ideal for schools to espouse and because of its newness it can be described as an evolving concept (Kearney and Kane, 2006).

It is also expected that students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) will be exposed to a broad and balanced curriculum (NCCA, 1999). They may require specific teaching methods but for Carpenter and Ashdown, (1996) they are entitled to a curriculum that has four key tenets: breadth, balance, relevance and differentiation. Allowances must also be made for individual needs, as they are not a homogenous group.

This thesis focuses on the social and educational experiences of students with MGLD in mainstream schools. The World Health Organisation describes persons as having MGLD if they are assessed as functioning within the IQ range of 35 – 50 (Ireland, 1993, p.124). Each student within this category has unique learning needs and they all possess a "diversity of difficulties" when it comes to learning (Lewis and Norwich, 2005). Traditionally these students were enrolled in special classes or in special schools. The Special Education Review Committee viewed special schools or special classes in mainstream schools as the most favourable locations for them (Ireland, 1993, p. 178). The committee recommended that only in exceptional circumstances would they be enrolled in an ordinary class.

I taught for seven years in a special school that catered for students with MGLD. These students were educated in a special school as distinct from a mainstream school. I am a firm believer that the local school should be the first option for young people with SEN. They should have the opportunity to attend the local mainstream school. This study aims at allowing students with MGLD to provide their own perspectives on inclusion. In recent years the Department of Education and Science

(DES) have increased supports available in mainstream schools. These should facilitate greater inclusion for students with MGLD.

Problem Statement

This study aims to discover the perceptions of students with MGLD concerning their social and educational experiences in mainstream schools. There is a lack of research in Ireland in this area. Notable exceptions are studies conducted by Kenny, McNeala and Walshe (2005), Ring and Travers (2005) and Mullen White (2006). The first study sought the views of parents only. The later two studies are single case studies. It is intended that this doctoral thesis should supplement the work carried out in the three studies mentioned. It should also deepen our understanding regarding the experiences of these students as they attend their local schools. This is a 'voice' that is often excluded from research. One reason for this, according to Swain and French (2000) is that research has historically concerned itself with the psychological and medical needs of individuals and paid little attention to the disabling aspects of the environment. The lived reality of daily experience for those who live with disabilities is only recently featuring in reports. Another reason cited for excluding this group of students from research is that traditional research tools are inappropriate for gathering information from them (Morris, 2003).

Research Question and Rationale for Choice

I have selected two broad questions to guide the focus of this study as follows:

- What are the perceptions of students with Moderate General Learning Disabilities (MGLD) of their experiences in mainstream schools?

- What research methods allow students with MGLD to express their views?

This thesis will therefore focus on the social and educational experiences of students with MGLD in mainstream schools. The students within this category have a commonality in difficulties when it comes to learning. Most students have difficulties in terms of communication and working memory. These difficulties have to be considered if one wants to hear the true 'voice' of these students. Choosing appropriate methods that help to elicit the views of students with MGLD is also an area that will receive specific consideration in this thesis. McConkey (1998) holds the view that by helping young people with GLD to express their views at an early stage, they are receiving vital social skills training. He maintains that by nurturing these skills, students with GLD are encouraged to be assertive, to negotiate and to enter into a variety of friendships.

Children and young people's right to a 'voice' has been enshrined in legislation and international treaties and this is an area that will receive more attention in chapter two of this thesis. It is important to engage young people in opportunities that allow them to reflect on their experiences. Recommendations about what to change and how to change it can come from young people and these views can be used to inform policy, practice and planning. Thomas, Walker and Webb, (1998) argue that part of the inclusive ideal is that young people should be enabled to have a say in the way that their schooling proceeds. Thomas et al (1998, p. 65) propose, "if one wants to know what children want the simple solution is surely to ask them". This would seem self-evident. However, structures that permit this 'voice' to be

heard are frequently not in place in schools. Many young people with GLD are treated with a mixture of benevolence and concern. It is usually adults who speak on their behalf. Their 'voice' is therefore rarely expressed or acknowledged (Shevlin and Rose, 2003). This study aims at enabling a group of six students with MGLD to provide their perspectives on mainstream schooling. Cruddas (2001) demonstrates how at times creative ways are required so that young people are enabled to find their 'voice'. This is an area that will be considered in chapter two, as it is a central aspect of this study. The following section describes a number of characteristics associated with MGLD.

MGLD Defined

In Ireland a psychological assessment is necessary for an individual to be categorised as having moderate general Learning disability. People are assessed as having MGLD if their tested IQ is within the range of 35 to 50. Instruments that assess intelligence and adaptive behaviour are used in the diagnosis. In terms of adaptive behaviour the child's social skills and activities of daily living such as eating, toileting, washing, dressing and mobility are taken into consideration. However, they are far from being a homogenous group and this will have implications when it comes to involving them in consultation and research.. Cognisance needs to take account of the fact that many have sensory, communication and motor impairments (Porter, 2005; Male, 1996). Other researchers summarises some characteristics of MGLD as follows in terms of communication:

- They depend on others to interpret what they say in order for them to be understood.

- Their level of comprehension is low.

- They tend to acquiesce to the suggestions of others.

- They are reluctant to contradict an interpretation given to their views and say 'no, that's not what I meant' (Grove, Bunning and Porter, 1999).

In the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities, Overview (2007, p. 17) the challenges that such students may face when it comes to learning in schools are outlined. These include:

- Limited concentration

- Passivity

- Delayed oral language development

- Difficulty in adapting to their environment

- Limited ability to generalise

- Difficulties in problem solving

Arising from these difficulties offering variety of curriculum and learning experiences pose a range of challenges for schools. The contextual background to this study is considered in the following section.

The Irish Context

The numbers of students with MGLD who avail of special school provision continues to dwindle, a trend not envisaged by the committee who reviewed special education (Ireland, 1993). Many students with this form of disability are now remaining in their local school. Personal correspondence from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) states that there are now 627 students with MGLD enrolled in mainstream schools in Ireland. The majority – 428 – attend primary

school and 199 attend post-primary schools. (M. Byrne, personal communication, November 15th 2008). According to figures collected (2006) there were 1,013 students with MGLD in designated special schools (Ware, Day and McPhilips, 2007).

Various forms of legislation promoting the concept of inclusion have been introduced in Ireland in recent years. The Education Act (1998) called on schools to provide maximum access to schools for all students including those with disabilities. This Act was followed by the enactment of the Equal Status Act (2000) and the Equality Act (2004) both of which outlawed discrimination on the grounds of disability. Provision was strengthened by the contents of The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) in which government policy regarding inclusion was outlined. School provision was to be inclusive and informed by rights and equality principles:

> To provide that the education…shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs, to provide that people with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs (EPSEN, 2004).

Children with special educational needs (SEN) have a legal entitlement to an appropriate education, as do all other children in this country. The terms of this Act apply equally to primary and post-primary schools.

Running in tandem with the enactment of legislation, the Department of Education and Science (DES) provide increased supports for schools in the form of additional personnel and equipment. There are two significant milestones that serve as an illustration of this new commitment. In November (1998) the Minister for

Education at the time introduced 'automatic entitlement' of additional resources to schools in respect of pupils on their rolls with disabilities. This resulted in a dramatic increase in the numbers of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and Resource Teachers working in schools. This announcement brought about fundamental systemic change in schools on behalf of students with SEN.

The DES subsequently introduced a revised allocation system for primary schools in 2005. This is now known as the 'general allocation scheme' and it provides additional teaching supports for those students who have high and low incidence disabilities. An individualised allocation of resource-teacher hours is made in respect of students with low incidence disabilities and this includes students with MGLD. Students with high incidence disabilities are entitled to receive additional learning support. Circular SP ED 02/05, sets out in detail how this scheme works and it also encourages a flexibility among resource teachers and learning support teachers as to how they can best meet the educational needs of those students who have special educational needs. This scheme is not available to post-primary schools.

Opportunities for professional development of teachers in relation to special education have increased in Ireland in the past decade. The Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education and Science funds the provision of a number of courses for teachers through seven third level colleges. Places on these courses are confined to teachers who are designated special education or resource teachers. Mainstream teachers are ineligible for acceptance. The Special Education Support Service (SESS) was established (2003) as a nationwide service for schools and one of its roles is to provide continuing professional development programmes for

teachers and schools that incorporate a menu of possibilities. The introduction of on-line courses in special education have given mainstream teachers an opportunity to up-skill themselves in meeting the needs of a more diverse body of learners. There is a minimum amount of time given to the learning needs of students with MGLD on the majority of courses. There is a scarcity of opportunities for SNAs to undertake courses in special education.

The DES established two other agencies that support the needs of students with SEN along with their teachers and schools. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) was constituted (1999) and the numbers of psychologists have increased since then. This service provides assessment services for students with SEN. They advise teachers on the approaches to learning that best suit the needs of individual students and this would include students who have been assessed as having MGLD.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was established (1998). Since its inception the Council has provided advice on curriculum and assessment for students with GLD. In (2002) the NCCA developed and published Draft Guidelines for Teachers of Students with GLD. A consultation process followed, where the partners in education were asked to provide comments on these guidelines. This feedback informed the final publication of curriculum guidelines for students with MGLD (2007). During this consultation process a view emerged that there existed a group of students in schools, especially at second level, who despite having the support of teachers and where sophisticated approaches to differentiation were practiced continued to experience extreme difficulties in having access to the

mainstream curriculum (NCCA, 2009). The students in question included those with MGLD and it was felt that they would find it impossible to attain the learning outcomes associated with Junior Certificate subjects and examinations (NCCA, 2009). After listening to the views from teachers and parents the NCCA concluded that there exists a need "for a different, more concerted approach to curriculum, assessment and certification to meet the learning needs of this group of students" (NCCA, 2009, p. 7). Work is ongoing by the NCCA in the development of a curriculum framework that would offer schools and teachers a structure within which they can review and develop learning programmes relevant to the needs of students with MGLD and consistent with the general aims of this stage of education. The proposed framework promotes personalised planning that gives consideration to the strengths and personal interests of the individual student but also contributing to preparation for life after school.

Despite the enactment of legislation and an increase in support structures in schools, research indicates that access to schools for young people with GLD is fraught with difficulties (Flatman Watson 2004a). In the Flatman Watson study 252 primary schools in Dublin and Kildare were surveyed. It emerged that thirty four per-cent of the schools reported that they had either refused or deferred access for students with GLD. Reasons given for refusal included: more assessment required on the children, additional resources needed, lack of expertise among teaching staff and a belief that the child's care and behavioural needs could not be catered for sufficiently within the school. Another Irish study reported that schools seem to have greater difficulties accepting young people with GLD and emotional difficulties in

comparison to their willingness to accept those with physical disabilities (Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley, 2008).

Students with MGLD are likely to succeed when schools replace old practices with fundamental changes in key areas (Ferguson, 2008). These 'shifts' as Ferguson terms them involve:

- A move away from traditional didactic teaching formats.
- Learning becomes 'personalised' for each and every student so that 'differentiation' is common practice.
- Communities of learners exist in schools that support and share in each other's learning.
- The curriculum is accessible to a wide diversity of students so that what is taught is interesting, engaging and meaningful.
- Teachers incorporate project work, integrating a number of subjects to study various themes.

A number of these practices are likely to be incorporated in primary schools. However, there are constraints and rigidities operating at second level that hinder the introduction of fundamental change for learners (Wedell, 2005). Notable in this regard are rigid timetabling, examination pressure and curriculum. The attitudes of teachers and their sense of competence in teaching students with disabilities are also significant in promoting the inclusion of a diverse population in mainstream schools (Ellins and Porter, 2005). McConkey (1998) believes that the academic and examination focus of schools continues to disadvantage and stigmatise young people

with GLD. He calls on schools to become more individual-centred in order to support all students.

There is now a need to document the nature of provisions that exists for students with MGLD who are enrolled in mainstream schools. In any such enquiry it is essential that students themselves be afforded the opportunity to express their views. The aim of this study is to provide an opportunity for students to articulate their social and educational experiences of mainstream schooling. It will be interesting to hear from students and significant people in their lives whether or not the enactment of legislation and the provision of additional resources have allowed schools to be more accommodating of students with MGLD. The data contained in the six case studies in this thesis will illuminate these issues.

Theoretical Perspectives

This is a qualitative study employing interview and observations as the primary data collection techniques. A compendium of methods is incorporated in the data collection process to enable students with limited powers of communication to express their views.

Outline of Research Study

This section provides an overview of the chapters contained in this thesis. Chapter One set out the policy context and background for this study. In particular it outlined the changes in policy that lead to the enrolment of students with MGLD in mainstream schools. The two research questions that underpin this study were also

presented. The rationale behind listening to the 'voice' of young people themselves was highlighted.

Chapter Two presents the Literature Review for this study. It examines the literature on the nature of 'student voice' and what measures schools can put in place in order for student voices to be heard. The evidence for a number of innovative practices, adopted by schools in the promotion of 'voice' among vulnerable groups of students are highlighted. Consideration is given to the possibilities that learning situations can be transformed for students if they feel that they have a say in matters that concern them. There are specific methodological considerations that have to be adhered to when consulting with young people and in particular with those who have MGLD and these are discussed. The Literature on aspects of school experience, which are relevant to the focus of this enquiry, is also discussed.

Chapter Three presents the research design and methodology used in the present study. Difficulties in sourcing participants are discussed. The Chapter deals with issues of validity and reliability. Ethical considerations are discussed and the procedures adopted for the analysis of data are outlined.

Chapter Four presents the findings for the central themes that emerged in this study and the discussion of those findings. These are considered from the students' point of view and to a lesser extent from significant other people who share in the lives of the six students. The body of evidence that emerges in this chapter confirms the fact that young people with MGLD have much to say about their experiences in school. Their views at times contradict those of adults.

In Chapter Five the conclusions are outlined, the limitations of the study are discussed and areas for future research are highlighted. A review of the effectiveness of the research methods used in this study is presented.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There are five main sections in this chapter. The first section returns to the notion of inclusion and adds an international dimension as to what brought about this concept. Literature that focuses on the inclusion of students with significant learning disabilities is considered. The second section has three aims. First it seeks to explain the notion of student 'voice'. Second it hopes to explain how schools can encourage this 'voice' to be heard. Thirdly it considers what schools gain by listening to this 'voice'. In the third section, methodological issues are considered when young people in general are involved in consultation. The next section focuses on a number of issues that have to be taken into consideration when students with MGLD are involved in any form of consultation or research. The final section in this chapter looks at the literature that is relevant to the themes that are highlighted in this study: identity, friendship, curriculum\pedagogy and transition to post-primary school. My intention is therefore to use this Literature Review as a means of explaining why young people should be consulted and demonstrate how this can occur in a meaningful way.

Development of Inclusive Education Policy

In recent years the adoption of international and inclusive educational policies have altered the educational landscape for all pupils with special educational needs and students with MGLD are included in this regard. In Chapter One an outline was given of the changes that promoted this to happen in an Irish context. The following

section provides a background to developments internationally that lead to the promotion of inclusion for all students in mainstream schools.

International Developments

The Warnock Report (1978) spearheaded a need for change and it promoted the need to allow all young people with SEN the same rights as all others. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) makes an explicit statement that the regular school is the most appropriate setting for young people with disabilities to learn. The Special Needs and Disability Act (DfEE) (2001) in the United Kingdom was enacted to promote inclusive education for all. Similarly, in the United States the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2004) offered parents of young people with disabilities the right to have their son or daughter educated in the least restrictive environment. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) advocates the rights of persons with disabilities to an education on the basis of equal opportunity, whereby "effective individualised support measures are provided in environments that maximise academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion" (Article 24).

Within the Salamanca Statement and the Framework for Action tensions surface regarding the application of inclusive education for all young people and a view emerges that inclusion may not be effective for all (Lindsay, 2003). A similar view was expressed by Warnock (2007) in which she raised concerns regarding the commitment to include all students in mainstream settings regardless of the nature of their needs.

Fox, Farrell and Davis (2004) highlight two interconnected themes that seem to be central to the effective inclusion of students with GLD including those with low incidence disabilities. The first of these relates to the views and experiences of mainstream class teachers. In a review of the literature on teacher's attitude to inclusion Avramidis and Norwich (2002) conclude that while attitudes were generally favourable, the nature and severity of the pupil's disability strongly influenced teachers' disposition towards inclusion. Wishart (2006) makes reference to an Australian survey in which a mere twenty per-cent of those surveyed felt that the regular classroom was the best educational setting for students with Down Syndrome. Wishart believes that many teachers share these views. Irish studies offer similar concerns. Scanlon and Mc Galloway (2006) discovered that mainstream primary teachers were mainly positive towards pupils with SEN, however, issues such as class size, inadequate allocation of resource hours and a lack of training and support were the main causes of concern. Ring and Travers (2005) draw attention to teachers concerns on their ability to offer a common curriculum to a student with MGLD. For inclusion to succeed, issues identified by teachers must be given due consideration.

The second theme by Fox, Farrell and Davis concerns the way in which support is provided to pupils with disabilities in the classroom. Lorenz (1999) shares this view and draws attention to the fact that additional classroom support is often being used inappropriately and ineffectively. Ofsted (2006) surveyed provision in seventy-four different types of schools and found that pupils with low incidence disabilities in mainstream schools, where support from SNAs was the main type of provision

were less likely to make good academic progress. Ofsted concluded that access to specialist teaching from experienced and qualified specialists enhanced the learning outcomes for those students with low incidence disabilities.

Porter (2005) highlights a number of strategies that promote learning for students with MGLD. These include delayed prompting, use of visual cues, enhancing cues, embedded learning, generalisation of learned skills and self-management skills. Porter argues that the necessity for adapted materials and structured support alters the nature and context of learning. These distinctive teaching strategies and adapted materials can serve to separate students with MGLD from their peers in the mainstream class. This view suggests that the needs of those with MGLD are so great that inclusion within mainstream is impossible. Evidence by Ofsted (2006) contradicts this belief and report that mainstream schools with additional resourced provision to be highly effective at meeting the learning needs of students with low incidence disabilities.

Students with MGLD face considerable obstacles when it comes to learning in mainstream classes. For inclusion to be successful it is important to provide a voice for all those involved, in particular the students themselves. Through researching the perspectives of young people the problems associated with the inclusive process are highlighted. The importance of listening to these 'voices' is considered in the following section.

Children's Views

In the past, childhood and the lives of children were solely considered through the views and understandings of adult caretakers (Christensen and James, 2000). In democratic societies and possibly more so in western cultures, children are now viewed as social beings, capable of reflection on lived experiences and able to make sense of these. There is a recognition in this, the twenty-first century, that children are social actors in their own right rather than parts of an 'other' such as a family or a school (Kellett, 2004). Interest has emerged in recent decades on a need to access children's views and perspectives on all matters of concern to them. This interest possibly emerged after countries began to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Articles twelve and thirteen in this landmark piece of legislation ensure that children are entitled to be involved and consulted on all decisions that affect their lives. Many countries have adopted policies and legislation that aspire to create opportunities where children can be included in consultation processes. In Ireland, notable in this regard are the National Children's Strategy (2000) and the establishment of an Ombudsman for Children (2004).

In two Irish studies there is evidence to show that schools in Ireland emerge as places where children are not afforded opportunities in which they can articulate their views. Both studies indicate that children feel a sense of powerlessness in schools and that they hold a subordinate status (Devine, 2002, 2003; Zappone, 2007). Devine, concludes that children are afforded limited rights of consultation in schools where hierarchical structures remain and opportunities that acknowledge children's position as actual citizens are rare (Devine, 2002). In Zappone's view

there is a need for systemic change in the Irish educational system so that it can become a living system (Zappone, 2007). It is widely acknowledged that schools need to adopt new structures where the voices of all young people are taken seriously (Arnot and Reay, 2007). It is appropriate at this point to consider 'pupil's voice' and what this concept entails as its importance is espoused in this thesis. Consideration will relate specifically to approaches in schools that promote 'pupil's voice' as a means of transforming traditional school cultures.

Pupil's Voice

Noyes, (2005) indicates that there are two specific ways in which schools allow pupils to have a say: pupils as researchers and consulting with them. Both procedures imply that schools are prepared to work with pupils so that they are given opportunities to voice their concerns, feelings and thoughts. A number of innovative structures can be established in schools that allow pupils to have a say. These include: prefects, buddying, mentoring, coaching, school councils, school ambassadors, lead learners, pupils as co researchers or lead researchers (Fielding, 2006). The ultimate aim to be achieved from listening to these voices is that the contexts of learning will be improved (Noyes, 2005). There are extensive written reports that provide teachers with suggestions as to how they can promote pupil voice in schools. The thrust behind this endeavour is a hope that schools may become more democratic in the way that they treat their pupils (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004). The fore mentioned researchers claim that the pupil's voice movement represents a new era in which "the school becomes a community of participants engaged in the common endeavour of learning (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004, p. 135). Other writers who espouse the importance of pupil voice claim that it is a sure way

of altering pupil disengagement and raising the low self-esteem of learners (MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck and Myers, 2003).

Are There Certain Types of Schools that Promote Pupil Voice?

Some schools are prepared to consult with pupils as to how teaching and learning could be improved. These schools are prepared to see young people differently (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006). Rudduck and Fielding proceed to state that there are three essential requirements needed for authentic consultation to occur. These are:

- Have the pupils been involved in determining the focus of consultation?
- Are the interests in what students have to say, real or contrived?
- Is there active discussion on student suggestions and active follow up?
  (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006)

Schools must have a genuine interest in listening to what students have to say. They must also be prepared to take seriously the comments of students. Currently this form of consultation is not mandatory for schools to incorporate and this results in the continuation of 'silent voices' remaining in existence. Who are these students and how can they be helped to find their 'voice'?

Arnott and Reay, (2007, p. 321) contend that there are marginalised children in every school who are unable to speak "the appropriate form of classroom talk" concerning their priorities and concerns and these remain the "unheard voices" in schools. Students with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to fall within this grouping. They are unable to talk about pedagogy

since they have not got the appropriate vocabulary. The more expressive students dominate consultations. Schools need to create safe opportunities for the silent voices to speak about difficulties in learning that they may experience. These are the students "who find learning in school uncongenial" and their voices need to be heard if we are to transform schools (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006, p. 228).

I will return to the notion of 'silent voices' at a later stage when I will concentrate on ways of involving students who have a MGLD in research. However, I will conclude this section by looking at two school structures in which the 'voice' of students can be promoted or silenced.

High Performance or Learning Centred Schools

Fielding, (2006) makes a distinction between the high performance learning organisation and a person centred learning community when describing schools. He maintains that the pupil's voice is more likely to be heard in the latter. In the high performance school, learning outcomes and high grades in examinations are all-important. The ultimate concern is to "maximise students' scores and students themselves are often co-opted into this endeavour" (Angus, 2006, p. 377). Students are given a voice in this school but the intended purpose is to increase "measurable outcomes... and is only legitimate insofar as it enhances organisational ends" (Fielding, 2006, p. 305). In the person centred school there is a 'radical collegiality' in existence with "students and teachers working and learning together in partnership rather than one party using the other for often covert ends" (Fielding, 2006, p. 308). There are formal and informal opportunities where young people can express their views and power relations are not as demarcated as in the high performance school.

The working practices in operation mirror those that are evident in a true democracy. The important features that are evident in person centred schools are a respect for reciprocity and an acceptance that students might also teach teachers (Fielding, 2006). In this context pupil 'voice' has a radical function. It leads both teachers and fellow students in the creation of a better learning situation.

If schools are to become more democratic institutions all students need to be able to express a view on matters that are of concern. By listening to pupils we become aware of their reality. This can often remain over shadowed in large schools. Lloyd, Smith and Tar, (2002, p.61) explain this situation as follows:

> The reality experienced by children and young people in educational settings cannot be fully comprehended by inference and assumption. The meanings that they attach to their experiences are not necessarily the meanings that their teachers or parents would ascribe, the sub-cultures that children inhabit in classrooms and schools are not always visible or accessible to adults.

Tangen (2008) refers to 'insider epistemology' as manifested through the mental states and processes like perceptions, feelings, thoughts and intentions. He sees this as being privileged knowledge but that outsiders can access it. If we are interested in learning about the lived experience of young people it is therefore crucial that we involve them in consultation and in research projects on issues that have relevance in their lives. It could be argued that everyone has passed through this stage of childhood and are therefore aware of the struggles and tensions that are associated with this stage in development. Adults "simply cannot become children again

because they cannot discard the adult baggage that they have acquired in the interim and will always operate through adult filters, even if these are subconscious filters (Kellett, 2005, p5). If we are serious in finding out what it is like to be a child, it is young people themselves who have this knowledge (Mayall, 2004). The challenge for schools is to find opportunities where pupils' voices can be encouraged. Lundy (2007, p.933) proposes a model for schools to incorporate if they are willing to listen to pupils' voices and to make consultation a reality. It has four components as follows:

- Space   - Young people are given an opportunity to express a view.
- Voice   - They are facilitated to express their views.
- Audience   - Their views are listened to.
- Influence - Their views are acted upon, as appropriate.

Each stage is interconnected but if implemented in schools, pupils' voices would be heard as entitled by law under Article twelve of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). This represents a radical view of schools but one where "dialogic schools" are formed, where voices are heard (Fielding, 2006, p.308).

What have Schools to gain by listening to pupils' voices?

The work carried out by Rose, Fletcher and Goodwin (1999) with students who have MGLD is worth considering in this regard. They found that involvement in assessment and planning raises their self-esteem and pupils' self-awareness and understanding. Rose, Fletcher and Goodwin observed at weekly meetings in a special school for students with MGLD. The students were given a weekly meeting in which they could reflect on their work during the week and speak on their

successes and difficulties. Rose (2003) writes on the effectiveness of this form of consultation and believes that it helps teachers to become more aware of the learning needs of students. Rose explains how teachers adjust their teaching approaches to meet student needs following consultation in certain circumstances. It is essential that schools create opportunities where students with MGLD and all other students are "provided with opportunities to promote greater autonomy" (Rose, 2003, p. 133). Rose goes on to state that: "An important indicator of maturity is the ability of the individual to take some responsibility for their own actions and to make decisions. This is a process that must start early, for all pupils including those with severe learning difficulties" (Rose, 2003, p. 133).

Cruddas (2001) provides a compelling account of a highly innovative project where groups of marginalised young women with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) were helped to find their 'voice' and then use this to speak on issues of concern. Eight second level schools in London participated in this funded project. A number of teachers were seconded and engaged in developmental work with students. The teachers facilitated developmental group work involving sensory exercises and games. This group of marginalised young women were helped to reflect on the barriers to learning and participation in schools and investigate what they need to do in order to remove these barriers. Cruddas reports positively regarding the effectiveness of the project in enabling students to find their 'voice'. The project assisted young women with EBD to speak of their sense of powerlessness in schools. The project also allowed a group of potentially 'silent' students to find their 'voice' and alert schools regarding the steps needed to remove barriers to learning. This study by Cruddas is highly relevant to this study. It testifies

that the most marginalised groups in our schools have a lot to say regarding the learning situation that they experience on a daily basis.

In another study two researchers help students in a large comprehensive school to 'voice' their experiences (Gunter and Thomas, 2007). In this study ten students were selected from the student body to speak on their experiences. The circulation of a questionnaire followed this to the entire body of students. It emerged that there was a high incidence of low-level bullying in the school. Students felt that teachers did not perceive this as a problem. A number of students used photographs as a means of investigating this issue further. The photos encouraged students to recall instances of low-level bullying that they witnessed or experienced. There were forty-eight students with mild GLD in attendance in this school.

The studies cited in this section suggest that consultation using different formats can encourage students and often those at risk of marginalisation to have a 'voice' in schools. The three studies allowed this to happen over time. Procedures were put in place where the voiceless were helped to develop the confidence and ability to speak and not to rely on others to do this for them.

The importance of student 'voice' has now been explained and at this point I would like to consider a number of ways that schools can ensure that the true voices of students are listened to. In order to do this there needs to be occasions when individual consultation takes place but there should also be opportunities made available to students when they act as co-researchers or lead researchers. There are a number of recommendations that need to be observed when consulting with all

pupils and these are outlined in the following sections of the literature review. I will then return to the notion of 'silent voices' and outline procedures recommended for use when consulting one group in this respect, namely young people with MGLD.

Consulting With Children: Methodological Issues

Previously in this chapter reference is given to the notion that children are now viewed as social actors who interact with and are influenced by people and events that they encounter. If we want to discover some of their unique personal and subjective experiences we are often faced with a series of challenges. They may have a lot to say but finding an appropriate method to ensure that their 'voice' is heard can present us with a challenge. Consulting with children or involving them in research projects can involve the use of a number of different methods. Researchers have asked children their opinions on preferred methods but the consensus among young people is that different methods suit different people and purposes and that, ideally, a choice of methods should be offered (Hill, 2006; Lightfoot and Sloper, 2003). In these studies children expressed the view that temperament and personality also determine the method used. Shy children may prefer a questionnaire for example to an interview. They also realise that the competence of participants must be a consideration. Children are aware that reading and writing can be problematic for some and so questionnaires and diaries should be avoided. There follows a brief discussion on certain methods that are found to be appropriate when hearing the 'voice' of young people:

Interviews

Caution must be exercised when using interviews as a means of eliciting the views of children. Reliable testimonies are given if a number of key points are considered when planning and asking questions. Specific measures must be incorporated to ensure that children understand the research questions asked. Clarity of questions influences the quality of the data (Scott, 2004). There is a need for questions to be unambiguous. The child's interpretation of a question can be largely at odds from that which the interviewer intended. It is also acceptable and recommended to allow 'don't know' answers (Scott, 2004). Children are likely to construct an answer if they haven't the knowledge rather than say 'don't know' if this could be viewed as non-cooperation or boldness. Open-ended questions are proven to elicit more reliable and detailed information from children (Wright and Powell, 2007). They arrived at this conclusion after considering the most appropriate methods when interviewing children regarding allegations of abuse. They make the following claim in support of open ended questions: "The ability of investigative interviewers to maintain the use of non-leading open-ended questions and to minimise the use of specific questions, is critical to the elicitation of a reliable account from a child" (Wright and Powell, 2007, p. 22).

Children's responses are also likely to be influenced by the same biases that impact on adult responses namely acquiescence bias, social desirability and context effects (Scott, 2004). However, this same researcher stresses that children are less susceptible to 'desirability bias' than are adults. It is crucial to find ways that will ensure the avoidance of "response contamination' when interviewing children in their home or in school (Scott, 2004). The work of Lewis (2002) is worthy of

consideration in this regard as her conclusions are based on her experience of interviewing children over two decades. Many of those interviewed by her had GLD. Symbols and pictures may be of use but they can restrict discussion (Lewis and Lindsay, 2002). Lewis (2003) recommends the use of statements in an effort to elicit responses rather than relying on question and answer format. This is another method of reducing the power imbalance. It is particularly beneficial when interviewing children in small groups as the statement acts as a prompt and may encourage other children to comment further on the statement. Multiple questions disguised as one question are a notorious trap at interviews" (Lewis, 2003). These should be avoided. Another strategy recommended is to encourage children to seek clarification when they are unsure of a question (Lewis, 2003).

Particular questioning types are also more likely to elicit more of a response. Ceci and Bruck (1993) discovered that children with GLD aged between eight and eleven cope better with general open questions rather than leading ones. They found that specific questions asked to both non-disabled children and those with a disability tend to yield fabricated responses. They go further in illustrating that the more one questions a young person on a particular topic the more they are likely to provide inaccurate information.

There are times when a child prefers a personal interview if the intention is to discuss private and sensitive issues. Then there are other times when a group or focus interview may be more appropriate. Mayall (2000) concludes that younger children are more forthcoming when a friend or friends can accompany them when they are sharing interviews. When young people's views were sought in a Scottish

study concerning the value of focus group interviews, there was an agreement that they work better if participants know each other, as it is easier to talk when you are surrounded with friends (Hill, 2006).

Question Type

There are additional needs to be addressed when setting questions for students with MGLD. Similar to the type of questions recommended for use with non-disabled children, when interviewing young people with GLD open questions are preferred as they allow the interviewer to establish a rapport with the interviewee and to probe further or to clarify issues (Simpson and Tuson, 1995; Lewis, 2004). Open-ended questioning also helps to reduce the power imbalance. The interviewees have general control and can decide themselves what they want to reveal (Swain, Heyman and Gillman 1998). Robson (2006) warns that open-ended questions may result in the interviewer losing control of the process and he further warns that this form of questioning can lead to copious amounts of data that may be difficult to code and interpret.

Similar to seeking the views of all children regardless of ability, it is important to avoid leading and forced choice questions when interviewing students with GLD. This form of questioning could be viewed as a possibility for interviewing those students who have limited powers of communication. After all they are only required to offer a short answer such as 'yes' or 'no'. This form of questioning has been shown to produce unreliable data (Agnew and Powell, 2004; Claussen, 2003; Waterman, Blades and Spencer, 2001). In the latter study, 128 children aged five to nine and twenty-three adults participated. They were read two stories both illustrated

with coloured pictures and then interviewed about the characters and events. Half of the questions posed were answerable based on what was contained in the stories. The remaining questions were unanswerable because the stories lacked appropriate information in this regard. This meant that the interviewees had to speculate or guess in order to answer a question. Respondents were more likely to provide an answer to an 'unanswerable' question when they were given a 'yes\no' choice. The majority of children and adults correctly indicated that they did not know the answer when asked unanswerable 'wh'-questions. This was not evident with the 'wh' unanswerable questions. The majority of children and over one fifth of adults provided a 'yes\no' response to the closed unanswerable questions. If it is necessary to ask a closed question, it should be followed with an open ended question that would verify that the student understood what they were being asked in the original question. Henry and Gudjonsson (2003) advise researchers who use open ended questions with people with GLD to incorporate other confirmatory data to validate the response of participants.

Agnew and Powell (2004) recommend a phased questioning approach when it comes to conducting interviews with students who have GLD. They advocate the elicitation of a free narrative account before any questions are directed at the interviewee. However asking for a free narrative can be a stressful situation for students with word-finding difficulties (Dockrell, Messer, George and Wilson, 1998). Finlay and Lyons (2002) stress that questions should be short and simply phrased.

Ethnography

Ethnography is often used as a means of discovering the daily lives of children (Emond, 2006, Christensen, 2004). Emond lived in a group home in Scotland to discover what life was like for residents. She felt that this provided a richer account of their experience rather than just obtaining a 'snapshot' of what life was like if she relied on interviews solely. Here the researcher used periods of observation along with interviews with significant people. The children in this scenario become the instructors and researchers become the pupils. Emond gave children the option of selecting their own preferred forms of communicating with her. Some wanted to rely on talk alone whereas others wanted to incorporate drawings, role-plays and games when they were being interviewed. Similarly, Christensen spent a year with children in Copenhagen to learn about their health and self care habits (Christensen, 2004).

Communication and Methodological Implications

When interviewing students with MGLD, the researcher must be aware that there cannot be a sole reliance on spoken language to achieve a frank and full response regarding their daily experience. Interviewers need to establish the most appropriate form of communication to be used with the interviewee. "Poor or limited communication skills lead to ambiguity in the interpretation of the response and difficulty with clarifying the meaning conveyed. It is not enough to use simple language and offer different modes of communication" (Lewis and Porter, 2004, p. 195). Innovative methods such as talking mats, cue cards, narratives and photos are suggested alternative means that may be incorporated in interviews and may encourage greater sharing of views on the part of the interviewee (Lewis and Porter, 2004). A number of these alternatives were incorporated while collecting data in this

study. However a word of caution needs to be given regarding their use. They may serve to "constrain or pre-determine the responses" (Lewis and Porter, 2004). Another means for eliciting views as recommended by Lewis and Porter (2004) is the use of a puppet in the form of a 'ventriloquist interviewer'. The young people may find it easier to answer the questions posed by the soft toy rather than an adult. A number of innovative methods are considered now that other researchers have used when asking the views of people with MGLD. In order to accommodate individual communication needs one or more of the following have proved effective in this regard.

Talking Mats

This research method allows students to place graphic representations on a mat to express their likes and dislikes or discussion on a particular topic. Brewster (2004) believes that talking mats can be used effectively as a means of facilitating a conversation with people who have GLD. Illustrations are more easily processed than words. Students can consider the picture for as long as they like. Speech evaporates instantly but the picture can help with the memory of what has just been said (Murphy, Tester, Hubbard, Downs and McDonald, 2005). The graphic pictures can assist in the understanding and memory of questions.

Cameron and Murphy have used 'talking mats' widely in their research involving people with GLD. They highlight a number of distinctive features that indicate their suitability as a research instrument.

- They are simple and enjoyable to use
- They are non-threatening in that there are no right or wrong answers

- They do not require literacy. The pictorial symbols are cognitively easy to assess without appearing childish (Cameron and Murphy, 2002)

The final completed mat should be photographed as a permanent record of the participant's views. Murphy, Tester, Hubbard, Downs and McDonald (2005) recommend video recording the activity so that non-verbal responses can be analysed at a later stage.

Photovoice

Photovoice involves making cameras available to participants and using their photos as a means of explaining what the world is like from their perspective. "Photovoice invites us to look at the world through the same lens as the photographer and to share the story the picture evokes for the person who clicked the shutter" (Booth and Booth, 2003, p. 432).

The provision of a camera allows students to be active participants in the research study. With the camera they are free to take photos of situations that they particularly like and enjoy in various contexts and situations. This gives the photographers a sense of ownership and power. Aldridge, (2007); Germain, (2004) and Booth and Booth, (2003) all incorporated this technique when undertaking research with people who had GLD. Students used disposable cameras to capture social activities that they were involved in over a period of time and when the photos were developed they were used as a stimulus for conversation when sharing interviews. Aldridge (2007) summarises the advantages of using this technique with students with GLD as follows:

- Photographs provide direct entry into the respondents' point of view and experience.

- Participation by students with GLD in this process allows them to demonstrate their capacity rather than their incapacity.

- Those who communicate non-verbally can 'show' the experiences that matter to them in their photos without having to 'tell'.

Allowing students to capture and if possible talk about the photos, provides often-vulnerable students, with an alternative form of voice (Chio and Fandt, 2007). As a method of data collection it is more accessible for students with GLD as there is no reliance on reading and writing unlike traditional methods of questionnaires and surveys.

Puppets

Researchers incorporate puppets as a medium for the elicitation of views from children. They were used effectively to obtain the views of disabled children on what school was like for them in a recent British study (Lewis, Parsons, and Robertson, 2007). In this scenario the child was allowed to interact with the puppet when they were involved in interviews and in times of consultation. Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, Baruchel and Jones (2008) used puppets in a variety of ways to elicit the views of children with cancer about their summer camp. Sometimes it may be necessary to have an 'alien interview' with a puppet where the interviewer announces that the puppet is from an alien planet and the children explain certain items of interest to him. In the second format known as a 'puppet interview' the researcher asks questions but the children respond through the medium of a puppet. The answers given through the puppet are believed to be the unique perceptions of

the child who is speaking in the guise of the puppet. Epstein et al. list a third form known as the Berkley puppet interview. Here there are two identical puppets in use by two interviewers. The puppets make two contrasting statements about themselves and the child is asked 'How about you?' The interviewer can combine the three different types of puppet interview when searching for the views of children. It is assumed that the answers that the child gives reveal the child's views on particular topics or situations. Puppetry is another methodology that encourages children to engage in conversation. It is another means by which the 'voice' of a child is allowed to emerge.

There are occasions when a number of different methods will be used when consulting with young people. If a research question is established and the interviewer takes time to become familiar with the interests and communicative abilities of the interviewees, these factors will be influential in determining the methods of consultation that are adopted. Consideration needs to be given in matching young people to appropriate methods if they are to be meaningfully involved in consultation (Greene and Hill, 2006).

Having discussed the dominant views from the literature on the importance of student 'voice' and the various methods that have the potential for allowing these 'voices' to be heard, a number of implications emerge that have a relevance to this study. The body of evidence indicating the challenges involved in enabling children with MGLD to communicate their views and the research studies, which have successfully privileged the voices of these students, have influenced the choice of methodologies employed in this study. These will be discussed in detail in Chapter

three. The remainder of the literature review focuses on the four themes highlighted in this study.

Social Relationships and Friendships

Having close friends is a fundamental need for most people. It is satisfying to have close friendships with others as they serve to enrich one's life. Some writers would even claim that friendships are in fact, the single most important factor influencing a person's quality of life (McVilly, 2006; Chappell, 1994). Having close friends that support, listen, share activities, can prevent one from feelings of isolation and loneliness (Knox and Hickson, 2001).

In defining 'friendship' a very broad definition written elsewhere by Willmott is used: "Friends are people who are not usually relatives but who enjoy a continuing relationship based on social contact and shared leisure time, mutual help and emotional attachment" (1986, p. 35). Parents of children with GLD want their sons and daughters to develop meaningful friendships in life and many feel that there is more likelihood of this happening in the mainstream school (Bunch and Valeo, 2004). However, research indicates that these students are in fact particularly vulnerable of being isolated and rejected by their peers in mainstream settings (Matheson, Olsen and Weisner, 2007; Mand, 2007; Frostad and Pijl, 2007). When this occurs for students with GLD, their sense of belonging is removed and their exposure to social opportunities becomes restricted. This can impact seriously on their self-esteem, motivation and school performance (Frostad and Pijl, 2007). The student may be physically integrated within a mainstream class but socially isolated from peers. O'Brien (2003) has a view that in situations such as this the child is

presented not with a window of opportunity but instead with a window of glass, in that they can view what is happening but not participate. O'Brien goes on to claim that in these situations there is no social connection between those students with GLD and their peers.

Meyer (2001) provides insightful accounts concerning the nature of friendships between students with MGLD and their mainstream peers. She documents situations in schools over a five year period where friendships developed between students with and without GLD. Meyer (2001) used 'Frames of Friendship' as a framework that allows one to understand the nature of the friendship that may exist between students with GLD and their peers in mainstream settings. She was a member of a Consortium in America that carried out participatory research on the social relationships and friendships of children and young people with diverse abilities. Her research involved quantitative and qualitative methods. Her results were always presented to participants: pupils, parents, policy makers, and teachers and she asked for their reflections on what emerged from the research. Meyer in addition provided detailed case studies of some of the students in order to provide information on what might have gone wrong along with things that were successful. Meyer (2001) combines statistical, empirical evidence and reflective data when looking at the nature of children's social relationships and their friendships. In one study, children aged six to nine, all in mainstream classes that included one or two children with MGLD, were asked to nominate other children as best friend, regular friend, a work buddy, a non-school companion or as someone who would be invited to a party. The difference between the nominations that the child with MGLD received and those without GLD was not statistically significant (Meyer, 2001). Parents and teachers

discussed these findings and felt that they indicated that inclusion was of benefit for students with disabilities in terms of friendship formation.

In another study, again in mainstream settings where students with MGLD were enrolled, groups of researchers spent an unspecified amount of time observing and interviewing students with MGLD, their peers and other professionals working in the schools (Meyer, 2001). Meyer devised 'frames of friendships' to explore the nature of friendships that existed for all of the children observed, both disabled and non-disabled. The following table outlines what the various frames constitute:

Table 1: 'Frames of Friendship', Meyer (2001)

Frame	Characteristics
1. Best Friend	"Friends Forever" – those who talk together three and four times a week on the telephone, visit each other's homes on a regular basis.
2. Regular Friend	Not a best friend but invited to parties, share in conversations in group situations but not invited to a 'sleep-over'.
3. Just Another Child	The SEN child is treated like all others in the group and never 'stands out' as being different.
4. I'll help	The SEN child is always helped in-group situations but there is never an expectation that they are capable of providing help to others.
5. Inclusion Child	People have different expectations from the SEN child in terms of performance and participation in-group situations. Pupils may talk to this child in 'baby talk' or in 'teacher talk'.
6. Ghost or Guest	The child is ignored, welcomed or treated as a guest by others in social situations.

We all experience different types of friendship in different situations and these different types of friendship may be seen to be analogous to Meyer's frames. There should be a certain balance regarding one's experience of frames. Problems arise

when a student's social experience rests exclusively within certain frames. Well-developed social lives include all six frames of friendship with different social interactions and relationships occurring at different times. Meyer (2001) provides an example of Matthew – a teenager with MGLD, and from her observation she realised that he had no best friend or regular friend. She suggested that a social skills programme was needed to give students like Matthew the skills needed to help him form different types of friendships.

In another school Meyer provides evidence of students who were integrated rather than included. She asked those peers without GLD to explain why they were not best friends with the students with MGLD. The students without disabilities gave reasons behind their lack of friendship with students with MGLD as follows: they were not in their classes all day, you could not tease them, as it was wrong to tease people with disabilities and they did not come to your house. However some students admitted on reflection that certain of the students with MGLD could be a 'regular friend' but not a 'best friend'.

Another framework proposed by Allan (1997) helps us to understand the nature of friendships that may exist between mainstream students and their peers who have GLD. This was part of a Scottish doctoral study that looked at the academic and social experiences of two boys in the last year of primary school and a girl in first year in secondary school. Allan used qualitative methods that included observation in schools, interviews with pupils with SEN, interviews with their peers and interviews with the professionals who worked in the schools. He used a 'Foucoultian lens' to explain the distinct features in friendship that he observed while observing

the three students. Two of the students had MGLD and were included for varying amounts of each day in the mainstream class. Allan explained that mainstream peers operated a 'regime of 'governmentality' over their peers with SEN. Typically they assumed three roles:

- Pastoral Power - the mainstream students saw themselves as having a role in the protection and salvation of their peers with SEN.

- Pedagogic Role - Here the mainstream pupils saw themselves to be "Agents of academic and social development of the pupil with SEN" (Allan, 1997, p. 187). They frequently assumed the role of teacher in helping the young person with SEN in their academic work.

- Transgressive Role - Mainstream pupils tolerated the crossing of boundaries by students with SEN in terms of physical contact such as touching and kissing.

However Allan makes no provision for the possibility that a student with SEN and one of their peers may become 'best friend' or 'regular friend' whereas Meyer allows for this to happen in her framework. Although Allan's three roles permit for much social interaction between students with MGLD and their peers, they also in turn appear not to contemplate the possibility of any lasting friendships developing between both sets of students. I stated previously in this chapter that this is in fact a hope of many parents by sending their child with disabilities to the mainstream school. In Allan's research the mainstream peers explained how they supported, helped and cared for those students who had GLD but they also expressed a desire for teachers to be more specific in providing more knowledge for them as to how they might offer other forms of support. Allan (1997, p. 192) recommends that teachers "tap into" the pupils' governmental regime and assist them in knowing how

to offer other forms of support to those students with SEN. This in turn might lead to the formation of friendships between both groups of students.

Further Understandings of Friendship

Other studies on friendship can add further to Meyer (2001) and Allan (1997) in helping us to understand the nature of friendship as experienced by students with MGLD. The importance of these studies is that it is students with GLD who provide their own views as to what for them constitutes friendship (Matheson, et al 2007; Mc Villy, Stancliffe, Parmenter, and Bunston-Smith, 2006). In the first study, twenty-seven teenagers in Los Angeles gave their perceptions on friendship. The participants had a range of developmental disabilities including GLD, motor delay, Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder (ADHD) and cerebral palsy. This was an ethnographic study in which six field-workers spent an average of ten hours in what Matheson et al. describe as 'hanging out' with each participant. Time was spent with the teenagers in various social situations such as school, parties, churches and out shopping. Each teenager subsequently participated in a semi-structured interview in which they spoke on different aspects of their lives. Three of the questions asked related to friendship, namely:

- Tell me about your friends?

- Do you have a best friend?

- Please tell me why this person is your best friend?

The answers to these questions were matched to the fieldworkers' observational notes concerning friendships. Few discrepancies were noted and the researchers concluded that teenagers' "self reports do indeed reflect their actual experiences with friendship" (Matheson et al. p. 323). The components of friendship that were

important for the teenagers in this study were: companionship, doing activities across contexts, similarity in interests\personality, sheer proximity and stability. In their explanations Meyer (2001) and Allan (1997) have given no weight to the fact that students with MGLD want to have stable friendships that last over time. Matheson et al. (2007) report that this is a need for students with GLD.

In the second study a total of fifty-one persons aged between sixteen and fifty-two and all having GLD outlined what they believed to be a good friend (McVilly et al. 2006). Participant data was collected in two ways: a loneliness scale was administered to all participants and a sub-set of participants participated in a semi-structured interview. Background information was collected from parents, teachers and work supervisors using a questionnaire. The loneliness scale consisted of ten statements rather than questions for example:

- I have friends.
- I feel all alone.
- It is easy to make new friends.

A verbal prompt was given 'How often does this sound like you?' The statements were written on individual cards. A five-point scale was allowed: never, rarely, sometimes, usually and always. These words were written on cards that incorporated a visual analogue scale augmented by ticks. Students could attach one card to the statements.

Thirty-two of the participants later volunteered to participate in a follow up interview in a place that was familiar to them. All of the participants had a clear understanding of what friendship entails: someone who cares for you, shares in

activities of mutual interest but most importantly someone with whom you can exchange thoughts and ideas (McVilly et al. 2006). These characteristics are no different to the elements of friendship attributed to typically developing pupils (Allan, 1997). A finding in McVilly et al.'s research that has relevance to this study is that those participants who had attended mainstream schools were less lonely than those who had attended special schools. Research cited by Mc Villy et al. and Matheson et al. (2007) goes further than Allan (1997) and Meyer (2001) in that they place much credence on the perceptions of those with GLD concerning their own subjective experience of friendship.

Siperstein, Leffer and Wenz-Gross (1997) looked at the quality of friendships between children with GLD and those without GLD in mainstream schools. They allowed children to pick a partner with whom they wished to play and they were subsequently allowed to play with their partner at a building activity over a fifteen-minute period. From observations of pairs of friends, Siperstein et al. arrived at a number of significant conclusions. They concluded the following points concerning the interactions between students with MGLD and their peers:

- They engaged in noticeably less verbal communication and collaborative decision-making.

- They often worked separately rather than together while engaged in joint activities.

- There were limited affective exchanges between both partners as indicated by a low frequency of shared laughter.

- The partner with GLD was frequently the passive member in the pair and leadership was always taken by the non-disabled member (Siperstein et al.).

These traits were not noticeable in pairs where neither child had GLD. In the pairs where one child had a GLD there was a possibility that the child with GLD considered that they had a particular friendship with one of their peers but this often lacked mutual engagement and responsiveness, both considered to be the hallmark of typical friendships (Siperstein et al.).

Different types of friendship require elements such as maturity, reciprocity, physical proximity, similarity of interest, trust, intimacy, disclosure, confidence in sharing thoughts and feelings (Matheson et al. 2007). Many of these requirements are extremely difficult for students with MGLD to achieve. This is why Chappell (1994) views the term 'friendship' as being problematic for those with GLD. Friendship needs to transcend contexts, to function in other places outside of school and work (Knocks and Hickson, 2001). Some friendships in order for them to develop need to flourish in social situations such as parties, outings and sleepovers (Mc Villy et al. 2006). However this is not possible for most students with MGLD (Matheson et al. 2007). They are dependent on families and other adults to facilitate social outings.

Difficulties in terms of communication, cognition and memory pose serious challenges to the formation of satisfying friendships between students with MGLD and their peers. It is suggested that they have not got the social skills necessary to sustain and develop lasting friendships (Carter and Hughes, 2005; Frostad and Pijl,

2007). Other studies reported differently in this regard. One study for example showed that children with Down Syndrome were excluded by their classmates in mainstream settings (Scheepstra, Han Nakken and Pijl, 1999). Methods used in this study included observation, the administration of a sociometric scale and a teacher questionnaire. This research was carried out in twenty-four primary schools in the Netherlands in which there were twenty-three pupils with Down Syndrome enrolled. Participants in this study were aged between six and nine years of age. A week's observation by researchers in each class revealed that children with Down Syndrome had less contact with their peers than other pupils, both in class and in the playground. In order to collect sociometric data, all pupils in the various classes were asked to name the three classmates that they liked most and the three classmates they liked least. The analysis of choices among students revealed that classmates did not select almost half of the pupils with Down Syndrome. The opinions of their teachers did not support this finding when their comments were analysed in questionnaires. They believed that pupils with Down Syndrome had positive interactions and friendships with their peers

It is also possible to consider friendship in terms of 'homophily'. This is the term used to explain the higher levels of friendship that develop among students who have similarities (Frostad and Pijl, 2007). Those with similar life histories and interests are often more likely to be attracted to each other and to develop strong friendships (Siperstein et al, 1997; O'Brien 2003; Ring and Travers, 2005). Those students with GLD often elect to form close friendships with similar students in schools and these friendships should not be denigrated (Chappell, 1994). Such an outcome would not only question the fundamental right of free association but might

isolate this group from those very persons with whom they might form a "voluntary relationship of mutual affection which is founded on shared interests and experience" (Chappell, 1994, p. 432). True friendships develop when individuals have shared interests and experience as stated previously in this chapter.

Evidence suggests that students without disabilities do possess an accepting attitude towards peers who have MGLD (Farrell, 1997). A research study found that seventy per cent of a group of ninety post-primary aged students had positive views about the inclusion of eleven students with MGLD in their school (Farrell, 1997). Similarly, a study undertaken in a rural four teacher school in Ireland offers evidence that one student with MGLD was accepted by peers and that he was treated with fairness and respect (Ring and Travers, 2005). However, this same study revealed that this student with MGLD had a very low social standing with his peers both within the classroom and in the playground. The researchers concluded, following observation in both contexts that there was an absence of "reciprocal interactions with non disabled peers" (Ring and Travers, 2005, p.52). Comparable evidence emerged from a study in England that focused on the social experience of children with Down Syndrome in nine schools (Cuckle and Wilson, 2002). They concluded that reciprocal relationships and friendships do not exist between these students in the way that they exist among their peers. Friendships are more visible among students with Down Syndrome as a group and other students who have special educational needs though not with non-disabled peers. This is possibly because their social life, interests and emotional maturity are more equally matched.

There is also evidence that students with disabilities are more likely to be rejected or isolated in schools and in certain cases they only have minimal engagement with their peers (Pijl, 2007; Nakken and Pijl, 2002). This is especially apparent towards the end of primary school (Frederickson, Simmonds, Evans and Souisby, 2007). Hall and McGregor, (2000) speculate that by the end of primary school many students with disabilities who have been in the school for several years are no longer perceived to be part of the class. Another study looked at eighteen students with Down Syndrome who were included in eighteen primary schools in England (Fox, Farrell and Davis, 2004). They concluded that students who were able to achieve academically or play appropriately with their peers were valued and accepted on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers. If they were not able to succeed in these areas the other children tended to "mother" them and view them as a burden or a responsibility. Much of this evidence emerged from observations of playground interactions.

The form of friendship experienced by students with MGLD in mainstream schools is likely to influence their sense of identity. The following section considers this aspect of schooling for these students.

Self Concept and Identity

The student's self concept is constructed from social experiences in the family and in the school. Self Concept is now viewed as being multidimensional rather than one-dimensional (Zeleke, 2004). The terms self-concept, self-perception and self-esteem are frequently used in an un-differentiated way but here I will offer an explanation as to what is meant by each. Self-concept and self-perceptions are used

mostly to describe one's perceptions in domain specific areas: academic, social and physical (Zeke, 2004). Self-esteem is defined as one's global sense of well being as a person (Zeleke). Zeleke conducted a review of numerous studies, which looked at the academic and social concept of students with GLD. Evidence as presented in studies suggests that the self-concept or self-perceptions remain stable at least in primary school for students with GLD (Zeleke, 2004). Other researchers show that students with GLD have a positive self-concept but that it is significantly lower than that of other students (Cambra and Silvestre, 2003).

Students with GLD rate themselves lower than their peers in academic self-concept (Chapmann, 1988b; Zeleke, 2004). Research by Gans, Kenny and Ghany (2003) compared the self-concept among fifty middle school children with learning disabilities and seventy of their peers without disability. The students were primarily Hispanic, completed a diagnostic self –concept scale assessment. Students responded to an eighty item scale with a 'yes' or 'no' answer. The statements relating to one's perceptions regarding school were as follows: I am smart. I am an important member of my class. Among the statements concerning one's perceptions regarding physical appearance were: My looks bother me, I have a pleasant face. There was no difference between both groups in terms of global self-esteem. The student group composed of students with learning disabilities evaluated their academic self-concept more negatively to those without a disability (Gans et al.). One's academic self-concept or academic self-perception can also be viewed as being multi-dimensional. Students can rate themselves in the various subject domains. Evidence exists which shows that students with GLD are capable of making distinctions about self-perceptions of competence in different academic areas such as reading and maths

(Renick and Harter, 1989). Renick and Harter administered instruments such as the 'Perceived Competence Scales for Children' and the 'Self-Perception Profiles for Learning Disabled Students' to reach their conclusions (Renick and Harter). The results of this research show that students with GLD had lower perceptions of their academic self-concept when they were in regular classes and that they compared themselves to their non-disabled peers. Renick and Harter (1989) believe that the self-concept of students with GLD lowers with age especially if the students attend mainstream classes. This does not appear to be the case if they attend special classes where they are surrounded with students who have similar special educational needs to them (Zeleke, 2004). It is possible to enhance the self-concept of students with special educational needs if teaching styles, school climate, peer relations and group-work are all considered as to how they are impacting on the students who have lower self concepts (Cambra and Silvestre, 2003).

Renick and Harter demonstrate how the perceptions of those with learning disabilities concerning their social acceptance, athletic competence and global self-esteem do not differ significantly from their peers. One hypothesis presented is that students with GLD emphasise other important areas of strength rather than relying on academic achievement (Bear, Minke, Griffin and Deemer, 1998). This probably is a way that students with GLD use, when evaluating their own self-perceptions in order to protect their self-concept.

The notion of identity is also closely related to perceptions of one's self-competence and self-esteem. Watson (2002) argues that the 'self' is an evolving process. Through reflection and discourse one constructs a notion of one's own self

61

and identity (Watson, 2002). He goes on to state "We learn who we are not by concrete relationships within a physical community, but through abstract symbol systems (Watson, 2002, p. 511). We are able to choose our identity and can ignore or reject identities fostered on us as a result of ascribed characteristics. Ones identity is constantly evolving based on the discourses that one has with oneself (Rhodes, Nocon, Small and Wright, 2008). The students who are the focus of this study are given a psychological label early in life and how this impacts on their living is considered in the following section.

Being Labelled as Having a Learning Disability

The idea of difference is also relevant when considering how those with disabilities perceive their own identity. Thomas (1999) explains that this notion of 'difference' can be explained if one considers that disabled people are essentially different from non-disabled people. The presence of impairment makes certain people in society different from others. She considers the lived experience of this 'different' group and considers ways in which society creates physical barriers and occasionally treats them to hostile or inappropriate behaviour. This can result in psycho-emotional disablism. Here she is referring to the personal experiences of oppression that operate at the emotional level. People with disabilities are made to feel different by the ways in which: people, structures and organisations confer on them a notion that they are different from the majority. It is also the contention of Thomas that the social model of disability needs to be extended to take account of the social policies and practices that undermine the emotional well being of people with disabilities. Feelings of shame, frustration and anger are all emotions that can lead to 'internalised oppression' which are commonly experienced by marginalised

groups within society (Reeve, 2002). Reeve continues to state that levels of internalised oppression vary among disabled people and are influenced by various contexts and people. Students with MGLD have all been assessed by a psychologist and given a "dominant identifying label" which will remain with them for the rest of their lives (Beart, Hardy and Buchan, 2005, p. 49). Labelling disabled people, can confer negative identities on them and also create additional stigmatisation on a group that already experience a lot of negativity in society (Link and Phelan, 2001).

In a research study, sixty young people with GLD were asked to reflect on their experiences of stigma in their relationships and interactions and almost all recalled experiences when they felt devalued and different (Davies and Jenkins, 1997). Labels can also lead to generalisations of children's difficulties, neglecting individualised issues (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007). On the other hand the presence of a label can lead to the provision of more resources. This ascribed identity on the basis of psychological assessment has been shown to be so powerful that it becomes a person's primary identity overriding other identities, even gender (Burns, 2000). Labels given to students by psychologists are frequently used in schools when introducing or describing students (Davis and Watson, 2001). Schools can use the label, to explain why progress in learning is minimal (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007).

Many people with GLD do not appear to consider this identity as applicable to them, even if significant other people do (Connors and Stalker, 2007). In this study twenty-six children with disabilities aged between seven and fifteen were interviewed at regular intervals to determine how they experienced difference and life. Incidentally, thirteen participants were described as having GLD. Some reported

experiencing negative experiences, hurtful and hostile reactions from others in schools and that they had to face physical barriers, which imposed restrictions on their daily lives. Despite these experiences they still, for the most part, viewed themselves as being young people with ordinary lives and much the same as their peers. Similar results emerged in another study where twenty-eight young people with GLD were interviewed concerning their ascribed identity and again they felt that the category did not apply to them (Finlay and Lyons, 1998). A number of reasons have been identified to explain why students with GLD do not accept this label as applying to themselves (Connors and Stalker, 2007). These include:

- They are not encouraged to talk about impairments or disability in school or at home.

- They do not have the language that allows them to discuss what 'difference' means.

- They want to be the same as their peers and therefore feel a need to minimise or deny their difference.

One study undertaken with seventy-seven young people with Down Syndrome offers another reason that explains why young people with GLD tend to see a given label as having no relevance to them. This study found that forty-one percent of the participants had no apparent awareness of their learning disability. Those who expressed awareness had achieved a higher level of cognitive development and the researchers conclude that this is an important feature that governs a person's understanding and acceptance of their learning disability (Cunningham, Glenn and Fitzpatrick, 2000).

Watson (2002) illustrates how some people with disabilities adopt a variety of strategies to negate, distance or challenge the negative identities that people bestow on them. These include:

- A rejection that physical difference or impairment sets them apart from their peers.

- A sense of unity is developed between themselves and non-disabled people.

- Others create a biography for themselves that normalises the impairment.

- Some people with disabilities accept that their impairment creates a difference between them and their peers but through reflexivity they accept that this is a normal part of life in a world of diversity.

Schools can use psychological labels as an excuse to limit the opportunities on offer to students with disabilities including those with MGLD. The following section outlines how this occurs.

Exclusion

Schools may stigmatise and devalue students if structures and contexts are not altered. If diversity and 'difference' are badly managed students feel hurt and excluded resulting in the 'barriers to being' (Thomas, 1999). L. Ware (2004, p.185) provides an insight as to how this happens:

The hidden curriculum of fundamental value systems, rituals and routines, initiations and acceptance which forms the fabric of daily life. It is at this degree of inclusion that real quality of life issues reside. This can be an intangible process whereby students are taught to see themselves as either valued or de-valued group members.

In a school that proclaims to be inclusive students may also experience a sense of exclusion if they are treated with less worth than all others. Booth (1998, p34) states "exclusion, like segregation can be conceived of as the process of decreasing the participation of pupils in the culture and curricula of mainstream schools". L. Ware, (2004, p195), demonstrates how inclusive schools "segregated students in clearly dehumanising ways". They were taught in classrooms apart from the majority of students and shared in few extra curricular activities. Secondary school students with disabilities can experience exclusion on many grounds and are often taught almost entirely by Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) (Shah, 2007). Students who have a MGLD are likely to have an SNA assisting them in school but this in itself can also impact on peer interactions (Tews and Lupart, 2008; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli and McFarland, 1997). These researchers report how SNAs separate students with disabilities from their classmates, and take on the role as teacher for lengthy periods of the school day. Schools need to be attentive to their contexts and culture to avoid exclusion. There are often deeply embedded cultural practices in schools that only students can observe. The research associated with this study allows students to speak of their experience in this regard.

Teachers are likely to experience difficulties when it comes to including students with MGLD in classes. They have to take account of their cognitive ability and learning styles. The following section considers how schools can make curriculum and learning more accessible for students with MGLD. The efforts that schools take in this regard are likely to impact on these students experience of self-

concept and identity. They will also have a direct influence on how students with MGLD share in a sense of belonging and inclusion in school life.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

In the past students with MGLD were offered a curriculum that was very much "skills based" (Nind, 2005, p. 1). In writing about Curriculum, I am referring to what young people have to learn in school and how this is organised into different areas and fields of learning (Corbett and Norwich, 2005). Attitudes changed over time and it is now accepted that students with GLD are entitled to have access to a curriculum that promotes empowerment, facilitates achievement, one that meets individual needs and makes allowances for the attainment of personal goals (Carpenter, Ashdown and Bovair, 1997). For these to exist, the curriculum offered to students with GLD should have four major tenets: "breadth, balance, relevance and differentiation (Carpenter et al.). These four areas should feature in every classroom.

Allowing students to have access to the general curriculum is considered to be in the spirit of inclusion. As well as increasing expectations, it also serves to "broaden the curriculum options available to students with significant cognitive impairments" (Spooner, Dymond, Smith and Kennedy, 2006, p. 280). However, access to the general curriculum has different meanings for professionals (Dymond, Renzaglia, Gilson and Slagor, 2007). In the Dymond et al. study, which took place in a secondary school in America, the views of both special education teachers and subject teachers were asked for in individual interviews. The school had one thousand five hundred students, where twenty percent had SEN. Teachers were asked to explain what access to the general curriculum entailed for students who had

severe (moderate) GLD. Subject teachers defined access as offering the students with GLD the same curriculum and materials as offered to all other students. In contrast, teachers working directly as special education teachers in the school, viewed access as providing students with GLD a curriculum that was adapted, relevant to the student's life and meeting the student's individual needs.

The curriculum cannot be treated in isolation and is associated with pedagogy and knowledge. Policy in Ireland as shown by National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is that the aims of education are common to all children. This belief was reflected in the publication of the Revised Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999). The NCCA believe that all students can benefit from the common curriculum but for certain students adaptations may be necessary. With this in mind revised guidelines have been issued for teachers of students with GLD (2007). The DES encourages schools to modify their teaching and engage in individualised planning for students with SEN by producing Individual Education Plans (DES, 2005). Each young person must receive opportunities to achieve in school. Despite policy changes and the introductions of curriculum guidelines, concerns remain regarding the 'outcomes' for students with SEN (NCSE, 2006). This is one area where policy needs to focus in the future. I will now focus on curricular access in mainstream settings for students with GLD and suggest practices that allow access and achievement to occur, inclusive of all learners.

Inclusive practice entails differentiation, transformation, building connections, letting the child lead and focus on interactions and processes (Nind, 2005). In America, it is mandatory for students to have access to the general curriculum in

mainstream classes or in special ones. Researchers point out that in reality few efforts are made by teachers to ensure that students with GLD have access to the general curriculum (Agran, Alper and Wehmeyer, 2002). Elsewhere, Wehmeyer, Sands, Knowlton and Kozleski (2002) have written extensively on the need to redesign the general curriculum so that students with GLD can have access to it. Wehmeyer et al. offer a number of recommendations aimed at facilitating access for this group of students. These are outlined in Table 2.

Their first step is a need to design the curriculum in such a way that all students can have access and show progress. The content should be broad and not concentrated on core academic subjects. Another step identified is a need to include 'functional' and 'life-skills' within the general curriculum. Other researchers have also highlighted this point as follows: "Access to the general curriculum does not preclude access to other types of curriculum" (Dymond, Renzaglia, Gilson and Slagor, 2007, p. 13). A third step identified as a means for ensuring access to the general curriculum is the implementation of quality instructional strategies across all classes in the school (Wehmeyer, Lattin, Lapp-Rincker and Agran, 2003). Wehmeyer et al. further recommend curriculum adaptations that include the use of materials that present information in graphic form using digitized text, audio and video based delivery mechanisms. Other researchers identify a need for augmentations, or expanding the curriculum in order to provide students with the skills needed to become independent learners (Wehmeyer et al. 2003). There is an identified need for students to be allowed to communicate their knowledge in a variety of ways, not just by written essay format. Alternative means of assessment and reporting on what students know need to be utilized more widely in schools

(Spooner, Dymond, Smith and Kennedy, 2006). The following table provides a summary of recommendations that schools need to encompass if they are serious about allowing students with GLD to have access to the general curriculum.

Table 2:   Steps to gaining access to the general curriculum for students with GLD, Wehmeyer, Lattin, Lapp-Rincker and Agran (2003)

Action Step	Description
Standard setting and curriculum design	Standards are written as open-ended, and the curriculum is planned and designed using principles of universal design that ensure that all students can show progress.
Individualised Educational Planning	The individualised planning process ensures that a student's educational progress is designed based on the general curriculum, taking into account unique student learning needs.
School-wide materials and instruction	There is school wide use of universally designed curricular materials and quality instructional methods and strategies that challenge all students.
Partial school and group instruction	Groups of students who need more intensive instruction are targeted. Whole School and classroom instructional decision-making activities focus on the lesson, unit and classroom level to ensure students can progress in the curriculum.
Individualised interventions	Additional curricular content and instructional strategies are designed and implemented to ensure progress for students with learning needs not met by school wide efforts or partial school efforts.

Schools should plan so that all students can demonstrate progress in what they are taught.

There are several instructional strategies that teachers need to deploy in order that students with GLD can access the general curriculum and also show progress. Curriculum adaptations and augmentations are required, (Wehemeyer et al. 2002).

Wehemeyer et al. identify a need for teachers to diversify their selection of instructional techniques and not to rely solely on traditional methods such as whole class and individual working arrangements. Differentiation allows for maximum involvement. The provision of graphic organisers by teachers also proves effective at making the general curriculum accessible to those with GLD (Wehmeyer, Lance and Bashinski, 2002). Key points to be learned can be presented graphically to students in order that they know what they need to study. The use of technology can also enhance learning for these students. These researchers suggest that there is an indictment of existing curriculum if the needs of those with GLD cannot be accommodated within the scope of the general curriculum. It should be broad enough to encompass specific learning needs that are unique to this body of students. Spooner, Dymond, Smith and Kennedy, (2006) demonstrate how peer support interventions have also proved successful as a means of facilitating students with significant GLD to access the general curriculum. Spooner et al. list studies, which demonstrate how peer support had proved more effective at helping students with GLD rather than the support of SNAs or paraprofessionals. The encouragement of peer-support may also increase friendships and promote the inclusion of students in more class activities (Spooner et al.). Another strategy found to promote access for students with GLD is self-directed goals (Spooner et al.). Students are allowed to set goals for themselves and are allowed to evaluate their progress in terms of their achievements.

Second Level

Naughton (2003) demonstrates how the curriculum at the end of primary school becomes much narrower in its focus and content. This continues at second level and

the syllabi for each subject restricts what teachers can teach (Naughton). There are seven areas that differ radically in the nature of provision in first and second level schools (Naughton). These include: aims and objectives, form of school organisation, organisation of curriculum and the learning environment, nature of assessment, influence of perceived student ability on organisation of learning, student autonomy\control and teacher\parent roles. The emphasis in primary school is very much, the development and the realisation of each child's potential (NCCA, 1999). This contrasts on the emphasis in second level schools where examinations and preparation of students for the world of work and third level education dominates.

In a number of post primary schools in this country alternative courses have been added to the curriculum in recent years such as Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP), Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). These additional programmes demonstrate how flexibility can be built into curriculum and assessment within the system. The JCSP, for example is viewed as offering a more appropriate curriculum to the weaker student. JCSP classes tend to have fewer students and less teachers working with them.

In an Irish context it has been argued that in spite of curriculum reform, little has changed in terms of teaching methods in the junior years at second level, with the emphasis remaining on instruction rather than on participation (Callan, 1997; NCCA, 1999; Naughton, 2003). A small-scale study in which a group of young adults with disabilities were asked to speak about their experiences in post-primary schools in this country has a relevance to this study. A number of the participants

outlined instances where they were denied access to the full curriculum offered to their peers without disabilities (Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela, 2002). The study had no participants with GLD and it is accepted that these students are more likely at being exposed to a more restricted curriculum. Studies conducted in America in this area show that students with GLD attend mainstream classes but they are not given access to the general curriculum and their teachers hold the view that the curriculum is unsuitable and not appropriate (Argan, Alper, Wehemeyer, 2002). However, views like this allow one to set low expectations for students with GLD and to continue educating them in segregated settings (Wehmeyer, Latin, Lapp-Rincker and Agran, 2003).

There are few studies written concerning the access of students with GLD to the general curriculum. Most studies in this regard are American based, as legislation enacted there compels schools to include in Individual Education Plans, written accounts concerning strategies that are in place so that each student can experience and show progress in the general curriculum. In one study thirty-three students with GLD were observed at intervals over a seven-month period in two-second level schools (Wehmeyer, Latin, Lapp-Rincker and Agran, 2003). An observational schedule was used to record the involvement or a lack of this for students in the general curriculum at intervals over a seven-month period of time. The results of this research are relevant to this study as the participants received their education in a variety of contexts including mainstream, resource rooms and special classes. Wehmeyer et al. discovered that students who received their education in resource rooms or self-contained classrooms were less likely to be engaged in curricular activities that were linked to the general curriculum. The opposite was true for those

students who received their education in mainstream settings. Students in mainstream settings were observed to be working on a standards-linked task for forty per-cent intervals compared to students in segregated settings.

Barriers and Challenges Concerning Access

These are outlined clearly by researchers who looked at efforts in America concerning the access of students with GLD to a general curriculum (Spooner, Dymond, Smith and Kennedy, 2006).

- Lack of training at pre-service level among newly qualified teachers.

- Professionals such as psychologists are also ill prepared in their basic training so that they have insufficient knowledge in allowing them to provide advice for teachers regarding access.

- There is a lack of family and community involvement in curriculum planning.

- Differentiation is non-existent in many schools as teachers are unaware of its importance and how to do it.

- Students with GLD are generally not involved in high stakes testing and assessments as are all other students. Therefore it is not necessary to make the general curriculum accessible for them.

Students with MGLD are likely to benefit more from mainstream schools if teachers are prepared to differentiate work and if different modes of learning are accommodated and allowed for. However, second level schools are still dominated by examinations and results. There is an expectation that students will succeed in examinations. Is this expectation militating against the enrolment of students with MGLD? The remaining section considers transition from primary

to post-primary and the level of choice that is afforded to parents and students with MGLD in this regard.

Transition and School Choice

There is little research available on the transition of students with MGLD to post-primary schools. The Council for Learning Disabilities (http://www..cldinternational.org) refers to transition as the passing from one state or condition to another and that many transitions are associated with predictable life events such as beginning pre-school, leaving elementary school and entering middle childhood. The transition from primary to post-primary school has been singled out as a crucial stage in a child's education. Research internationally demonstrates that transition creates difficulties and challenges for most young people (NCCA, 1999). Fortunately, Naughton (2003) tells us that fears and anxieties experienced at this stage by young people are short-lived. There are two studies that look at transition of students with SEN as they move between primary and secondary school in Ireland (Kelly 2006 and Maunsell, Barrett and Candon 2007). The two studies have a relevance to this study as they also aimed at gaining the perspectives of students with GLD concerning school experience.

In the first study Kelly interviewed eleven students with mild\moderate GLD along with their parents concerning the transition process and how they experienced this. All of the students had attended a special class catering for students with mild GLD in a mainstream primary school and had transferred to a number of post-primary schools, both special and mainstream. It was a retrospective study as the students had left primary school for a number of years at the time of research.

Results from the study revealed that students were not consulted on the transition process nor did they get to transfer to the local community school with their peers from mainstream due to lack of SEN provision in the school. Pupils expressed a variety of emotions. They spoke of their worries about losing friends and the uncertainty surrounding the development of new ones. However, there was also an excitement among students that they would be learning more difficult and challenging things. When considering the importance of friendship for students with GLD earlier on in this chapter the significance that this holds in one's life was considered. It is therefore important that the possibility of losing or maintaining friendship for those with MGLD needs to be a consideration at times of transition. It is hoped to look at this matter further in this study from the perspective of participating students.

In the second study by Maunsell et al., eight students with SEN from two single-sex primary schools in inner city Dublin participated. The exact nature of their SEN is unspecified. Each student participated in a semi-structured personal interview in which they spoke about their views concerning their transfer to a new second-level school. Similar to Kelly's study the students spoke of looking forward to doing new subjects especially those of a practical nature. They were also looking forward to meeting new teachers. However, they feared bullying and harder work. Only two of the students had fears about the difficulty of making new friends.

School Choice

Bagley, Woods and Woods (2001) explore the experience of and reasons for, school choice among parents who have a son or daughter with SEN. The research

methods used were annual surveys over a five-year period using postal questionnaires, supplemented by personal interviews with samples of parents. Twenty-eight parents of students with SEN participated. Findings show how parents of children with SEN perceived themselves to be marginalised and devalued by schools as they attempted to engage with the process of school choice. In this study parents report that school open-evenings were often found to be unaccommodating where teachers in SEN and school principals were unapproachable or on occasions absent. This study is of particular interest as it focuses on the perceived levels of choice as experienced by parents at times of transition. Bagley et al. (p. 305) identified key needs that parents of children with SEN require when looking for appropriate second-level as being "safety, security, care, inclusivity, unconditional respect for individual worth and potential". Parents expect schools to help their son or daughter in reaching their fullest academic potential. However, their priorities are for personal and social development (Bagley, Woods and Woods, 2001).

In Chapter One, reference was given to the research of Flatman Watson (2004a) who reports on the difficulties experienced by parents in getting their child with GLD into primary schools. Studies suggest that the difficulty remains when it comes to finding a place at second level. Parents feel "marginalised and devalued" as they try to select appropriate provision at the time of transition (Bagley, Woods and Woods, p. 306). Students with GLD have expectations and fears at this important time and this study will consider those of students with MGLD in this regard.

Summary

The challenges that schools face when including students with low incidence disabilities are considered initially in this chapter. The importance of 'student voice' is highlighted and an explanation is given as to how certain 'voices' are allowed to remain silent in our schools. One way of listening to the views of these students is to involve them in research and consultations in areas of life that are of particular concern to them. A number of innovative projects were considered in this chapter where the 'voices' of marginalised students in schools were enabled to express their views. Consideration was provided on methods to use when interviewing children and also those with GLD. The incorporation of visual stimuli is recommended as highlighted in a number of the studies considered in this chapter. Key studies in the four themes that are explored in this doctoral thesis are considered. Among the salient points that emerge is the fact that students with GLD are able to distance themselves from the ascribed identity that a psychologist gives to this group of students. The literature review highlights a need among those with GLD to participate in social situations where they can experience friendship in its many guises. However, students with MGLD have a limited choice in terms of access to second level and this impacts on the endurance of friendships. This chapter indicates how curricular access becomes problematic at the later stages in primary school and that this can continue throughout second level. Consideration was given to strategies that promote access to the general curriculum for students with GLD.

Chapter Three considers the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The review of the literature highlights the importance of student 'voice' A number of approaches are considered that successfully facilitate the emergence of voices that are often unheard in schools and in research. This exclusion may in part be due to the difficulties encountered in consulting with young people where traditional interview methods prove inappropriate. It is evident from the literature review in the previous chapter, that there are specific considerations to be borne in mind when students with MGLD are involved in research and consultation. They may have comprehension and communication difficulties and these will impact on their ability to participate in research. They are likely to be affected by the power imbalance between themselves and the researcher and this means that they are prone to suggestibility. Specific considerations have to be incorporated in research studies to counteract these tendencies.

It is my intention to rectify this omission of the 'voice' of those with MGLD though in a relatively small way by completing this study. The 'voice' of students who have MGLD will be kept to the fore in all of my writing. Two broad questions have been selected to guide my research namely:

- What are the perceptions of students with MGLD of their experiences in mainstream schools?

- What research methods allow students with MGLD to express their views?

This chapter gives an outline of the methods used in the collection of data to answer the above research questions. A rationale is provided in support of my choice of methods. A full description of the data collection strategy is given and an explanation is given concerning my choice of participants. Data Analysis and how this was undertaken is stated. Ethical considerations are specifically stated as the participants in this study come from a very vulnerable group in society. Areas such as credibility, validity and trustworthiness are also dealt with in this chapter.

Research Design

This was a qualitative study in which interviews and observations were the main sources of data. Spending an initial week as an observer in each of the participant's schools allowed for a sense of rapport to develop (Davis, Watson and Cunningham Burley, 2000). This provided an opportunity for me to become familiar with each student's preferred method of communication. Each student participated in a minimum of four interviews. Brewester (2004) advises that consultation-involving people with GLD should be an ongoing process rather than a one-off event. A compendium of innovative methods, previously referred to in the literature review, was incorporated in the data collection process to allow for students who had limited powers of communication. Other researchers recommend the use of visual imagery when people with GLD take part in research studies (Porter and Lacey, 2005; Begley 2000). Providing people with cameras and allowing them to capture significant people and places over a period of time proved to be effective for researchers who incorporated 'photovoice' interviews as part of their consultation process (Booth and Booth, 2003; Germain, 2004). In this study students captured photos over a week, shared subsequently in an interview regarding them and they received a full set of

prints to take home and keep. Games and puppets were also incorporated as visual methods to reduce an over-reliance on spoken language in interviews. Another reason for using these methods was to reduce the power imbalance that was a feature of research involving people with GLD in the past (Porter and Lacey, 2005).

Conceptual Framework

Philosophically, I place myself within a critical realist perspective. Robson (2006) claims "realism can provide a model of scientific explanation which avoids both positivism and relativism". Realism allows for the consideration of views of participants. Scientifically realism views the world differently to the positivist view. The latter regards human behaviour as passive "essentially determined and controlled thereby ignoring intention, individualism and freedom" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2005, p. 19). It espouses a belief that general universal laws govern human behaviour, whereas a key concept of the realist approach is that the real world is very complex and stratified into different layers (Robson, 2006). It is concerned with the mechanisms that impact in a given context. Realists look for explanations behind the mechanisms that operate in our world. They are concerned with the impact that mechanisms have in particular contexts. Understanding the mechanisms at work can lead eventually to change that can counteract "blocking mechanisms" (Robson, 2006, p. 39). We can at times view "releasing mechanisms" that create positive contexts (Robson, 2006, p39). In the present study it was hoped that the participants would provide information on the mechanisms and structures that operated in schools and how they impact on their social experiences.

Bhaskar (1989) puts forward the idea of critical realism. Robson considers that this critical feature strengthens the realist position as it promotes an emancipatory approach to research. This allows one to critically appraise the context and social practices that are under investigation. Adopting a critical realist approach, one questions and criticises settings and eventually this criticism may provide an impetus for change.

Critical realism can be seen as a specific form of realism. Its manifesto is to recognise the reality of the natural order and the events and discourses of the social world. It holds that we will only be able to understand and so change the social world if we identify the structures at work that generate those events and discourses (Bhaskar, 1989).

Layder (1993) addresses how to conduct research from a critical realism perspective. Layder maintains that a central feature of realism is its attempt to preserve a scientific attitude towards social analysis and at the same time recognising the importance of actors' meanings and in some way incorporating them in research. A key aspect of realism is a concern with causality and the identification of causal mechanisms in social phenomena. This is quite different to the traditional search for causal generalisations. Layder proposes a stratified or layered framework of human action and social organisation. The framework provides for macro-phenomena to include structural and institutional phenomena as well as micro phenomena, like behaviour and interaction. Table 3 provides an outline of the components of this framework:

Table 3:   Research Framework developed by Layder (1993)

Element	Focus
Context	Macro social forms
Setting	Immediate environment of social activity
Situated Activity	Dynamics of face to face interaction
Self	Biographical experience and social involvement.

The first level is 'self' and this refers to the individual's relation to his or her social environment and is characterised by the intersection of biographical experiences and social involvements (Layder, 1993). Self is concerned as to how individuals are affected and respond to social situations. In 'situated activity' the focus is on the dynamics of social interaction. The area of 'self' concentrates on how individuals are affected and respond to certain social processes whereas 'situated activity' focuses on the nature of the social involvement and interactions. The focus in 'setting' rests on the intermediate forms of social organisation. A setting provides the immediate arena for social activities. A setting can be things like the culture of the organisation, power and authority structures (Layder). The wider macro social forms that provide the more remote environment of social activity are referred to as the 'context' (Layder). Layder stresses that theorising should be a continuous process accompanying research at all stages. This framework developed by Layder serves as a basis that underpins this critical realist study.

Case Studies

It is appropriate at this point to define what exactly is meant by case study. Numerous writers provide different definitions as to what constitutes a case study. Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2005, p. 181) provide the following definition:

"Case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interaction of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance". Stake (1995, p. xi) describes case study as "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances". Stake further believes that each case has a distinct boundary.

Stake (1995) considers case studies as an ideal method for carrying out an in-depth study of an organisation over a sustained period of time. Case studies attempt to portray what it is like to be a participant in a real life situation (Geertz, 1973; Yin, 1993). As a method it can be likened to a TV documentary (Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005). The focus is very much placed on participants in their "naturally occurring" setting (Yin, 2003). Adelman, Kemmis and Jenkins (1980, p.59) view this as a great strength in case study as the focus is "strong on reality" where as a lot of other research that emerges is "weak in reality". There are no newly created situations put in place for the purpose of the case study and life is as always after its completion. The aim of this research method is to "illuminate the general by looking at the particular" (Denscombe, 2004, p. 30). From looking at a number of in-depth case studies the reader will have an insight into the school experience of students with MGLD.

Rationale for Chosen Research Methodologies

One of the aims of this study was to listen to the perceptions of students with MGLD on their social experiences in mainstream schools. I had a number of choices regarding the range of methodologies to deploy in order to answer this question. Porter and Lacey (2005) considered the various methodologies used in GLD research

and they stated that most researchers relied on surveys and questionnaires when undertaking research. I decided against this approach. My intention as stated previously was to give prominence to the student's 'voice' in this study. A reliance on questionnaires required expertise in literacy and communication that would present an immense challenge for young people with GLD. A questionnaire could have been distributed to parents and professionals but they are not the keepers of the desired knowledge needed to answer my research question. Robson (2006) criticises the use of questionnaires in this regard.

Another possible method that I could have used was focus groups. These are regarded as flexible, easy to set up, enjoyable for participants and suitable for people with literacy difficulties (Robson, 2006). Focus groups perform best with eight to twelve participants (Robson, 2006). I could have approached a number of voluntary organisations for volunteers to participate in focus groups. I was interested in selecting students from a variety of school contexts and to visit them in these locations. This therefore required more than focus groups. Assistance from one voluntary body that I approached was not encouraging so I felt unable to rely on them. The difficulties encountered in this regard are covered later in this chapter. I therefore decided instead to compose five in-depth case studies on the experiences of six students with MGLD in five separate schools. This also allowed for the opportunity to include a variety of research methods that would answer the second research question in this study, namely; what research methods allow students with MGLD to express their views regarding mainstream schools?

As a methodology, case studies allow for a glimpse into the world of learning disabilities (Porter and Lacey, 2005). There are a number of different types of case study. Yin (2003) identifies three types of case study; exploratory, descriptive and explanatory;

- Exploratory Case Study - the goal here is to discover theory by directly observing a social phenomenon in its raw form (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This form of case study is developed because the researcher wants to achieve a greater understanding of that particular case. The case itself is of interest rather than being representative of other situations.

- Descriptive Case Study - this type of case study provides an insight into an issue or offers a refinement of theory. There is a previously stated theory used to guide what needs to be described when writing up this form of case study.

- Explanatory Case Study - this involves the study of a number of case studies jointly in order to inquire into a particular phenomenon. In many ways what is involved is the compilation of a number of exploratory case studies but they are all then considered jointly.

For the purpose of this study the form of case study used was 'explanatory'. I looked at school experience through the eyes of the participants, which in this case were students with MGLD and got some insights into their experience of school. This resulted in the formation of six case studies for six students, which focused on "contextual factors, processes and experiences", encountered in schools (Robson, 2006, p. 181). In the analysis of all of the case studies I selected common threads.

Another strength associated with case study research is that it allows the researcher to use a variety of sources, a variety of types of data and a variety of research methods when carrying out in-depth studies (Denzin, 1978; Denscombe, 2004). Observations of events in each case setting can be combined with formal and informal interviews with people involved. Questionnaires could also be used to provide additional information on a point of interest. A variety of types of data, a variety of sources and a variety of methods are all part of the investigation (Denscombe, 2004). This is particularly important for this study. Table 4 provides an overview of the methods and sources used to collect data in the development of case studies in this study.

Table 4:   Methods Used to Collect Data

Observation	Five consecutive days spent in each student's school.
Interviews with Students	4 semi-structured interviews with each student, lasting no more than 45 minutes.
Camera	Students kept a digital camera for a week and captured photos of people and events that were important to them in school.
Photovoice Interview	In one of the four interviews students talked about the photos that they had captured with a digital camera over a period of a week. Interviews lasted no longer than 45 minutes.
Interviews with Significant People	Parents, Resource Teachers, Principal, Mainstream teachers, Special Needs Assistants.
Fieldnotes	These were written during and after every school visit.
Reflections	Written in a Research Diary – thoughts, questions and impressions that surfaced in the course of this research study.

A stated aim of case study research is not to pass judgements on the various contexts that are portrayed. Neither was it my intention to induce change. Others may use the findings and interpretations to make changes for students with MGLD based on my interpretations and data. It is my hope that the views expressed by the six participants in this study may be used to encourage reflection on the part of management and teachers. The 'voice' of these participants could be the catalyst to improve provision in schools for this group of students. Adelman et al. (1980) offered recommendations that should be followed and taken account of when planning and carrying out case studies. Among these considerations is a need to avoid disruption and inconvenience for schools and especially for participants.

The use of case studies as a means of research is also strongly criticised. The main criticism stems from the fact that findings are not generalisable. Case studies are bounded and specific to a certain context (Stake, 1995). Other critics of case study echo these same views (Nisbet and Waters, 1984). All case studies may be so unique that they have no bearing or resemblance to other contexts.

At the heart of every case study there should be a period of observation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2005). The expressed intention in this study was to collect information from observations conducted in the schools where the participants were enrolled. The theory behind this method of collecting data is considered in the section that follows.

Observation

In the course of data collection each participating student was observed in his\her School on five consecutive days and subsequently questions were asked at interviews based on occurrences observed. A purpose of observation was to secure data relating to the first research question associated with this study. Observing students engaged in a number of activities and in different situations in their own school also assisted in the formation of final case studies.

Semi-structured methods of observation were used as a research technique where the observer became the "instrument" that provided data for analysis (Robson, 2006). As this study was concerned with the experiences of students with MGLD in mainstream schools, one of the major sources of data was "the interpretations by the observer of what was going on all around" (Robson, 2006, p. 314). Being with students is an appropriate research method for gathering information as it provides the researcher with first hand experience of the context in which participants live and work (Morris, 2003). Field notes were made during observational visits and more extensive accounts were written up immediately afterwards.

Observation as a technique has many advantages for the researcher. It allows one to get at "real life" in the real world (Robson, 2006, p. 310). However Robson also maintains that the observer's presence in a specific context or situation can affect the reality for those under observation. This is known as the "reactivity effect" (Cohen, Mannoion and Morrison 2005). To counteract this effect and to ensure that it did not impact adversely on this study, this was another reason to justify five full

days spent with each student. Having spent this amount of time in each school the complexities and dynamics of each place became apparent. A disadvantage associated with this research method is that it is time consuming for the researcher (Robson, 2006). In this study it required as much as five full days in five different schools as an "unobtrusive" observer (Robson, 2006). However, observational visits to student's schools allowed for descriptors to be recorded of the student's situation. A semi-structured schedule was used and extensive field notes were recorded and written up. Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2005) present a number of frameworks that they recommend as guidelines when observing. They offer the following checklist developed by Spradley (1980) as one approach. Fieldnotes should cover the following topics:

Space: layout of the physical setting, rooms, outdoor space.

Actors: who are the relevant people involved.

Activities: the various activities of the actors.

Objects: physical elements, furniture etc.

Acts: specific individual actions.

Events: particular occasions.

Time: the sequence of events.

Goals: what actors are attempting to accomplish.

Feelings: emotions in particular contexts (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2005, p. 312).

It was not necessary to write on each topic but as a framework I found it helpful when writing thick descriptions. As an observer I also recorded 'critical incidents' as part of my fieldnotes. Critical incidents are "non-routine but very revealing" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2005, p. 310). I therefore recorded a number of these events

that provided an important insight into practice and happenings in the five schools. Field notes were written up within twenty-four hours of all visits to ensure that nothing was lost from the account. These notes also contained reflections and impressions of what was observed along with personal analysis and reflections.

Direct observations were supplemented by interviews with the six students whose perceptions on their experiences were the focus of this study. Using interviews as a methodology is considered at this point.

Interviews

Periods of observation do not reveal all that is happening in specific cases. It is essential to gain the views and interpretations of those who dwell in the case or context. Qualitative researchers use interviews as a means of discovering the "multiple realities" that exist in specific cases but may not be apparent from observation (Stake, 1995, p. 64). The purpose of interviewing students, parents and teachers in this study was to use the data that emerged in them as another lens through which to analyse the experiences of students with MGLD in mainstream schools. The interviews had a significant contribution to make when it came to answering the research questions posed earlier. They yielded rich sources of comparable data across a range of schools. They complemented the data collected from periods of observation in schools. One of the key characteristics of the qualitative interview according to Kvale (1996) is that the lived world of the interviewee and how they perceive this world, dominates. This is in keeping with the philosophical notion of critical realism as outlined in this thesis.

The format of Interviews in this study was semi-structured where all students and a number of parents and teachers had an individual face-to-face meeting with me. There were exceptions in this regard. There were two students in one school and so they participated in joint interviews. Their SNAs did likewise. Open-ended questions were asked. These have a number of advantages for researchers. They are flexible and allow the interviewer to probe where necessary in more detail on a specific topic or theme. The use of this form of questioning, as highlighted in the literature review is favoured when interviewing students with MGLD as it prevents "acquiescence" (Porter and Lacey, 2005, p. 98). This form of questioning encourages a sense of rapport and cooperation between both parties who engage in the interview process. With this format of interview the interviewee is allowed "to develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher" (Denscombe, 2004, p. 167). Rodgers (1999) provides safeguards to ensure that respondent's replies are valid. Over a three-year period she consulted with thirty adults with GLD on health related matters. She incorporated a number of interviewing techniques that helped to ensure that participants could speak freely and not feel that they had to 'acquiesce' to please the researcher. At times she rephrased questions or asked questions in more than one way. Rather than asking questions she asked the interviewees to tell stories on relevant aspects of their lives. There were other times when she used coloured photographs from magazines when she wanted people to talk on a given topic. She also felt on other occasions that little input was required from the researcher and instead permitted the use of self-directed reflection by the interviewee.

Interviews have to take account of the student's communication ability. In this study a compendium of methods were incorporated in interviews that suited the

interests, age, maturity and communication ability of the interviewee. The following were strategies used to make the interview process more suitable for students with MGLD:

Significant People

Rodgers (1999) recommended having carers or significant others to articulate the views of those who have limited powers of communication. As this study was about hearing the personal views of students themselves, I tried not to rely on adults to interpret what participants said. There were a small number of occasions when I looked for clarification from SNAs and teachers to confirm the views of a student.

Photos

Stalker (1998) incorporated photos as an aid when interviewing residents with GLD who lived in institutions. They brought the researcher on a "guided tour" of the institution and the photos were developed and subsequently used in interviews to promote conversation. Booth and Booth (1996) supplied the research participants with disposable cameras and they were encouraged to take photos over a period of time. Interviewers allowed students to talk on their photos. Others researchers recommended a "concrete frame of reference" as a stimulus for conversation (Porter and Lacey, 2005, p. 98).

Games

The inclusion of games within the context of interviews was also incorporated in a number of research studies where people with GLD participated. Begley (2002) incorporated a 'posting activity' as part of her research when looking at the self-perception of children with Down Syndrome. She made use of three post-boxes that had clock faces affixed with graduated shading. The clocks indicated; 'all of the time', 'some of the time' and 'none of the time'. Pupils were shown pictures of children in various school situations for example: reading, playing, and painting. The researcher asked the student to place the picture in the correct post-box to indicate their perception of each activity. Clear statements were used as prompts for example; "You like reading 'all of the time', 'some of the time' or 'none of the time'". A game similar to this was incorporated in this study (Appendix 9).

Game 2

The pupil's involvement in school activities was photographed during a week of observation. Photos were arranged in rows of four on the table. The student was given two bundles of smiley and grumpy faces. He placed the 'grumpy' face on photos of activities that he disliked. He placed the 'smiley' face on photos of activities that he liked. The completed activity was digitally photographed. (Appendix 9).

Puppet

In the literature review chapter, I outlined how researchers use puppets successfully when interviewing young people. In this study I made use of 'Toby' – a hand held tortoise puppet when interviewing Nathan. A picture of Toby is contained in Appendix 7. During interviews I pretended that Toby was asking me questions that he wanted me to put to Nathan. The following statements described how this worked: *'Toby says he hates running out in the field! How do you feel about running out in the field? Toby says he loves writing in his book! How do you feel about writing in your book?'*

Validity of Responses

Denscombe (2003, p. 301) explains validity in a very broad sense as proof that the data and research methods employed in the course of a research study are true. In relation to the data, validity is concerned with whether or not the data "reflect the truth, reflect reality and cover the crucial matters". Central to this also is the assurance that can be provided by the researcher that the methods employed and the data and findings are accurate and honest.

Validity needs to be accounted for in any research study. Methods need to be incorporated that promote validity thus ensuring "that people's lives, experiences and views are represented accurately (Rodgers, 1999, p. 425). Atkinson (1988) emphasises the importance of 'informants' in validating the views of people with GLD. These are close acquaintances of the interviewee who should be in a position to confirm the reliability of expressed viewpoints. These people are also very helpful at providing contextual information and biographical information that may otherwise go unheard due to the person's difficulties at articulating this knowledge. The help of these people may also be needed where comments are not readily understood due to inarticulate speech. However, this may breach a promise of confidentiality. It may be necessary to ask the interviewee's permission to check out some information that has been confusing for the researcher.

Validity is increased if answers are probed for examples and further details required from respondents. Observations in situations described by the interviewee also foster greater validity (Rodgers, 1999). It is important that the researcher carefully validates the views expressed. There are two ways according to Silverman (1993) that permit researchers to validate the findings in qualitative studies. These involve the use of triangulation and respondent validation. Triangulation involves looking at data that is obtained from different sources and methods and analysis is used to determine if findings corroborate or are similar in various contexts. Grove (1999, p. 192) encourages researchers to use "other sources of evidence" in support of interpretations. Respondent validation happens if the findings are presented to the interviewees or research participants and verification sought to ensure that they are

in agreement with the researcher's interpretation. Miles and Huberman (1994) also favour participant verification and claim that this is an effective method for researchers to verify and confirm their findings. They consider this practice as showing respect to participants. They further suggest that the research findings should be presented to the participants in a format that is accessible and easy, to understand. Other writers have suggested a number of scenarios and methods that allow for this to happen. Rodgers (1999) supports the adoption of methods that allow participants to criticise or confirm findings as written following interviews. The findings need to be grounded in the everyday reality of participants and allowances must be inbuilt that allow for confirmation of my interpretations of their experience.

Papadopoulos, Scanlon and Lees (2002) and Booth and Booth (1996) suggest that the use of reconstructed stories can be effectively used as a means of validating responses. Here, the researchers construct a story based on the findings from several interviews and asks for verification. They use segments of data from interviews and data obtained from multiple sources to construct a story that gives an indication of life in general for those with disabilities. Participants are given the opportunity to hear the stories, identify themselves with the content and theme, and to possibly expand on the story from their own experience. They may also provide more specific instances from their own lives to confirm the central themes of the stories. Papadopoulos et al. (2002) claim that this is a user-friendly form of validation for respondents in research studies but that it also serves as a means of demonstrating rigour in the means of analysis. There are limitations to this means of verification. There is a chance that the stories may be biased in containing only the themes that the researcher wants to put forward.

Verification

The young people shared in a number of interviews as outlined in Table 3, including one in which they talked about their photographs. At the beginning of each interview I produced a verification sheet for the interviewee to check and keep (Appendix 8). This contained a brief summary of what transpired in the previous interview. The purpose here was to allow the person interviewed to confirm that my interpretation of responses were accurate. Clicker Five software was used to insert images in text. This, hopefully, allowed for greater understanding among participants. It also allowed the interviewees to verify the accuracy of transcripts and therefore increase the validity of data. The whole process of interviewing was audio recorded.

Interviews with adults were similarly recorded and were transcribed within forty-eight hours, after the interview had taken place. A typed version of the interview was posted to the interviewee and they were asked to check the transcript for accuracy. If they asked for amendments to be made their wishes were taken on board. Taped interviews were also downloaded to my own personal computer. This ensured that there was a hard copy and an electronic back up copy of all interviews. This safeguard concerning the organisation and storage of data provided a clear audit trail. The data was stored on my college computer and hard copies of tapes were stored in a locked drawer in my college office.

All of the interviews with the students were held in their schools, in a quiet room and with an adult present, usually an SNA. The adults were asked to remain silent

during interviews and not to offer prompts or suggestions to students. Having another adult present when engaging in private meetings with individual students is recommended as good practice by the teachers' union (INTO, 1991). I was conscious of being a male stranger, visiting schools and felt that adherence to this guideline would act as a safeguard against any allegation of misconduct on my part as a researcher. Parents were allowed to select their preferred location for interviews. Two parents invited me to their homes, one selected a restaurant and the remainder chose to be interviewed in their son or daughter's school.

Participants

The desired participants in this study needed to be attending mainstream schools and aged less than eighteen years. It was therefore important to secure permission from their parent, guardian or caring organisation to which they were in receipt of a service. In Ireland this permission is a requirement before young people under the age of eighteen can participate in a research study. It took eighteen months of networking formally and informally before I sourced five potential case study sites and informants.

The 'gatekeepers' that I initially approached were a large Voluntary Organisations, where I worked previously as a primary school teacher. Gatekeepers assume the role of protector and guardian of students who have GLD. Researchers have to mediate with them in order to include some of their charges in research projects. Heath, Charles, Crow and Wiles (2007) believe that gatekeepers of clients attached to large organisations sometimes 'overprotect' their children. There are a

number of reasons suggested by Heath et al. (2007) to explain why gatekeepers in large organisations deny the participation of persons in research. These include:

- Pressures of time and institutional inconvenience

- Reluctance to expose quasi-private worlds to public scrutiny

- The inappropriateness of a proposed research topic and or its methods

Negotiating Access

In June of 2006 my challenge began at sourcing five participants with MGLD who would share their experiences of mainstream school. It was to be a long struggle and not what I expected. My intention was to have five manageable case studies within a tight geographical area. I had set a number of criteria that would assist in defining the field of enquiry:

- Students would have MGLD and enrolled in mainstream primary or second level schools.

- Students would be attending mainstream schools in 5th, 6th classes (Primary) and 1st, 2nd years (Post Primary).

- Schools should be accessible to public transport.

I therefore met with the research director of the voluntary organisation in May 2006 to outline my research intention. He was enthusiastic and directed me to submit a full proposal and to complete a mandatory ethics form. This was duly completed. A subsequent meeting was held between the ethics committee of this Organisation and myself in October of 2006. They were all enthusiastic that this study should proceed and set a number of conditions for me to adhere to:

- Secure a Certificate of Garda Clearance, which stated that there were no records of child mistreatment or abuse held against me.

- Clearly acknowledge the limitations of the sample.

- Be sensitive in relation to the pupil and that of other pupils while observing.

My research proposal was amended to give assurance that the later two points would be adhered to when conducting research. However, obtaining a Garda Clearance Certificate was to take a further three months. In January 2007 this certificate was furnished with the Organisation and now I had fulfilled all of their conditions. They asked me to liaise with their Inclusion Officer. The Inclusion Officer sent letters on my behalf to parents requesting their assistance with my study. Attendance at an after-school club run by this Liaison Officer was granted. All efforts at sourcing participants were unsuccessful at this stage.

In September 2007 the Director of Special Education in the college where I now work agreed that I could circulate resource teachers in a new attempt at sourcing a research sample of students. The teachers concerned had completed a Graduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs in this college within two years past. Again using my original selection criteria a total of twenty-five schools were identified as having potential research participants. Formal letters were sent to the resource teachers and their principals. Ten teachers who replied stated that they had no suitable candidate on their caseloads. Three other teachers indicated that they could put me in contact with potential participants. I subsequently decided to rely on my own personal contacts to source four other case study sites. This final effort solved my problem.

The Informal Approach

Given the difficulties as outlined in this chapter so far I subsequently spoke with a number of teachers and lecturers working in special education in various schools and colleges. I outlined the problems that I was experiencing. This proved to be a more fortuitous strategy at locating supportive gatekeepers and prospective research participants. Fortunately one teacher and one lecturer put me in contact with two sets of parents who had children that met the requirements of this study. One year later I had finally sourced two participants who would help me to pilot my interview techniques. It took another six months before I had a final sample. A personal friend who is the parent of a daughter with Down Syndrome put me in contact with Alice and her family. A teacher colleague who was a student on the Graduate Diploma Course in SEN put me in touch with Aaron and his family. The four other student participants and their families were sourced through informal contacts that I had with two lecturers in special education from another college. I set out to source five students but in the end I had six students as there were two in one school and both were willing to participate. Three students were in primary schools and three were in post-primary schools. I had students from a range of different educational settings, all coming from a wider geographical area than what I originally planned for or envisioned. This would enhance the quality and depth of this study. The following insertion provides a brief description of the six participants. More extensive information is given in Appendix (1).

Aaron

Aaron was fourteen years of age and had Prader Willi Syndrome. He attended a mainstream primary school. He was currently in sixth class and was ready to transfer to a second level school. He spent periods during the day in a special class that existed in his school. There were four hundred students in his school and sixty per-cent were newcomers from other countries. He lived at home with his parents and had an older brother and sister. He liked to follow a definite routine each day. He was interested in everything to do with machinery.

Shelly

Shelly was fifteen years of age and had Down Syndrome. She was in second year in a large community college that had over six hundred students enrolled. She was in the lowest stream in her year and was following the Junior Certificate Schools Programme. She had access to a resource teacher at intervals during the day and also received assistance from a Learning Support teacher. For the majority of classes she joined a mainstream class with nine other students. She will do her Junior Certificate exam at the end of the next academic year. She lived at home with her parents and she had a number of brothers and sisters. She liked sports and listening to music.

Alice

Alice was fourteen years of age and had Down Syndrome. She lived in a rural town in the midlands of Ireland. She was in sixth class in a twelve-teacher school. She received one to one tuition each day for an hour from a resource teacher. In addition she was withdrawn for one hour each evening when an SNA did specific schoolwork with her. For the rest of the school day she participated in a class of thirty students with one teacher and no SNA. She was ready to transfer to second level education at this point like all of the others in her class. She lived at home with her parents and had an older brother and sister. She liked sports, going to the cinema and listening to music.

Kevin and Noel

Kevin was eighteen and Noel was seventeen years of age. Both had Down Syndrome and were best friends and had been in school together since Junior Infants. They attended a large Community College that had over one thousand pupils enrolled. They participated in mixed-ability classes and were currently in third year. The school operated a reduced timetable for students with SEN. This resulted in both Kevin and Noel spending study periods in other rooms apart from their mainstream peers for a considerable proportion of each day. They were not doing the Junior Certificate like all of the other students in their year. The school had just introduced an alternative programme of work for them (ASDAN). Both boys lived at home with their parents. Kevin was an only child whereas Noel had other brothers and sisters. They both loved participating in Special Olympic's clubs.

Nathan

Nathan was thirteen years of age and had Down Syndrome. He was enrolled in a special class specifically for students with MGLD that formed part of a mainstream primary school. There were nine other young people in the special class aged from nine to thirteen. He was due to spend one more year in the primary school and would then transfer to a second level school where a similar special class was in existence. He lived at home with his mother and was an only child. He loved football and joined mainstream children in his school for training in this at least once every week.

Figure 1:   Figure 1: Participant Profiles

Piloting of Interviews: Young People

Over the summer of 2007 I shared three interviews with two students who had

MGLD. The interviews were conducted in the children's homes and over a period of

time when they were on school holidays. I incorporated some of the research tools that have been discussed in this chapter as being appropriate for use when interviewing students with MGLD. The following were the lessons learnt from the piloting and were borne in mind when conducting the interviews for the main study:

- Have an agreed protocol between the researcher and the other adult present in the room.

- Avoid using a schedule of questions when interviewing students. Allow the interview to be open and relaxed and look for information on various themes that are relevant to the research questions.

- Conduct interviews in the natural setting that the student is expected to talk about.

- Incorporate concrete frames of reference that may encourage enhanced dialogue on the part of students.

- Allow for spontaneity. The student should be given opportunities to initiate topics.

- Spend a greater amount of time with students and observe their involvement in a range of different situations and activities.

A number of themes emerged in the literature and these were confirmed in the analysis of the pilot interviews as follows:

- Self Identity of students.

- Curriculum on offer in schools.

- Social Relationships and friendships with their peers.

- Support provision within class

- Leisure activities.

I decided to pursue these themes further when interviewing the students in the larger study.

Data Collection

The following table outlines the entire data collection process that forms part of this study. Pseudonyms are used to conceal the true identity of participants. With a similar intention the real names are not used in naming schools.

Table 5:   Overview of Data Collection Process

Aaron	
22nd-28th November 2007	School Observation
7th December	1st Interview
14th December	2nd Interview
17th December	3rd Interview
28th January 2008	Photovoice Interview
28th January	Interview with SNA, Special Class Teacher, Principal and School Secretary.
12th February	Interview with Aaron's mother
30th May	Closure\Gifts
Shelly	
21st-25th January 2008	School Observation
31st January	1st Interview
6th February	2nd Interview
18th February	3rd Interview
10th March	Photovoice Interview
10th March	Interview SNA, Resource Teacher, Mainstream teacher
28th May	Interview LS Teacher - Closure\Gifts.
30th May	Interview with both parents in Shelly's home
Alice	
3rd-7th March	School Observation
7th March	Joint interview, both parents
14th March	1st Interview
3rd April	2nd Interview with Alice, Class Teacher
8th April	3rd Interview with Alice, Principal and Resource Teacher
28th April	Photovoice Interview
23rd May	Closure\Gift

Kevin and Noel	
28th April – 2nd May	School Observation
6th May	1st Interview
12th May	2nd Interview
19th May	3rd Interview
26th May	Photovoice Interview
26th May	Interviews: SNAs (joint), 2 Resource Teachers (joint), and Year Head
5th June	Interview both mothers (joint)
5th June	Closure\Gifts
Nathan	
3rd –6th, 9th June	School Observation
10th June	1st Interview with Nathan
18th June	2nd Interview
23rd June	3rd Interview, Special Class Teacher and SNA
27th June	Photovoice Interview, Mother and Closure/Gifts

Data Analysis

Having transcribed close to forty interviews along with observational notes, there was a considerable amount of data. This section gives an outline of the strategies adopted to perform an analysis of the entire data. There were two stages in the analysis of data. In stage one, prior to looking for themes I constructed five case studies to get a holistic picture of the young people's experiences. These five case studies can be found in Appendix 1.

In stage two of data analysis I decided to provide in-depth analysis on four themes. This approach is recommended by Maykut and Morehouse (2004) where they encourage researchers to identify the most prominent and relevant outcomes. The study's findings are presented and discussed with reference to the literature. The data is organised using four salient themes that emerged from the literature and during content analysis: identity and sense of self, friendship, curriculum\pedagogy and transition. It is hoped that the main 'voice' that emerges when considering each

theme is that of the student participants. In order for this to happen I have included many quotes from the young participants throughout as a way of giving them a 'voice'. These are supplemented by the views of other people who know and work with them but these are subordinate to the students' voices. The researcher's point of view is included in the interpretation of the four themes. These themes are analysed initially on the part of students and subsequently from an adult's point of view.

Following transcription, there was written data that could be analysed to determine themes. My evidence for the predetermined themes was identified using a colour coding system as recommended by Creswell (2003). The interviews were broken into "chunks" and the colour code attributed to the various chunks indicated the themes (Yin, 2003; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The colour codes in this study can be described as "descriptive codes" as they are basically an indication of "the attribution of a class of phenomena to a segment of text" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 56). The application of colour codes to transcribed data is likened to templates or bins that facilitate data analysis (Robson, 2006). This process is also referred to as "unitising" of data (Denscombe, 2003, p. 271). An extract of coded data is to be found in the Appendices section of this thesis (Appendices 4 and 5). It is recommended that the researcher should focus on five to seven themes when writing up findings (Creswell, 2003). The pupils' views on these various themes will be reported under separate headings and contain "multiple perspectives" from those who participated in the study (Creswell, 2003, p. 194).

As an aid to data analysis Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 57) recommend the use of a "start list" of codes prior to the commencement of any fieldwork. Robson (2006,

p. 458) likewise recommends the use of key codes determined on a "priori" basis having strong links to the research questions. In this research the list of codes or 'start lists' were the themes identified in the literature and these were confirmed as being centrally important to students' experiences of inclusion.

By the end of July 2008 all of my data was transcribed and ready for analysis. A colleague from the special education department in the college where I work agreed to cooperate with me in the initial stages of this process. We both independently read a completed set of data for Alice, one of the participants in this study. This included all observation notes, transcript of adult and student interviews, field notes and reflections. I did not provide my colleague with a list of the themes.

After a week we came together and compared the themes that surfaced for both of us while reading through the data. We both came up with similar themes though different terminology and wording may have been used. In addition to the pre-determined themes, my colleague also listed the following additional themes: second level, benefits from mainstream school, losses in mainstream school and attitude of teachers and other students in mainstream schools. We compared our chosen themes, discussed similarities and differences and then agreed on a set of eight themes that stood out for both of us in the entire data collected concerning Alice. Each theme was given a particular colour from a selection of fluorescent highlighter markers.

I proceeded to code all of the data for the remaining participants in a similar way using the identified themes as listed on Table 6. During this phase of colour coding it became necessary to supplement my existing number of themes by adding two more: difficult learning situations and bullying.

Table 6:   Colour Codes and Themes Used in This Study

Colour	Theme	Definition
	Inclusion	Participation in the cultures, curricula and communities of local schools (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan and Shaw, 2000).
Yellow	Friendship	"A continuing relationship based on social contact and shared leisure time, mutual help and emotional attachment" (Wilmott,1986, p. 35).
Green	Curriculum	What young people have to learn in school and how this is organised into different areas and fields of learning (Corbett and Norwich, 2005).
	Isolation	Noticeable circumstances and periods of time when the student is alone in school (Pijl, 2007).
Orange	Personal Identity	One's perception of their self-worth and self (Zeleke, 2004)
	School Supports	Learning Support, Resource Teaching and SNAs.
	Transition	Transfer to post primary school.
	Difficult Learning Situations	Situations that make learning difficult for students.
Brown	Bullying	Victimisation that children experience in school (White and Loeber, 2008)

All of the data was read several times and was colour coded. The following were the strong themes that emerged:

- Inclusion

- Friendship

- Curriculum

- Personal Identity

- Transition

- School Supports

There was an amount of overlap where certain data could be colour coded under two or more themes. One example serves as an illustration in this regard. Experiences of isolation could be coded under friendship, curriculum or personal

identity. Further analyses of data lead me to 'collapse' these nine themes into four major themes: Identity and Self-Worth, Friendship, Curriculum\Pedagogy and Transition. These were the themes that occurred most frequently in the data and therefore were used as major headings when writing up findings. On a glance of the entire colour coded themes these were the ones that stood out as being significant. The other themes such as inclusion, isolation, school supports, bullying could be considered also under these four main themes. The perceptions of each student concerning these themes are presented in the findings of this study. Data that had no relevance to the above themes was not coded.

The second research question in this study asks:

- What research methods allow students with MGLD to express their views?

In order to answer this question a number of different strategies referred to earlier in this chapter were incorporated in each interview. As part of my analysis of data these strategies are reviewed in Chapter Five concerning their effectiveness and potential.

Trustworthiness

The onus rests with the researcher to ensure that any data that emerges is credible or "trustworthy" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To ensure "trustworthiness" in the data that emerges it necessitates rigorous safeguards to be put in place. The notion of "prolonged engagement" is one such safeguard (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Sufficient time should be spent in each case so that the researcher becomes familiar with the entire complexities of the situation under observation. Affirmation of interviews in the form of "verification statements"(Lincoln and Guba, 1985) or "member checks" (Stake, 1995) also increases the trustworthiness of data. I have

written previously in this chapter regarding verification techniques used in this study that complied with these safeguards. Triangulation also featured heavily in this research. Data from a number of sources was recorded before any analytical statements were arrived at. The advice from my research committee also served as a "critical friend". They challenged my methods, findings and conclusions. All were experienced researchers in their own right. Stenhouse (1988, p. 52) advises that trustworthiness is also increased with the accumulation of a substantial "case record". All field notes, records from observations, transcripts of interviews were retained. This data trail remains available as supporting documentation and can be used to verify findings if challenged to do so.

Ethical Considerations

Before making contact with schools or parents an application for approval of a project involving human participants was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. The applications involved an outline of the study, lay descriptions of aims and purpose and assurances that the interests of all participants would be protected. After approval was given from the Research Ethics Committees I initiated contact with potential participants.

As with adults, children should not be forced to take part in research if they would rather not (Clough and Barton 1998). They had the right to refuse involvement on hearing what was involved in the process. Parents or significant carers, termed proxies, made the initial decision regarding participation. A letter was sent to the parents of participating students giving them full details of what involvement entailed for their son and daughter.

Participation was on going for the five participants. At the start of each interview I showed them an illustrated consent form (Appendix 3). They circled the appropriate images to indicate a willingness to participate. During interviews there were two signs on the table indicating 'stop' and 'go'. Students were familiarised as to how these could be used to terminate an interview or to allow it to proceed.

The research question guiding this study called on me to spend time in a number of schools in order to observe students with MGLD. Qualitative methods were best suited to provide information to answer the research questions. My primary concern was with description and interpretation rather than measurement and prediction. The evidence that emerged from this research was presented in qualitative form with direct quotations and thick descriptions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Given the heterogeneity of this group of students and the differences in their various school contexts it was felt that the human as instrument was the most flexible data collection tool by which to probe, describe, interpret and analyse their experiences (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Robson, 2006).

Opinions differ about the desirability of giving participants small presents in recognition of their assistance (Hill, 2006). The prospects of a reward can motivate young people to participate in research (Punch, 2002). The participants in this study were not informed that participation would result in a reward. At the end of his or her involvement each student received a gift voucher to the value of forty euro or two DVDs. This gesture was intended as a token of appreciation for their assistance

with my research. Hill (2006) maintains that unannounced rewards do not count as incentives.

Summary

This chapter offers a rationale for selecting case study methodology, describes the methods used for data collection and outlines the strategy for data analysis. It explores a number of ethical considerations associated with this study.

The next chapter provides in-depth analysis and discussion on the findings of the present study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

A focus of this study was to explore the perceptions of students with MGLD in mainstream schools in relation to their social and educational experiences. A number of visits were made to five mainstream schools over a seven-month period collecting data. Data was gathered from observations and interviews. In this chapter the main findings in this study are discussed under four distinct themes: identity and sense of self, friendship, curriculum\pedagogy and transition, as identified in the literature review. In keeping with the research question, in the presentation of findings, the main focus is on the 'voice' of the pupils and the findings for the pupils' perceptions are presented first. The adults who participated in this study contribute additional information on the experiences of students regarding each theme and these are also included in this chapter. These are overlapping themes and a summary at the end draws together the relationship between them. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the various methods deployed in the study.

To set the context for the presentation and discussion of the findings, a brief reminder of the profiles of each of the six participants is provided in the repeated insert that follows, with further information in Appendix (1).

Aaron

Aaron was fourteen years of age and had Prader Willi Syndrome. He attended a mainstream primary school. He was currently in sixth class and was ready to transfer to a second level school. He spent periods during the day in a special class that existed in his school. There were four hundred students in his school and sixty per-cent were newcomers from other countries. He lived at home with his parents and had an older brother and sister. He liked to follow a definite routine each day. He was interested in everything to do with machinery.

Shelly

Shelly was fifteen years of age and had Down Syndrome. She was in second year in a large community college that had over six hundred students enrolled. She was in the lowest stream in her year and was following the Junior Certificate Schools Programme. She had access to a resource teacher at intervals during the day and also received assistance from a Learning Support teacher. For the majority of classes she joined a mainstream class with nine other students. She will do her Junior Certificate exam at the end of the next academic year. She lived at home with her parents and she had a number of brothers and sisters. She liked sports and listening to music.

Alice

Alice was fourteen years of age and had Down Syndrome. She lived in a rural town in the midlands of Ireland. She was in sixth class in a twelve-teacher school. She received one to one tuition each day for an hour from a resource teacher. In addition she was withdrawn for one hour each evening when an SNA did specific schoolwork with her. For the rest of the school day she participated in a class of thirty students with one teacher and no SNA. She was ready to transfer to second level education at this point like all of the others in her class. She lived at home with her parents and had an older brother and sister. She liked sports, going to the cinema and listening to music.

Kevin and Noel

Kevin was eighteen and Noel was seventeen years of age. Both had Down Syndrome and were best friends and had been in school together since Junior Infants. They attended a large Community College that had over one thousand pupils enrolled. They participated in mixed-ability classes and were currently in third year. The school operated a reduced timetable for students with SEN. This resulted in both Kevin and Noel spending study periods in other rooms apart from their mainstream peers for a considerable proportion of each day. They were not doing the Junior Certificate like all of the other students in their year. The school had just introduced an alternative programme of work for them (ASDAN). Both boys lived at home with their parents. Kevin was an only child whereas Noel had other brothers and sisters. They both loved participating in Special Olympic's clubs.

Nathan

Nathan was thirteen years of age and had Down Syndrome. He was enrolled in a special class specifically for students with MGLD that formed part of a mainstream primary school. There were nine other young people in the special class aged from nine to thirteen. He was due to spend one more year in the primary school and would then transfer to a second level school where a similar special class was in existence. He lived at home with his mother and was an only child. He loved football and joined mainstream children in his school for training in this at least once every week.

Figure 2:   Participant Profiles

Theme One: Identity and Sense of Self

Student Perspective

One of the aims of this study was to examine the perspectives of students with MGLD in mainstream schools. Their 'insider perspectives' and 'insider knowledge' were afforded recognition, as they were the only ones who could give a true account of what schools were like for those students with MGLD. They were a vulnerable group as they came to school with a "dominant identifying label" and this immediately set them apart from the majority of other students (Beart, Hardy and Buchan, 2005, p. 49). In the Literature Review I made reference to a number of studies that looked at the self-concept of students with disabilities in schools. Cambra and Silvestre (2003) suggested that students with SEN have a positive self-concept but one that is relatively lower than that of their peers. The six participants in this study appeared to have a very positive self-concept. It was not possible for me to administer assessments to test this hypothesis due to time constraints. However the data collected supports the view that these students had a good perception of their own self worth in school. I asked each student to tell me about the things they were best at in school. Most of them selected sports as an area where they excelled and had opportunities to show that they were equal to their peers. Alice participated in team sports on a regular basis and she explained how this made her feel:

> *Researcher (R):*   *Alice, what are you the best at in school?*
> *Alice (A):*   *I'm the best at football.*
> *R:*   *Anything else?*
> *A:*   *Basketball* (Transcript 1).

One month after this initial interview Alice participated in a second one. Again she chose to emphasise her achievements and the sense of well being that she derived from her sporting pursuits.

R:	*What nice things did you do with teacher?*
A:	*am....... Rounders.*
R:	*......, you like rounders?*
Alice:	*Yes.*
R:	*Did you do any more nice things?*
A:	*Yes, basketball*
R:	*Did you score any baskets?*
A:	*Yes.*
R:	*How many?*
A:	*About one hundred* (Transcript 3).

The school celebrated her achievements on winning medals in Special Olympics. She was allowed to show these in every classroom. The principal believed that *"She possibly saw these victories as indicators of her enhanced standing in comparison to her peers"* (Transcript 6). However, she received acclaim for her sporting achievements and this was good for her sense of self.

Similarly, Nathan selected sports as activities that made him feel good about himself. In his second interview he took great pride in producing a medal that he had won two days previously in the annual school sports. He appeared to be extremely proud as he told Toby the tortoise about his victory:

R:	*Toby wants to know how you felt when you won the medal:*
Nathan:	*Happy* (Transcript 38).

Nathan demonstrated his confidence in sports when I observed him participating in football training with the mainstream pupils (Fieldnotes 4-6-08). He also told me that he was eagerly looking forward to participating in a summer camp where he would be the only participant with SEN. It was never a consideration for him that he would not be as able to participate as all of the others. Five students selected sports to demonstrate areas where they could show that they were succeeding in school in

ways equal to or better than their peers. This was a similar finding for Bear, Mink, Griffin and Deemer, (1998) when their research participants with GLD emphasised other areas of strength outside of academic subjects.

Of the six participants, Aaron was the only one who did not select an area of sports to demonstrate his standing in comparison with his peers. Due to his particular syndrome he was unable to participate in physical team sports with his mainstream peers. He possibly understood this and therefore selected an area apart from sports. In all of his interviews he continuously repeated 'penmanship' as the subject in school where he felt extremely capable and proud. Renick and Harter (1989) concluded that students with GLD were capable of making distinctions concerning their capabilities in various subject areas. The contributions given by participants in this study would equally suggest that this was true. Aaron demonstrated this when he selected 'penmanship' along with colouring and reading. He realised that his ability in sporting activities was not a strength of his.

Kevin and Noel had outgoing personalities and they were able to express their likes and dislikes concerning school. They were both very active in Special Olympic clubs outside school but they valued the fact that they participated in sporting activities within school. Kevin said that one of the reasons behind his love for school was: *"I do a lot of sports"* (Transcript 27) and Noel shared this view: *"I like this school because I like PE, as well"* (Transcript 27). The school provided opportunities when the boys were given a chance to feel 'proud' of themselves and of their achievements. The school acknowledged their successes in Special Olympics and presented them with a trophy at an award ceremony in a packed hall of parents

and students. The boys claimed that this was an occasion in which they felt extremely proud. They shared the sense of this happening in an interview:

Kevin:	*That was a long time ago, in our past. That was my first trophy?*
R:	*What happened when the principal gave you the trophy?*
K:	*They do cheering and clapping.*
Noel:	*They were noisy, 'Well done Kevin, Well done Noel'.*
R:	*And how did that make you feel?*
Noel:	*I feel happy, great and famous.*
R:	*And you Kevin?*
Kevin:	*I felt famous and proud* (Transcript 27).

In a similar study to this one, students with a range of disabilities were asked to share their experiences of what it was like to live with a disability and it emerged that the presence of a disability was not paramount for participants (Connors and Stalker, 2007). In a similar way I felt that the participants in this study considered themselves as being no different from their peers. This was despite the fact that a number were in special classes and all of them were constantly supervised by SNAs. At no time did any of the students mention the fact that they had Down Syndrome or a learning disability. For Noel and Kevin, I sensed that there was a clear understanding on their part that they occupied a different position in their large community college compared to their peers. They were aware that they were the only ones not taking Junior Certificate exams and they were certainly aware that their timetable was completely different to that followed by everyone else in the school. I remained unsure whether or not they associated their learning disability with this sense of difference. Kevin explained how this notion of difference prevented him from making contributions in class:

R:	*Do you ask questions in class?*
Kevin:	*Ah no, not really.*

R:	*Why don't you ask questions in class?*
Kevin:	*Because I'm afraid.*
R:	*Why would you be afraid?*
Kevin:	*Because I'm a quiet person.*
R:	*I think you'd be well able to ask questions?*
Kevin:	*Yeah.*
R:	*Did you ever ask a question in class?*
Kevin:	*No*
R:	*Never?*
Kevin:	*Never, because I expect other people to ask the questions.*
R:	*You expect others to ask the questions?*
Kevin:	*Yes, out of respect* (Transcript 27).

I suspected that Kevin had developed an internalised belief that he was different to and less capable than the other students in his class. There was also the possibility that this lead him to retreat from offering any form of spontaneous involvement or comment on what was going on in the class.

From observations in the five schools it was apparent that the schools took initiatives that allowed students with MGLD to achieve success in front of their peers. Shelly had constant charge of the register and would always present this to the various teachers at the start of each lesson. I clearly saw that she welcomed this sense of responsibility and that she took this job most seriously. Another happening occurred during the course of my research in Shelly's school. The President of Ireland had visited the school and Shelly had photos of her presenting flowers on the occasion. Her SNA had captured this happening in a photo and we used the photo as a stimulus for discussion regarding her subjective experience on the day:

R:	*How did you feel when you were presenting the flowers?*
Shelley (S):	*Happy.*
R:	*What did the other boys and girls do as you were giving the flowers to the President?*

S:	*So proud.*
R:	*They were so proud? And what did they do?*
S:	*What did they do?*
R:	*Did they say anything?*
S:	*Hurray, Hurray.* (Transcript 10).

About this time she had also participated as an orphan in the school production of the musical "Annie". Here was another occasion when she was part of a high profile event in the life of the school where her efforts received the acclaim of her peers and this had to be good for her sense of well-being. The school were ensuring that Shelly was involved in school activities and she spoke of these events warmly in interviews. Having various roles to play, Shelly felt that she was no different to all of the other students in the school.

Adult Perspective

The adults who participated in this study never relied on psychological labels to describe the identity of students. Other researchers recorded situations where they visited schools and the label was the sole means used to describe the identity of students (Davis and Watson, 2001). This was not my experience while collecting data. For the most part, the professionals and parents focused on the positive aspects of personalities and also on the unique capabilities of the young people. However, this was not entirely true of all of the adult participants. I will demonstrate in this section how some adults, although not always, continued to base their expectations of these students around stereotypes that often confer a negative sense regarding capabilities whereas others gave a positive account.

Alice's principal highlighted a number of positive attributes of this young girl's identity: *"She gets on very well with people and is hard working. She is affable and easy to deal with"* (Transcript 6). In a similar way Shelly's resource teacher elaborated on the distinct characteristics of Shelly and also on her capabilities. He outlined Shelly's strengths as follows: *"Terrific work ethic. She's willing to engage to learn new stuff and she has a great little way about her. All of those things are positives. She has a terrific memory"* (Transcript 12). This teacher was fully aware of the difficulties Shelly experienced in school but he chose to comment instead on her resilience. She was in the lowest stream and in a class where all of the other students had immense emotional and behavioural difficulties. He went on to state *"she certainly brings something to her class. It is better because she's in the class"* (Transcript 12). He could have used the psychological label to explain how her presence added to the extremities of his teaching situation but instead focused on Shelly's strengths. Another mainstream teacher spoke in a similar way regarding Shelly's personality and identity, as follows: *"She has a positive influence on all of those around her. She brings them into line. At times when some of the others are messing she will let a roar at them saying 'stop messing"* (Transcript 14). There was an acceptance among teachers and SNAs that Shelly contributed positively to the atmosphere of the school with her jovial personality and her capacity to manage situations.

I have indicated previously in this chapter that I believed that three participating students for most of the time appeared not to see any difference between themselves and their peers. Kevin. Noel and Aaron were exceptions in this regard, though in two different schools. Kevin made his realisation known concerning difference when we spoke of curriculum and teaching and this is written under that theme. Kevin and

Noel were totally aware that they were different from the other boys in their mainstream classes. They had developed awareness that the two of them possessed an identity that set them apart from their peers. Certain practices in the school brought them to this realisation, for example, being the only boys who attended Home Economics classes. I observed that they attended PE together but they always joined in activities with the girls. We talked about this as follows in an interview:

R:	You don't play with the boys?
Kevin:	No way.
R:	Why?
Kevin:	Girls are pretty.
R:	Ok, but why would you not play on the boys' team?
Kevin:	Because we don't play with boys any more.
R:	Why?
Kevin	Because the boys are all so rough.
R:	How do you know this?
Noel:	They run very fast and they kick the ball very strong.
R:	And did they ever kick the ball at you?
Kevin:	No.
Noel:	No.
R;	But would you like to play on the boys' team?
Kevin:	Yea.
Noel:	Yea.
R:	Next week will you try and play on the boys' team?
Kevin:	No, not really. Girls are safer (Transcript 27).

There is a definitive 'voice' here regarding the perceptions of Noel and Kevin. They no longer want to play with the boys. They appear not to mind being the only boys in Home Economics classes. However, the practice sets them apart and gives them a totally different identity to all of the other male students in the school. Here the school has been the principal agent in constructing an identity of difference, which is in fact played out in exclusionary practice. Yet, the students are clear that they like

and want this situation. The role adopted by schools in fostering a different sense of identity will be considered further under the theme of 'curriculum and pedagogy'.

Aaron's mother felt from conversations that she had with her son that *"he did not see himself as being 'different' to all the other children"* (Transcript 20). Instead she claimed that he knew he was 'special' and this perception may have developed over the years from going to the 'special' class and due to the fact that he had assistance provided both within school and at home in terms of care provision. This brief point demonstrates how support structures in Aaron's life lead him to believe that he had a 'special' identity. He never spoke in interviews in a way that suggested that the special structures or the special identity that he possessed set him apart from his peers. The only evidence that he saw himself as being different (albeit 'special') was expressed by his mother and not by himself.

Kevin's mother never mentioned her son's sense of difference. However Noel's mother spoke of a procedure that occurred which, for her illustrates how Noel was not made to feel different from other students. The school operated a system where those who arrived late received a 'stamp' in their homework journal. Noel was late on a few occasions and he got some penalty 'stamps' like everyone else. In interviews he showed me these 'stamps' and informed me that if he received any more he would have to remain behind after school for detention. His mother felt that he appreciated the fact that rules and sanctions applied to him equally like all others in the school. This gave him a sense that he had a similar identity to other students. Their parents highlighted the positive features associated with each young persons

identity most frequently. A number of other adult participants had more mixed views regarding identity as outlined in the coming sections.

Parents never emphasised the fact that their son or daughter had a learning disability. They often portrayed them as ordinary young people trying to get along with life. Shelly's father described his daughter *"She's a typical teenager. She'll slam the door or mutter at times"* (Transcript 16). Likewise her mother explained how *"She would tell you everybody's business, she would talk about who was in trouble and what they were doing and the minute you would open the book to help her with homework she would say 'hate that school' but that is only her reaction"* (Transcript 16). In a similar way, Alice was described by her mother as being a *'happy go-lucky outdoors person"* (Transcript 7). Like other participants in this study parents never used what Beart, Hardy and Buchan, (2005) described as the 'dominant identifying label' when they spoke of their young son or daughter's identity. Instead they spoke of their children's personalities and capabilities and the 'psychological labels' rarely entered into the conversations.

Stereotypes and Prejudice

There is a tendency for people to use stereotypes and generalisations when talking about students with disabilities (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007). Of the six students in this study, five were students with Down Syndrome and many people endorsed the stereotype associated with this syndrome (Wishart, 2001). The stereotypical perception of these children, views them as always happy, docile, forever young with a love for music. In another study these characteristics of Down Syndrome children were accepted by such professionals as teachers and

psychologists (Wishart, 2001). Those who accepted this stereotype had low expectations as to the potential for learning among students. A number of complexities were apparent in the data that emerged in this study. While the adults did not think primarily in terms of labels and identified all of the positive characteristics of the students, none the less, they did reinforce stereotypes in other aspects. This attitude was apparent in relation to curricular access where there was a tendency among adults to see the inadequacies in the young people rather than in the school. This betrayed a mindset in keeping with what has been identified in the literature. This may explain why, in this study, many of the adults felt that secondary schooling was far too challenging for students with MGLD. The SNAs felt that much of what was presented in the classes went *"over their heads"* (Transcript 29). One of the resource teachers expressed her perception that *"everything was beyond them"* when she spoke about Kevin and Noel's standing in mainstream classes. Here was a suggestion from the people who were otherwise, the strongest allies for the boys in school and they stated that the context was inappropriate. This point will be addressed further in this chapter when considering the theme of 'curriculum and pedagogy'.

Two other adult participants questioned the suitability of mainstream second level schools for students with MGLD. The principal in Alice's school made reference to the *'plateau'*, which is another stereotype possible, associated with Down Syndrome. He had the view that by this stage in Alice's development *"She had possibly reached a plateau"* (Transcript 6). He suggested that it was wrong to expose her to the pressure of mainstream second level school and felt she would gain significantly more by attending the local special school. The notion of *'plateau'* was

also alluded to by one of Shelly's teachers when he said that: *"I would say at the end of fourth year she will have learned as much as she can from us"* (Transcript 12). Here he was referring to the end of the junior cycle in post-primary school. He went on to state that in his opinion it would be appropriate for her to transfer at that stage to a special school. These professionals were suggesting that there was a point where students with MGLD would no longer benefit from academic learning unlike all other young people.

Further Reflections

In the main, participating schools in this study were including practices where students with MGLD were afforded opportunities in which they received an opportunity to feel confident and good in themselves. I would suggest that this was one of the reasons why the participants enjoyed school and felt that they were enabled to excel like their peers at certain times. Adults for the most part avoided giving credence to the traditional characteristics of students with GLD but there were exceptions in this regard. Instead they chose to describe participants in terms of their achievements and capabilities. The student participants, for the most part, felt that they were just like all of the other students in their school. However, three had reached an understanding and acceptance that there were specific differences between themselves and the others in their school. Kevin, Noel and to a lesser extent Aaron, who were the oldest participants in this study are the ones that I am referring to. Renick and Harter (1989) state that the self-concept of students with GLD deteriorates as they grow older especially when they are in mainstream settings. There was a gap in age between Kevin, Noel and the other participants. This may suggest that their self-concept had lowered since they entered second level school.

Schools need to be mindful of not creating structures and practices that draw negative attention towards pupils with MGLD. Watson (2002) suggests that we learn who we are by the abstract symbols that are in existence. Kevin and Noel had restricted opportunities in which they could participate in mainstream classes. This possibly reinforced the traditional negative identity ascribed to pupils with MGLD in the past. The social experience afforded to students in school is important in the formation of self-concept (Zeleke, 2004). From my own observations it would seem that the structures that existed in certain schools helped to construct an identity of difference, which was synonymous with exclusion. Where students followed different timetables, received their education apart from the majority of students, were not undertaking the same exams as all others, this helped to create a sense of difference. In the other schools, practices were incorporated where students with MGLD were allowed to achieve and demonstrate their abilities in many ways in inclusive settings for the most part.

Theme Two: Friendship

The second theme 'friendship' is linked to the notion of sense of self and that of identity. One's sense of identity is determined by social experiences (Zeleke, 2004). This could possibly suggest that the more positive encounters that students with MGLD experience in terms of friendships, this would have a direct influence on their self-worth. The importance of 'friendship' is considered under the following theme.

In the present study Meyer's framework (2001) was used to assess the nature of friendship as perceived by the six participating students. The use of this framework made it possible to see whether young people without disabilities treated the student

with MGLD as a ghost or visitor, set different expectations for them, treated them as all others or at times treated them as a best friend or a regular friend. In using this framework Meyer intended that teachers record the various frames that students experience over time. It was also her intention that these recordings would be analysed among professionals in the school and allow for discussion as to how the situation could be improved. A strength associated with the application of this framework is that it permits the use of both observational data and interviews with students and others. It also does not rely on sociometric nominations which when used provide a rather narrow insight into friendships in schools. A shortcoming in this framework by Meyer is that it places no importance on the friendship that develop between students, all of whom have a disability. In this study these friendships were observed as being very significant for participants.

An additional framework developed by Allan (1997) was also used in the analysis. Similar to Meyer, Allan used observation and interviews as a means of investigating the nature of friendship between students with and without disabilities. Allan (1997) highlights what she calls 'governmentality' that exists in mainstream schools. By this term she means that those without disabilities are interested in helping, protecting and making allowances for those with GLD. This study would indicate that this was not an overt feature in the schools that I visited and especially in the second level schools. I suspect that Allan's study, which took place in Scotland operated within a different context. The presence of SNAs was not reported on in Allan's study. For participants in my study, the SNAs were in close proximity at all times in the day, to students with MGLD. This possibly negated the sense of 'governmentality' that Allan had identified as in existence in Scottish schools.

My reason for selecting these frameworks is that they both stress the importance of interviewing research participants on their experiences of friendship and therefore support the notion of 'student voice'. In combining the two frameworks, one has a clear means for evaluating the type of friendship experienced by the participants in this study. This study aimed at giving 'voice' to a vulnerable group and both frameworks permit this to happen. In the 'further reflections' section at the conclusion of this theme I will consider the adequacy of both frameworks.

Student Perspectives

The six students in this study appeared to be accepted by their mainstream peers in the five separate schools. However when I say accepted it was in certain cases as superficial as 'mere salutations'. This was especially apparent in the cases of Kevin and Noel. As they moved from class to class in their school, they saluted other students and staff members and usually received a reply but the conversations rarely went further. They were constantly in the company of their two SNAs and this may have prevented others from entering into conversation as they viewed them as having company already. I observed that this happened at other times in their school. The following extract from my fieldnotes illustrates the situation:

First Incident

9.40 am, Kevin and Noel are working on their ASDAN modules in the Learning support room. They are making greeting cards for their parents. They are required to select google images from their computer. There is another female student in the room working, independently on the computer. The boys frequently look over at her. She leaves the room for a short while. On her return both boys say "Hi, Margaret". She replies "Hi", sits down and resumes her work (Fieldnote 1.5.08).

Meyer (2001) outlined how many students with GLD in mainstream schools, never experience encounters that go beyond mere salutations. An alternative practice in Shelly's school encouraged dialogue between her peers and herself. To promote her independence, Shelly's SNA no longer walked with her on the corridors. In the course of one week as an observer I shadowed her as she made her way to various classes and overheard her comments to teachers such as *"Hello Miss, I like your hair"* (Fieldnote 22.1.08). A few more steps along the corridor she was greeted by an older male student:

Boy:	*Shelly, what class have you now?*
Shelly:	*RE.*
Boy:	*With whom?*
Shelly:	*Miss Madigan.*
Boy:	*Will you be talking about God?*
Shelly:	*Yeah, God.*

Shelly's experience would not go along with Meyer's hypothesis. Shelly appeared to walk with confidence as she made her way about the school. It appeared that she enjoyed a level of interaction with the other students in the school. This went beyond mere salutations and in the majority of instances observed, it was not Shelly who initiated the conversation. The following sections present more evidence concerning the nature of friendships as experienced by the participants:

'I'll help you Child'

In the course of this study I observed no instance where mainstream pupils undertook a 'pedagogic role' (Allan, 1997). These pupils were never asked to assist those students who had a MGLD with their work. This role appeared to be exclusively for the SNA and teacher. This was regrettable as research conducted by Spooner, Dymond, Smith and Kennedy, 1996), though American based,

demonstrated that peer support proved successful in helping students with GLD to have access to the general curriculum. This will be considered further under the next theme in this chapter. There were however, rare instances in this study when mainstream pupils provided assistance for students with MGLD in social situations. I observed this happening in Alice's school on two occasions as outlined in the following two recordings from my fieldnotes:

Second Incident

> *A book fair arrived on the fourth day of my time as an observer in the school. Alice and her classmates went over to view this display in the school hall. One girl spontaneously selected a book for Alice and brought it over to her. It was all about "High School Musical" which was a Disney film that was very popular among, possibly, twelve year olds. Alice was delighted and she sat down to browse through this book. The other girl knew that this film was a favourite of Alice as she always wore a "High School Musical" pendant around her neck* (Fieldnote 6.2.08).

It was possible that the girl, who was in Alice's class, sensed that Alice would be unable to find a suitable book or she just thought that the book was what Alice would want. In any event it indicated to me that the mainstream pupils were willing to help Alice. In situations such as this the assistance was readily given and without an adult directing them to do so. I observed other situations such as this when observing in Alice's school. The following incident happened while the teacher was gone on her lunch-break and the sixth class were having some fun in her absence:

Third Incident

> *"The young people were making and throwing paper planes. Alice looked on while this was happening. One boy in her class spontaneously made a plane for her and handed it to her "Here Alice". She appeared to welcome this gesture as shown by the smile on her face. One boy's help gave her a means of entrance into this game and she immediately took his lead, accepted the plane and became part of the group. For the remainder of this game she picked up several paper planes and re-directed them back to their owners* (Fieldnote, 7.3.08).

In this situation it was possible that Alice wanted to participate in this game but like many other young people with GLD she found it difficult to initiate conversation and to join in an activity (Carter and Hughes, 2005). There was also a possibility that her mainstream peers had come to realise this fact and they now looked for situations where they could offer assistance. Another likelihood was that they sensed her exclusion and they wanted to prevent this from happening in their friendly classroom. I observed similar situations for Aaron, Kevin and Noel especially in PE lessons. My fieldnotes record how one boy showed Aaron the correct way to hold the baton in a relay race and also gave him the signal when it was his turn to take on the role as captain (Fieldnote 24.11.07). In a similar way a girl in Kevin's PE class instructed him on the correct way to hold a racquet when playing badminton (Fieldnote 29.5.08). These incidents, though rare, indicate that mainstream pupils are prepared to offer help to students with MGLD but on most occasions this role remains with the SNA.

'Just Another Child'

This is the name given to Meyer's frame in which the ordinary aspects of being a young person are more prominent than the feature of having a disability. This is closely linked to the 'identity' theme in this study where it was stated that students with GLD are capable of distancing themselves from their ascribed identity in order to be just like all of their other peers. There were occasions when I sensed that these young people with MGLD regarded themselves to be 'just another child' in school and that their mainstream peers treated them accordingly. Recorded fieldnotes illuminate this point: *"Alice saw a group of boys from the classroom window playing*

a catching game. She rushed out and entered the circle and was immediately accepted as a participant and thrower in this game" (Fieldnote 5-3-08). She clearly felt that she could do this and that she would not be rejected.

At break times Nathan always ran to play football with the mainstream pupils, who were similar in age to him. There was a chance that he considered those children to be his friends since he was originally with them when he started school. There were, however, times when he had to be assertive in order to be allowed to join the boys who were playing football. They were all very energetic and competitive and Nathan found it difficult, at times to keep up with them. On one occasion he indicated that they wouldn't allow him play: *"They all hate me"* (Fieldnote 11-6-08). This was his interpretation of the situation where the boys would not pass the ball to him or allow him to be in goals while playing in the playground. This would be a common experience for most young people involved in team sports and Nathan had to experience likewise. This illustrated that there were others in the school that were not willing to make allowances for Nathan. They expected him to be able to keep up with everyone and not to expect preferential treatment. This was not his experience always when he participated in the football matches.

'Regular Friends'

This refers to times spent with others in mutually enjoyable shared activities. Regular friends may be specific to particular contexts. This form of friendship was also observed among participants in this study. Nathan drew my attention to this fact when he participated in an interview in which I made use of a tortoise puppet that I

called 'Toby'. Nathan immediately corrected Toby when he suggested that he had no friends in school:

> R: *(Pretends Toby whispered something) He says he thinks that you have no friends in school?*
>
> Nathan: *Yes I do.*
>
> R: *(Again Toby whispered something in the Researcher's ear) He wants to know who are your friends?*
>
> Nathan: *Ian, Ciaran and Kim (other special class children).* (Transcript 35).

Nathan went on to state that he enjoyed playing football and tennis with those friends. At the time when I was in Nathan's school, it was drawing near to the Summer Holidays when there would be no school for two months. Toby (puppet) said that he would have no one to play with over this period of time. Nathan told him that he had no such predicament:

> R: *(Pretended Toby was whispering something) Toby said that he's really sad now because he has no school for the summer.*
>
> Nathan: *Me too.*
>
> R: *But he said he'd have no friends to play with when he's at home!*
>
> Nathan: *Yes I will.*
>
> R: *Who?*
>
> Nathan: *My friends like Tom (mainstream child).*
>
> R: *Toby wants to know where you'll meet them?*
>
> Nathan: *In the playground* (Transcript 38).

Nathan was particularly fortunate at having a supervised playgroup in a park near to his home. Many of the other children who went there were also members of mainstream classes in his school and this was a good amenity where he experienced the friendship of others.

135

When asked, the six students readily listed mainstream children that they considered to be their friends. Shelly for example made a list of the people she wanted to come to her fifteenth birthday party. Most on her list were in her mainstream class and there was also a boy from a class in a higher year. The children in her class entered into the excitement of her birthday. Her friend Fiona for example asked, *"Will you be having a rave?"* (Fieldnote 21.1.08). And on the fifth day during my week as an observer in her class she was busy making a list of those who were going to her party. Fiona shouted across the class *"Shelly, can I go?"* and Shelly replied, *"Yeah, your name is on the list"* (Fieldnote 25.1.08).

Shelly was aware that if it were not for school she would be without the company of people, her own age. For her and others with GLD the school setting was the primary or indeed, the only access to social experiences (Matheson et al. 2007). This emerged in an interview when I asked about her friends at home and she informed me *"I don't have friends...I don't...I've got brothers and nieces"* (Transcript 9). School, was possibly viewed as the place where there were lots of young people similar to her and mostly she experienced the warmth of friendship from them. They were possibly considered to be 'regular friends' and even 'best friends' in a similar way to Alice.

'Best Friend'

Meyer (2001) distinguished between regular and best friends. The best friend frame applies to relationships that involve trust among parties and involves spending time together in and outside school. In this study I observed no friendships among participants and mainstream peers that typified this category. However, I was not convinced that friends were always judged using this classification. Alice for

example appeared to consider everyone in her school as falling within the 'best friend' category and that there were no 'regular' friends or maybe some who needed to be avoided. She informed me in an interview that her best friends were in school. She went on to state that her main reason for going to school was *"I like to be with my friends"* (Transcript 3). She readily listed off the names of her friends in school when asked and stated that there were no individual children whom she disliked, *"They're all my friends"* (Transcript 3). In another interview, where we discussed the many images that she captured with the digital camera as part of the 'photovoice' research method she also spoke highly of her friends in school. In one photo for example she had captured a boy making a funny face and I asked her about this person:

R:	*Who's that?*
Alice:	*That's Mark.*
R:	*And what's he doing?*
Alice:	*Am..... a.........*
R:	*Is he making faces?*
Alice:	*No, he's just making me happy.*
R:	*And how's he making you happy?*
Alice:	*Because he's friendly (*Transcript 4).*

Incidentally this same boy was the one who had made the paper plane for her in another incident reported on elsewhere in this chapter. We discussed other photos that she had captured of other children and she constantly remarked: *"There's (name of child) – my best friend"* or *"Here's my best fifth class friends"* (Transcript 4). We spoke about another photo that she had taken and I suggested that we put it in the bin, as it was unimportant. She laughed and immediately disagreed with my interpretation:

R:	*Oh Look here, you hate these children?*

Alice:	*No (laughs), they're my best friends.*
R:	*I better tear it up and put it in the bin? (Joking)*
Alice:	*No, (laughs) they're my best friends* (Transcript 4).

In a 'photovoice' discussion I drew her attention to another photo that she had taken, this time of another girl in her class. *"There's Patricia – my best friend"* (Transcript 4). Patricia sat near Alice in class and they both played basketball and football together. Patricia affirmed Alice's efforts at times and this also appeared to boost her self-esteem:

R:	*Does she (Patricia) say nice things to you?*
Alice:	*Yeah.*
R:	*What nice things?*
Alice:	*A... ... a... ...a... ....she says I'm very good at basketball and football* (Transcript 4).

This same girl called to Alice's home every Friday and they went to the cinema together. During my observations in the school I witnessed very little communication between the two girls. It was possible that the parents of both girls organised the Friday evening encounters. However, their friendship transcended school and Meyer identified this as a feature of 'best friend' relationships.

Ghost and Guests

In the course of collecting data I observed other times when the young people with MGLD could be considered what Meyer (2001) termed 'a ghost' when describing experiences of friendship. In situations where this arose the student was essentially invisible or was acknowledged but treated as an outsider. Recordings of observations were made when I felt that this happened in schools. The following situation arose one morning while I was in Alice's class. In that moment in time it

became immediately noticeable that Alice was excluded at certain times and that this

went unnoticed by all of the others in her class including the teacher:

Fourth Incident

*This morning the children were working doing questions and answers on a
story in their reader about the French Revolution. Alice was the only
student who was not engaged in this activity. She worked at the computer
doing written exercises related to 'Kipper the clown'. The divide that
existed between the work that Alice was engaged in and that of her peers
was immediately noticeable. There was a knock on the door and three
children from another class entered the room. They were conducting a
survey as part of the "Green Schools Initiative". They required the
following information from all of the students: 'Who had a lunch box, a
plastic bottle or a lunch bag on that day'? They recorded the responses
from all of the children to this question. However, Alice was unaware that
this survey was taking place. She was working on her own at the computer
wearing headphones. She offered no response to the question posed nor was
this noticed by anyone including the questioners. She remained at a
distance from the work that her peers were undertaking and also was
excluded from a survey that everyone else participated in.* (Fieldnote 5-3-
08).

At times, like this it appeared that Alice was a "ghost" and not interacting with her

peers in her mainstream class. However, in the interviews shared with her it became

clear that she had no sense of being "a ghost" in this school (Meyer, 2001).

It was possible that Alice judged 'friendship' with a different lens to the one that

I used on school visits. On one occasion at the conclusion of a 'photovoice'

interview, I asked her to select six of her favourite photos. She immediately selected

six photos that depicted friends, teachers and other people in the school. I repeated

this activity after mixing up all of the photos. Again she selected six photos, different

from her original selection, and yet all, showing people rather than objects (Fieldnote

24-4-08). This indicated for me the sense of friendship that Alice perceived between

herself and all of the people and students that she met in St. Christopher's Primary School.

In Aaron's school my observations showed that, on occasions, he too became a ghost. The following fieldnotes were recorded following my observations out in the school playground:

"There were possibly two hundred children, all running and chasing. Some groups were playing football. There were groups of boys and girls skipping with ropes. The teacher on duty was reprimanding a group of children for some form of misbehaviour. The children accepted her correction but they immediately began to argue and talk to each other in Latvian. I observed Aaron at the edge of a group of eight boys. They were exchanging football cards. Aaron just looked on and said nothing" (Fieldnote 22-11-07).

Aaron stated that at times like this he was just happy to be an observer rather than a participant. It was also a fact that situations such as this only arose for Aaron when his best friend was out sick. At no time did I sense that his unwillingness to be involved in the various groups created a sense of tension between him and his peers. They were possibly aware that Aaron was quite happy to be a spectator but his friends allowed for this. There were no efforts to move away from him or to send him away.

As an observer in Kevin and Noel's busy second level school it was clear at times that they were 'guests' on occasions when they entered the mainstream classes. There were times when I felt that they were not fully participating in school life in comparison to their peers. The following account of a Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) morning demonstrated this for me:

Fifth Incident

"At 10.30am Noel joined the mainstream class for a whole morning of CSPE. They were having a 'themed morning' where an education officer had come to their class grouping to make a presentation on the working of Dail Eireann (Irish Government). This began at nine o'clock while Kevin was down in the Learning Support room. There were thirty students in the room listening to this guest speaker. Noel sat at the top right hand side of the room with his SNA. This was where all of the girls were sitting and the boys sat at the opposite side of the room. The speaker asked a question, 'Who was in charge of the 166 TDs who made up the Irish Government?' There was a long silence until Noel raised his hand and said 'We were'. This answer may have been prompted by his SNA but the guest speaker praised him for giving the correct answer. The class were then divided into teams for a table quiz. Noel was the only boy on his team of six girls. He had no interaction with the girls at this table quiz that concluded this part of the lesson. Later in the day a local TD was due to visit the class. However at 11.10am Noel returned to the Learning Support room for Maths"(Fieldnote 20-05-08). The SNA returned to the mainstream class at intervals to check if the expected TD had arrived. When she returned to the Learning Support room Noel made the following enquiry from her: "What was the class doing Yvonne?" She informed him that they were just listening. There were no further attempts made to allow Noel return to the mainstream room and to share in this 'themed morning' (Fieldnote 20-05-08). This was despite the interest shown by Noel on what was taking place down in the mainstream class.

I later talked to Noel about this day and we concentrated on his experience when part of a team of girls in the table quiz that took place as part of the CSPE morning. He found the experience difficult and possibly intimidating. He made this clear in the following extract from our interview:

R:	*How did you feel then?*
Noel:	*Kind of nervous, but I know lots of the girls from my own school.*
R:	*And why were you kind of nervous sitting with the girls?*
Noel:	*Because it made me kind of shaky.*
R:	*Shaky! Were you a bit scared?*
Noel:	*No not scared, just nervous* (Transcript 27).

I asked if he would have preferred to stay on in the mainstream class but he said, *"I wanted to come back here (resource room) and see Kevin"* (Transcript 27). On

occasions similar to this there could be a distinct possibility that Noel felt unsure of his standing among his friends in the mainstream class. Why did the girls make no efforts to communicate with him? He may also have questioned the fact that none of the boys expressed a desire to have him on one of their teams. It was impossible to detect whether he sensed that he was the 'ghost' on these occasions.

Homophily and 'Best Friend'.

This is the term used to describe a friendship that develops among people due to the fact that they have particular similarities (Frostad and Pijl, 2007). In the current study it was noticeable that some of the participants formed friendships with other students who had GLD or physical disabilities. Kevin and Noel had very few opportunities to interact with the main body of students in their school as they now spent most of their time in a resource room apart from their peers. They had grown up together, attended primary school together and participated in special Olympic clubs outside of school. Their life histories and interests were similar and this allowed for friendships to develop and mature. There were other students in other classes throughout Kevin and Noel's school who had GLD and by choice they all sat together in the lunchroom. There were usually six in this group. They had developed a bond of friendship as they were all members of clubs that operated outside school and they also went on respite breaks together. The literature review contained research where persons with GLD had indicated that they wanted to be allowed to develop friendships across various contexts outside school (Mc Villy, 2006).

Aaron had developed a close friendship with another student in the mainstream class and this student had a physical disability. They spent all of their time together

out in the playground walking and talking about what Aaron explained as, *"loads of stuff"* (Transcript 25). He included a photo of this boy as one of the special people in his school. This arose in the context of a photovoice interview that we shared together. Aaron was asked to select six photos from all of the images that he had captured and he selected one of Liam, his best friend. There was preliminary research evidence that indicated that friendships between peers with GLD were "more stable, proximally defined and companionate" than friendships between students with GLD and typically developing peers (Matheson et al. 2007, p. 327). Observations and interview data in this study testified that this might indeed be the case for some participants. Interestingly Meyer (2001) does not allow for this form of friendships in her framework.

Friendship With SNAs

In this study, there was evidence of strong attachments between the students and their SNAs. The attachment shown towards people who support students with GLD is a common occurrence (O'Brien, 2003). This is another form of friendship that is missing from the framework developed by Meyer (2001). Shelly, Kevin and Noel all stated that their SNAs were among their best friends in school. I observed that the SNA always sat next to Kevin in his tutorial group and suggested that he might prefer to have one of his peers there in her place. He said that he would prefer the current situation to continue as: *"I like Nora sitting beside me. She's my lady friend"* (Transcript 27). Noel, on the other hand said, *"I wish someone who'd sit beside me would be a girl"* (Transcript 27). However, as he said this he looked over at his SNA and said, *"Yvonne, don't be jealous"* (Transcript 27). This may indicate that he wanted one of his peers to sit with him during tutorials. If this were to happen he

may sense that he was like all of the other students sitting next to a student rather than an adult.

In this study it was noticeable that the participants had different perceptions concerning the role that their SNA performed and occupied. Shelly made this clear in interviews: *"Miss Clarke, (SNA) she's my favourite teacher"* (Transcript 8). Miss Clarke sat next to Shelly and kept her focused on her work but under teacher supervision. The SNAs directed, for the most part of each school day what Kevin and Noel would do in class and yet there was the perception among the boys that these people were not teachers. In a photovoice interview Noel showed me a photo of his SNA and stated "That's Norah, my favourite helper"(Transcript 31). Allowing for the fact that that each student had a SNA constantly beside him or her no participant held a perception that they were under surveillance. Alice however, had experienced this sense in the past and therefore the SNA now only spent one hour with her every day.

SNA as a Barrier to Friendship

The SNA has a supportive role but they can also prevent social interaction (Tews and Lupart, 2008). I observed that Shelly's SNA frequently inhibited her interaction with the other pupils in her class. Like all other students in the school she moved from room to room for the various subjects and was free to sit where she liked on entering rooms. On the second day as an observer, I became aware of this. Shelly entered the Maths room and while going to sit at the back of the room with the three other girls she remarked, *"I want to sit with my friends"*. This was said aloud, possibly, as if in protest. However her SNA immediately called her to the top

of the room to sit next to her, away from her friends (Fieldnote 22-1-08). Similar incidents occurred in the course of my observations and they highlighted how SNAs can unintentionally hinder social interactions. My observations support the findings of other researchers in this regard (Tews and Lupart, 2008; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli and McFarland, 1997).

Kevin and Noel were constantly in the sole company of their SNAs for lengthy periods of the day. A fieldnote on my third day of observation recorded the following reflection: *"This was Thursday and the boys had teacher contact time for four forty minute periods. They also had four, forty-minute periods when they were solely in the company of SNAs. Today they only spent one double period in a mainstream class along with a morning tutorial that lasted for a few minutes. They had very little opportunity to interact with their peers (Fieldnote 15-5-08).* When they were in mainstream classes their SNAs sat with them in order to provide assistance but this could have acted as a barrier to other students interacting with them. There was never an opportunity afforded to their mainstream pupils to fulfil what Allan (1997) defined as a pedagogic role. The SNAs were possibly viewed as the people whose job it was to provide assistance for the boys. There could also be the possibility that their peers had perhaps reached the conclusion that this was never an expectation of them. Failure on the part of professionals to utilise peer-support was possibly one of the reasons to explain the absence of 'best friend' relationships. Its lack of use was also regrettable as it is recommended as one way of promoting access to the general curriculum for students with MGLD. A last area 'bullying' is now considered under the theme of friendship.

Bullying

There were indications from three of the students in this study that they experienced bullying though not on a regular basis. I was reading an illustrated verification sheet with Shelly one day. This was based on a previous interview. The last line read: *'I would like to put some of the boys on detention'.* She had made this statement in the previous interview and now I asked for reasons why detention was necessary for the boys. It transpired that some of the students bullied her on the corridor. Interestingly, this disclosure was made when the SNA who was always present at interviews had left the room for a few minutes. The following is the experience that Shelly recalled:

R:	*Why would you put the boys on detention?*
Shelly:	*Because they're bold and bullying people.*
R:	*What bold things did they do?*
Shelly:	*Bullying.*
R:	*Tell me more?*
Shelly:	*Bullying, pushing into people or kicking someone.*
R:	*Who did this to Shelly?*
Shelly:	*Yeah, on the corridor, Rory and George.*
	(Transcript 11).

She recalled how she had to get her Resource Teacher and her SNA to make the boys apologise to her but in her own words: *"I was very sad about bullying"* (Transcript 11). She went on to admit that this happened again and once more she had to ask for assistance from her teachers and SNA to prevent this from reoccurring. The school had a very strict anti-bullying code of practice, and behaviour such as this was not tolerated. However, it appeared to be an experience that had negative memories for Shelly.

Kevin and Noel indicated that they too experienced bullying apparently by another student with SEN who was in their school. This revelation emerged in the course of an interview where both boys elaborated on the subject. We were talking about other students whom they would like to join or sit with them at lunchtime and they mentioned Larry:

Kevin:	*Sometimes he comes over, but then he walks off.*
R:	*He walks off?*
Kevin:	*I don't know why!*
Noel:	*(Interrupts) Because he takes our sweets.*
R:	*He takes your sweets?*
Noel	*No.*
Kevin:	*He says can I take twenty or fifty cents from you?*
R:	*From you?*
Noel:	*From Kevin or me.*
R:	*Don't give him your money.*
Kevin:	*I have to* (Transcript 27).

They still wanted Larry to be their friend and to sit with them in the lunchroom. In a later interview they retracted this information and revealed that they had never experienced any form of bullying in their time in school:

R:	When I was in school I hated bullies.
Noel:	The same.
Kevin:	The same.
R:	Did you ever meet a bully in school?
Noel:	No.
Kevin:	No. *(Transcript 27).*

Larry took sweets and money from them and yet he was not considered to be a bully. They possibly saw him as a friend as he also participated in 'Special Olympic' clubs outside of school. It was possible that they had no experience of bullying from other students and this was why they believed that they had never been bullied. These two instances suggested that students with MGLD had awareness that at times, they too can encounter people who may not be friendly towards them. They appeared to

147

experience only isolated incidents of bullying and therefore could not be identified as 'victims' of bullying.

Adults' Perspectives on Friendship

Parents wanted their young sons and daughters to make friends in school. Noel's mother gave her perspective in this regard: *"Friendships are so important. At the end of the day you are not talking about academics here. You're talking about friendships and having a good experience"* (Transcript 33). The adults interviewed in this study agreed that the acceptance of students with MGLD by their peers happened on a number of levels. Shelly's resource teacher was of the opinion that *"they're very protective of her"* (Transcript 12). This particularly applied to the older students in the school who watched out for Shelly's safety, often at a distance, in situations like when they were having lunch in the school canteen. Here they possibly assumed a 'pastoral role' as described by Allan (1997). This occurred without Shelly being aware that it was in fact happening and no interactions were required. Her Learning Support Teacher held the view that other students *'protect'* Shelly rather than sharing in true reciprocal friendships (Transcript 15). In an interview she stated: *"They mind her more than being her friend. They are not her peers in that respect"* (Transcript 15). She maintained that it was therefore important that Shelly should have 'safe spaces' to go to in the school such as the resource room where she would be in the company of students with similar needs. In a similar way Alice's mainstream teacher spoke on the pastoral role of the children in her school towards Alice. She believed that there were no deep friendships in existence but that the majority of Alice's peers *"are good to her and watch out for her"* (Transcript 5). She believed that they had more patience with Alice than they had with each other.

The teacher explained how at 'news time' in class *"they listen to her answer and don't mock her in any way"* (Transcript 5).

In other schools adults also remarked on this pastoral type of friendship. In the case of Aaron, people in his school remarked that he had formed no close friendships among his peers without GLD. The school secretary, who drove him to and from school, stated in an interview that the children in the school totally accepted him and *"without making it too obvious look out for and mind Aaron"* (Transcript 22). The same seemed to be the case for Nathan. He was due to spend one more year in primary school in his special class. He had a certain amount of interaction with his mainstream peers at break-times out in the playground. Again there were no observable close friendships between him and the mainstream children. However, the caring nature of the mainstream children towards him was again emphasised by his SNA when she gave her view that they *"look out for him"* (Transcript 36).

Both of Shelly's parents confirmed what their daughter had stated to me in interviews, that she had no friends outside of school. This became apparent when Shelly's mother invited me to the house so that she could participate in an interview. On arrival I noticed that Shelly was sitting on the wall outside the house on her own. This was the reality for Shelly and she was aware that none of her peers would ever call or socialise with her outside school hours. Her mother explained the situation:

> *She's lost now in the summer when on her holidays. We have to try and improvise. The grandkids come up and play with her. Five or six year olds living across the road from here may come over sometimes and she will play with them. That's the other side of the coin, no friends to play with* (Transcript 16).

To redress this lack of a social outlet with people of her own age, her parents were now enrolling her in Special Olympic Clubs. They were turning to groups that catered specifically for young people with Down Syndrome to provide a social life for Shelly and to give her an opportunity to form friendships. However, it was only possible to attend a club on one night every week and it would not function during school holidays. School therefore had a major role for Shelly in giving her social experiences and access to a group of young people that she appeared to enjoy interacting with. All of the other parents in this study facilitated their children's attendance at special Olympic clubs with a similar aim in mind.

Two years ago Alice seemed to have felt that the SNA came between herself and her peers. Her Resource Teacher held the view that *"it was very difficult having someone shadowing her all of the time"* (Transcript 29). Alice let her resentment be known by *"reacting against her presence"* and would prod the SNA with a pencil or do things very reluctantly and slowly when directed by this person (Transcript 29). The school therefore decided to withdraw her SNA apart from one hour together each day. This is an example of a different kind of school response to accommodate the needs and desires of students with MGLD.

Nathan's closest friends were to be found in his special class that operated within his mainstream primary school. The SNA explained in an interview that another boy in the special class considered Nathan to be what Meyer (2001) terms a 'best friend'. She told me how this was manifested in class: *"David often brings in little muffins and he always has one for Nathan. They also want to sit beside each other a lot"* (Transcript 36). In addition, Nathan attended a 'friendship club' after

school where he met children from his own special class along with others from different schools. His teacher outlined in an interview how Nathan and his peers shared in social activities outside of school as *"they often have little parties and they are all invited to each other's* (Transcript 34). These friendships had a role to play in combating isolation, so often experienced by students with GLD in mainstream settings (Pijl, 2007; Nakken and Pijl, 2002). Aaron's mother spoke about her son's best friend —Liam – and that he was the only one of his peers that he ever talked about. She believed that *"He loves Liam"* (Transcript 20). However, both boys were due to transfer to different schools in a few months and there was a hope, according to the Deputy Principal in this school that this friendship would continue in the years ahead. Alice had friends previously in her primary school. However, she remained behind when they transferred to secondary schools and her mother explained how contact ceased almost immediately. Fortunately her new class were nice to her and her mother believed that once again she felt valued by all of the mainstream children in her school: *"Everybody is her friend, 'my friends, my friends, my friends', she sees everybody there as being her friends and loves going to school. She loves Monday when it is time to go back to school"* (Transcript 7).

Difficulties With Friendship

Evidence in this study mirrors the findings in other studies that draw attention to the fact that students with SEN can be isolated in school (Pijl, 2007; Nakken and Pijl, 2002). Shelly and Alice both ate on their own on each day that I acted as an observer in their school. Shelly's resource teacher believed that she experienced no sense of isolation and held the view that: *"She may be on her own but she is aware of the others in close proximity to her"* (Transcript 12). In the past this resource

teacher encouraged children with SEN to join a group but he no longer did this. He said that he had come to realise that he was working with teenagers and that they wanted to have control over their own lives. They did not want him to interfere with their free time in school. Shelly had an outgoing personality but she was still unable to sustain a conversation of any length during periods such as lunchtime. One of her class teachers who supervised in the lunchroom on a regular basis stated: *"she has extreme difficulties interacting with other students"* (Transcript 14). This may be a reason why she was left sitting at a table on her own during lunchtime. From my own observations, it was clearly obvious that Shelly was, what Meyer (2001) termed "a ghost" each day in the canteen. The other students chatted as they ate in various groups around the room. I wondered whether this was a cause of concern for Shelly? Her SNA believed that Shelly was not concerned at being on her own away from others in the school. In fact she felt that Shelly made a conscious decision to be on her own in the dining room and therefore stated, *"It is good that she is allowed to make her own choice regarding where she sits"* (Transcript 13). Shelly expressed her own thoughts regarding this. In an interview she commented that *"lunch"* was one of her favourite times in the day (Transcript 8). She liked it because the other girls in her class sat next to her. It probably was sufficient for her that the other girls were in the same proximity as her and this perhaps contributed to making lunchtime into a positive experience.

Adults who worked with Alice perceived that she was, in a similar way to Shelly, excluded from social interactions on occasions from her peers. The Principal felt that she had experienced great difficulty in trying to *"fit in"* with her present class (Transcript 6). He held the view that she was at a different level in terms of

maturity. He claimed that this was possibly a reason why it was difficult for her to establish friendships with the other girls in her class. He outlined how: *"The whole teenage thing is now beginning to start. The other girls are now into make-up and going out. This is not so for Alice"* (Transcript 6). It was also his belief that she had not developed the social skills essential to sustain lasting friendships, a difficulty identified by other researchers (Matheson, Olsen and Weisner, 2007). Aaron's mainstream teacher had a similar explanation that accounted for his shortage of friends. She suggested that the other children had realised over the years that he had difficulties interacting with them and that they made allowances for this. She explained, *"I think that the other children are aware of his needs. I don't think he will ever be able to have a relationship with them, like they have with each other"* *(Transcript 21)*.

Evidence suggests that any friendships that may have existed in the early stages of primary school have all but disappeared by the time sixth class finishes (Frederickson, Simmonds, Evans, and Souisby, 2007). By the end of sixth class SEN students are frequently no longer perceived to be part of the class (Hall and McGregor, 2000). Alice was repeating sixth class at the time of this study. Her Resource teacher explained: *"She had great friends last year but her mother points out that she doesn't see these friends any more"* (Transcript 2). Her mainstream teacher elaborated on this: *"Last year she was loved and adored by her class"* (Transcript 5). Her father recalled how *"All through the school years, in the little parties she felt fully included and integrated. They invited each other to parties and they came here"* (Transcript 7). It was possible that her former classmates treated Alice as a 'regular friend' if we use Meyer's (2001) terminology. However, contact

dwindled with all of these friends and ten months later she never heard from any of them. She had been with those friends for eight years. It was highly possible that the same would happen with her present class especially since she had only been with them for this year alone.

Adults described how Kevin and Noel were less isolated when they joined their first year. The SNAs recalled how their peers made time for them and *"made efforts to include them in class"* (Transcript 29). One of Noel's teachers explained how different his relationship was with his peers when in first year: *"He was like a quality control officer. He would go around to everyone and have a taste of what they had cooked. They were all used to talking with him"* (Transcript 30). However, this study took place when the boys were in third year and I sensed that there was no sense of connection between the two boys at this stage and their peers. I observed them on the corridors between classes and rarely did other students acknowledge their presence. Their SNAs confirmed that this was the case: *"There are a few boys that will say 'hello' to them, ah yes, they will say 'hello' but that is all"* (Transcript 29). Both SNAs suggested that the reason for this was that *"The interests of the other students are far broader. They have very little in common with the other students"* (Transcript 29). They too recalled how Noel made more efforts to communicate especially with the girls in first year but he no longer made attempts at this. Now he waited for the girls to make a comment or to ask him a question. The SNAs believed that other boys in the mainstream class no longer made efforts to communicate with Kevin and Noel possibly because they *"feel more awkward at making this effort and especially at the age they are at"* (Transcript 29). The

resource teachers felt that as friendships consolidated for their peers in second year: *"the boys became more excluded from their class group"* (Transcript 30).

Discussion

The frameworks contained in the Literature Review in this thesis provided a lens through which the nature of friendships between those students with MGLD and their peers were analysed. Meyer (2001) offered six frames and Allan (1997) offered three pointers. Data in this study indicated that the six participants experienced 'friendship' at many levels in their schools. Their peers helped them on occasions but mostly in play situations. Rarely was there any peer-support offered to assist students with MGLD in work situations. Alice and Nathan were treated as regular friends on occasions but this was not a common occurrence. Situations arose on occasions when students with MGLD were 'ghosts' where they were possibly outsiders to their peers in school. In talking with the students however, there was never any indication that they experienced exclusion. At the time of this research there were no best friendships in existence between the participants and the mainstream students. Participants were best friends with other students with disabilities. Kevin and Noel had been together since Junior Infants and now in third year of secondary school they were still together and considered themselves to be best friends. Nathan had also formed a 'best' friendship with one of his peers in the special class. Similarly, Aaron had become best friends with Liam, another student with a physical disability who was also in his sixth class. It was interesting to discover that all of these 'best friends' could be described with the term 'homophily'. Evidence from this study supports other studies in this regard where students with SEN formed lasting friendships with others who were like themselves (Frostad and

Pijil, 2007; Siperstein et al, 1997; O'Brien, 2003; Ring and Travers, 2005). There have been occasions when schools discouraged friendships like these from developing (Chappell, 2004). In this study it was noticeable that these friendships were valued and supported in the participating schools.

A number of studies included in the Literature Review section in this study suggested that students with MGLD were socially isolated when enrolled in mainstream settings (Pijl, 2007; Scheepstra, Nakken and Pijl, 1999). There were certainly instances in this study when the students were isolated from their peers. This was especially apparent for Kevin and Noel, as they were no longer in mainstream classes for the most part of the day. However, in talking with the students there was no sense that they experienced isolation. They had each other, along with supportive SNAs and resource teachers who possibly compensated in this regard. All of the other students felt included in their school.

The adult professionals were of the view that the six students, possibly apart from Nathan, had not developed sufficient social skills to allow them sustain a 'best friend' type of friendship with their peers. They also believed that there was a huge gulf in terms of interests that separated these students immediately from their peers. This was possibly the case. However, the young people were happy to share in activities and just to be near to mainstream peers. This provided them with opportunities and experiences that they never experienced at home or if they attended a special school. Their parents knew that there were difficulties for their young people in terms of friendship. They knew that the mainstream peers were not calling to their homes nor were they inviting the students with MGLD to theirs. This

happened in the past for Alice and was still the case for her but to a lesser extent. A disconcerting finding in this study is the fact that friendships dwindled and disappeared as the students progressed in school.

Kevin and Noel's parents still had a hope that the boys would form friendships in their mainstream secondary school. They hoped that this would happen in Transition year where the exam pressure that existed since they joined second year would abate for a while at least. They hoped that the boys would re-develop friendships that once existed back in first year. Noel had mainstream peers who volunteered in his Special Olympic club and there was a possibility that when these students matured they would be more confident and willing to engage with him in school. The rigidities and curricular demands possibly constrained the amount of social interaction of participants. Due to the fact that the students in mainstream classes were following different programmes of work there was no reason for them to interact with their peers in the classes and this reduced further the likelihood of any friendships developing.

Further Reflections

I made use of two frameworks to highlight the nature of friendships for the participants in this study. They were useful for the purpose of this study as they provided a number of different lenses through which I could look at the nature of friendships that existed in the schools. I saw that the participating students shared in a range of social experiences that placed them in a number of frames. This study has identified one area that neither framework had placed an emphasis on. This is the importance of friendships between students who have a disability. In this study the

evidence suggests that friendships of this nature are highly significant for students with MGLD who are enrolled in mainstream schools. Both frameworks place no emphasis on the importance of 'proximity' for students with MGLD and their mainstream peers. This study demonstrated that this was very important for the participants. Students experienced friendship when they were on the periphery of groups, possibly because they still experienced a sense of inclusion in the social atmosphere overall. This experience of being surrounded by young people of their own age was missing from other parts of their lives. They possibly valued the opportunity that school provided in this regard. All of the participants were teenagers and school provided the opportunity to 'hang out' in groups in a way that all young people of a similar age want to do. This was the view that I felt from listening to the 'voice' of participants.

The participants spoke highly of their mainstream friends. From my observations it was apparent that the mainstream students in the majority made efforts to include the students with MGLD in a number of activities on occasions. They played a role in creating inclusive schools. My observations suggest that they were sensitive to the needs of students with MGLD in social situations. However, this remained unacknowledged by the adult professionals who participated in interviews. They held the view that as both groups had no common interests and likes that this prevented any forms of friendship occurring. However, students with MGLD would not go along with this view. They felt that their experiences of friendship with mainstream peers were positive in general. In listening to the 'voice' of these students there were few revelations of them experiencing negative attitudes

from their peers apart from one or two minor instances of bullying. Their views are therefore at variance with the adults.

Another disconcerting discovery in this study was the lack of structures that schools had in place to promote friendships. No school operated a 'buddy' system where students without GLD took a lead in supporting students with MGLD in social and educational situations. This role was the responsibility of SNAs. Balancing the role of SNAs and peers in the promotion of social interactions for students with MGLD represents a key challenge for the work of schools.

Overall the experience of friendship had been largely positive for the participants in this study. The students' perceptions of what and how they learn in school is considered under the next theme.

Theme Three: Curriculum and Pedagogy

In the past, most students with MGLD attended special schools and the curriculum offered remained very much skills based (Nind, 2005). Now that these students are enrolled to a greater extent in mainstream schools there is an expectation that they can access the general curriculum like all other students in their school and therefore their possibilities for learning are broadened (Spooner, Dymond, Smith and Kennedy, 2006). In mainstream schools, students with MGLD now have an entitlement to a curriculum that offers breadth, balance, relevance and differentiation (Carpenter, Ashdown and Boviar, 1997). With this acceptance schools are required to incorporate a curriculum where students with MGLD can be encouraged and empowered (Carpenter et al). This study asked participants to share their perceptions of the curriculum that was on offer to them.

In the Introduction to the Draft Guidelines for Teachers of Students with MGLD it states "The Primary School Curriculum and the eight areas of experience at junior cycle offer continuity, progression and curricular experiences that all students, however diverse their learning difficulties can share (NCCA, 2001, p. 3). The notion that students with GLD are able to learn by means of accessing the general curriculum presents a daunting challenge for schools. This is recognised by the DES and they now encourage schools and teachers to become involved in individualised planning and to modify teaching strategies (DES, 2005).

There is an absence of research into the quality of educational provision for students with MGLD in this country. In the Literature Review, reference was made to US studies in which it emerged that teachers made little effort to ensure that students with GLD had access to the general curriculum (Argan, Alper, Wehmeyer, 2002). Other researchers have pointed out that access requires a lot of planning, adaptations and augmentation (Wehmeyer, Lattin, Lapp-Rincker and Agran, 2003). Wehmeyer et al. devised a table that illustrates the steps required of schools in order for students with MGLD to have meaningful access to the general curriculum. This table is contained in the Literature Review chapter (p. 63). Among the steps required is an acceptance that all students be allowed to demonstrate progress and learning. This may require the utilisation of alternative forms of assessment. The importance of quality instruction at every level in the school, with the introduction of augmentations and supplementary instructional materials are further steps required of schools (Wehmeyer et al. 2003). This presents a challenge for teachers who may have received no professional development in this regard. Traditional teaching

methods are unsuitable for students with MGLD (Wehmeyer, Sands, Knowlton and Kozleski, 2002).

The participants in this study found this a difficult area on which to comment. However, a number of views were expressed. In addition data were generated through observation and through the adult interviews. It was therefore possible to document the nature of curriculum that was on offer to them.

Student Perspective

From observations it appeared that Nathan and Aaron, who had access to a special class, were exposed to a curriculum that had breadth, balance, relevance and differentiation (Carpenter, Ashdown and Bovair, 1997). The other participants appeared to receive a curriculum that lacked these qualities. Alice for example undertook schoolwork usually covered in first and second classes in primary school though now in sixth class. However, she appeared to be unaware of this difference between herself and her peers. She even considered herself to be among the top students in the class in terms of her performance in Maths and English (Transcript 1).

R:	*What would you like more help with in school?*
Alice:	*With my work ah………..with Maths and English.*
R:	*Would you like more help with Maths and English?*
Alice:	*Yeah.*
R:	*Whom would you like to help you?*
Alice:	*Teacher* (Transcript 1).

This might suggest that there was awareness there for Alice that her teacher spent more time with the other students. From observations in her busy class this was in fact the reality as the teacher prepared the other students for second level transfer,

confirmation and placement tests. Alice might possibly like more teacher contact and to be less engaged in solitary individualised work. During observation in her class I noted that she spent considerable amounts of time on her own working on the computer while the others worked separately with the teacher. Research undertaken by Naughton (2003) could be used to explain the reasons for this. He demonstrated how the curriculum content becomes extremely narrow in focus by sixth class. There was the possibility that the content and methodologies no longer permitted Alice to share in the class.

I felt that the other primary school participants in this study experienced a sense of belonging to their class and that they also enjoyed what they were doing and learning. One reason for this was, in my opinion, that Nathan and Aaron had the benefit of having a special class where they could spend part of the day and were engaged in appropriate activities and work. Those who worked with them felt that it was good that the students gained a sense of achievement by doing appropriate work in the special class and then having opportunities to return to a mainstream class. In the four interviews Aaron repeatedly stated that he excelled in specific areas in comparison to the other children in school:

R:	*What do you like doing in Miss Black's room?* *(special class)*
Aaron:	*Penmanship.*
R:	*And what are you the best at in Miss Black's room?*
Aaron:	*Penmanship, reading and writing.*
R:	*Anything else?*
Aaron:	*Colouring* (Transcript 25).

This view of Aaron concerning his capabilities in schoolwork appeared to give him a sense of confidence and this in turn seemed to contribute to a positive sense of self for him.

Nathan was confident and appeared not to have experienced feelings of frustration or dislike to any of the subjects covered in school. While sharing interviews with Nathan he was asked to 'post' board maker images into a choice of three post-boxes to indicate his feelings towards various school subjects (Appendix 9). He placed images for PE, Maths, Reading in the box to indicate that he liked these subjects 'all of the time'. He placed images of independent work, painting and writing in the box which indicated that he only liked these activities 'some of the time'. He subsequently removed 'writing' from the 'some of the time' box and posted the image into the box that read 'all of the time'. When this game was repeated he changed his choice of post boxes. However the only thing that was placed in the 'none of the time' post box was an image that indicated teacher-reading stories. When we spoke about his photos he indicated that he also disliked times when his class performed activities with the parachute. He later explained that he was afraid that he would be blown away with the parachute if it rose into the air. Nathan's judgement here concerning his capabilities can also be linked to the 'identity theme'. There it was suggested that students with GLD are able to make judgement related to their prowess in individual academic areas. Nathan confirms that this was so when engaged in the 'posting game'.

Of the six participants, Kevin and Noel were the two students who were doing work that was totally outside of the general curriculum. From observations it became

noticeable that the boys were not fully included in the life of their school. Most of their days were spent in the Learning Support room and in the company of SNAs. Arrangements such as this have been regarded as having adverse effects on the establishment of friendships (Tews and Lupart, 2008; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli and McFarland, 1997). This study would also suggest that arrangements when the students are left in the sole care of SNAs restrict their access to what they learn. On the limited number of times when they joined mainstream classes there was an immediate realisation that the boys were not fully participating and sharing in the classes. I was in their school as an observer at a time in the year when the other students and teachers were trying to meet deadlines in relation to the Junior Certificate. The boys were aware that they were not doing Junior Certificate and possibly felt that the work that was ongoing in mainstream classes was therefore of little relevance to them. In an interview Noel was asked to give his experience of an Art lesson that week, to which he replied: *"They were getting ready their posters for Junior Certificate"* (Transcript 28). Kevin had a similar experience at Home Economics where all of the other students were revising for their exams. He explained how he loved the subject but he no longer cooked: *"because my Home Economics class was getting ready for exams. I just had to listen"* (Transcript 28). The boys were fully aware that they were doing a different programme of work to everyone else in third year. They made this realisation clear in an interview:

R:	*And would you not like to be in the room with all the other boys and girls?*
Kevin:	*Look, they are doing different exams and different subjects. Noel and me are doing the same.*
R:	*Oh, now I understand.*
Kevin:	*Because Noel and I, we've got the Learning Support timetable (Transcript 27).*

This is a further example of how school structures and the curriculum offered create a sense of difference and possibly reinforces the notion that their GLD label sets them apart from all others in the school.

From observations I felt that he boys received a curriculum that was extremely restricted. Having reduced access to mainstream classes meant that they now spent a significant amount of time doing functional literacy and maths assignments with SNAs. However, when asked, they both said that they would have liked to be doing the Junior Cert. Noel stated: *"I wish I will do History, Geography and English"* (Transcript 27). Kevin said that he had a similar desire to participate in this exam. He stated: *"I'd do Art, Home Economics, English, History"* (Transcript 27). They recalled occasions when they participated in school exams in other years and how they succeeded in them. Noel went on to say that: *"I really like exams. It's very good and I get very good marks"* (Transcript 27). Kevin drew my attention to his recent achievements in 'mock exams': *"I got two Bs and four As"* (Transcript 27). The boys appeared to be unaware of the perceptions of adults that they were frustrated and bored in mainstream classes. They believed that they achieved satisfactorily whereas their teachers and SNAs held conflicting views in this regard. I never asked the boys if they were consulted regarding their removal from the mainstream classes and how this decision affected them. I could only presume that their views were not requested.

A number of adults in this study considered that many of the subjects at second level were too difficult for students with MGLD. Yet, during observations in the Resource Room and in the course of interviews it became apparent that this might not necessarily be the case. I sensed that Kevin and Noel remembered quite a lot of

the material that was covered in the mainstream class. People were possibly using their pre-conceived understandings of limitations associated with GLD to suggest that learning was impossible for them in mainstream classes. These two students were eager and anxious to succeed. The following situation emphasised their maturity and willingness for engagement in appropriate work. On a particular day their learning support teacher asked them to make use of the computer to research the identity of a famous person. Without any prompting from adults they considered a number of possibilities such as Michael Collins or local politicians like Bertie Ahern and Joan Burton. Kevin prompted Noel that it would be good for him to consider researching *"George Washington, first president of the US"*, (his words) (Fieldnote 12.05.08). The boys demonstrated that they were capable of engaging in higher levels of thinking when an appropriate challenge was presented to them. In a follow up interview to this situation the boys talked about what they remembered from their History lessons in mainstream classes. Noel remembered covering "the Bronze Age, World War 1, World War 2 and the Romans" (Transcript 27). Kevin remembered learning all about Hitler and he recalled how this figure from history *"Hated Jewish people...he killed them all...In Germany...He killed himself...He drank poison because he didn't know it was a poisonous drink"* (Transcript 27). Noel said that he would like to be back in the History class again because *"I liked the teacher"* (Transcript 27). This indicated that students with MGLD benefit from having access to mainstream classes and a broad range of subjects. Other studies considered in the Literature Review chapter in this thesis agreed in this regard (Wehmeyer, Lattin, Lapp-Rincker and Agran 2003; Dymond, Renzaglia, Gilson and Slagor, 2007). In these studies schools were encouraged to put in place augmentations and adaptations in order to allow students with GLD to participate

and learn from the general curriculum. A failure to implement curricular augmentations created situations similar to those experienced by Noel and Kevin where their needs were not accommodated and therefore remained excluded from the general curriculum unlike all others in their school.

Kevin appeared to have developed a 'defeatist' attitude when it came to what he was able do in school. Regarding woodwork for example he viewed this as being a totally unsuitable subject for him and he explained why this was so: *"Oh, I don't do woodwork because it's far too dangerous. I would get splinters off the wood"* (Transcript 27). It is possible that he has internalised this belief from what he had heard others saying about what he was and was not capable of doing in school. He also informed me why he did not take science as a subject: *"It's so difficult, so difficult for me and Noel. You have to check about humans and to dissect a dead frog...it's so gross"* (Transcript 27). He appeared to have developed internalised views regarding his capabilities. Wishart (2001) indicated that this was a trend among students with Down Syndrome. They avoided learning situations, which they saw as potentially difficult. Kevin appeared to have accepted that it was proper that Noel and himself should be engaged in separate curricular work to all of the other students in his year. He was aware that himself and Noel were alike and that this was sufficient reason to explain why they followed different timetables and engaged in a curriculum that was different to all of the other students.

An alternative curriculum had just been introduced for Noel and Kevin. This was ASDAN – Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network. ASDAN awards work on a credits based system and where students compile portfolios

demonstrating that they have participated in various challenges aimed at developing personal and social skills. As a programme, ASDAN was considered more appropriate to the general curriculum as it helped to promote the development of social skills and encourage independence for both Kevin and Noel.

Adult Perspectives Regarding Curriculum

There were a number of conflicting views among adult participants regarding the nature of curriculum for students with MGLD. There was a consensus among a number of professionals who worked in second level schools that the curriculum there was unsuitable for students with GLD. There were exceptions, however, in this regard. Teachers with a qualification in special education were of the view that with differentiation, augmentation and improved teaching methods, access to the general curriculum was possible. However, one of the learning support teachers, who had obtained a specialist qualification in SEN, however remained adamant that the curriculum in second level was totally inappropriate for students with a MGLD. A number of primary teachers had concerns concerning curricular difficulties experienced by students with MGLD. Parents questioned the methodologies and curricular content and felt that more could be done in regards to these in order to increase the involvement of students with MGLD in school.

Primary Level

Alice was present in her mainstream class for the entire school day apart from two periods of possibly forty minutes when she was withdrawn to work with her resource teacher or SNA. However having a presence in a mainstream class does not guarantee access to the regular curriculum. Her mainstream teacher felt pressurised, preparing students for Confirmation and entry into a number of local second level

schools. The mainstream teacher expressed a feeling that she could not integrate pupils similar to Alice without additional resource teaching time. She would welcome more resource teaching time allocated to Alice. She viewed Alice as being in great need of much more 'individual' instruction. Certain subjects such as History and Geography were difficult for Alice according to the mainstream teacher. However, they had to be covered with the other students in the class and Alice was also present at these times. This may explain the following statement made by the resource teacher concerning her perception on what the classroom experience meant for Alice: *"Academically in the class I don't know how she feels. I imagine she's quite bored. She's not doing things in the class that are of interest to her. She would need to be doing more activities like horse-riding, gardening, shopping and interactive things" (Transcript 2)*. The Principal voiced a belief that Alice had a need to be more involved in non-academic subjects. However, a lack of resources prevented them from facilitating the introduction of these activities into Alice's daily programme of work. They were voicing a concern that emerged with other professionals in this study concerning the suitability of existing curricula for those students with MGLD.

Alice's parents firmly disagreed with this view. They wanted Alice to be exposed to core curriculum subjects. Over the years her mother had worked with Alice for possibly one and two hours every night on schoolwork. She recalled how Alice began to experience difficulties with the curriculum as she advanced in school: *"I'd say up to second class she would have kept right up there with the other children. Once third class began you could see her slip and she had to get more resource help and assistance from the SNA. She still enjoyed every minute there but*

the difference between her and the others became more apparent" (Transcript 7). Her father was extremely pleased with the academic progress and assistance received by his daughter and he possibly had a belief that his wife had unrealistic expectations of what Alice could achieve: *"I would think that you are setting the standard too high for Alice"* (Transcript 7). This notion was strongly refuted by his wife. She was adamant that Alice was capable of a challenge and that she enjoyed learning. Certain teachers set lower expectations for Alice compared to those expected of other students in her class and this disillusioned her. Her mother explained this as follows:

> *I just felt, the more she learnt, and the more she enjoyed it. I remember in third class she would get spellings for the week. On Friday she would be able to spell these words. I think that certain teachers' felt, when Alice was past second class that she was no longer able to remember and to retain things. I felt that this was the thinking of some teachers. I had to ask for more homework at times. I felt she was more stimulated with the more homework that she was given. With less homework she became lazier* (Transcript 7).

Aaron had an exemption from having to learn Irish. Apart from this he followed the usual Primary School Curriculum. His special class teacher acknowledged that there were difficulties and that even *"Some of the work that goes on in this classroom (special class) can even be too difficult for him to comprehend at times"* (Transcript 18). She highlighted one area of difficulty that he experienced on a regular basis in the mainstream class. This happened when frequent visitors gave talks to the class on various topics. She claimed that many speakers were unable to take account of Aaron's needs and that their content was frequently too difficult for Aaron to comprehend. His mother claimed that Maths posed great difficulties for him but explained that all children with his syndrome had similar difficulties with this subject.

Aaron's mainstream teacher maintained that he participated more in class when 'project work' was incorporated as a teaching method. Doing projects allowed him to have control over the range of materials and he enjoyed the active participation in the compilation of projects. These were often undertaken in groups. And she went on to say how: *"He loves doing for example his History project. This involves lots of cutting and sticking and also sourcing pictures from the Internet. He tries to join in as much as everyone else" (Transcript 21).* His mother recalled an instance recently when he asked for information on World War One and that he wanted to write about this event. This was at the time when this topic was being covered in his mainstream sixth class.

Second Level

Curriculum and pedagogy are a lot different at post primary level to that experienced by pupils in primary school. In second level schools the Junior and Leaving Certificate exams impact on the way classes are taught and also on what is taught (Naughton, 2003). All of those interviewed concerning Kevin and Noel's experience of school believed that they achieved more in their various subjects when they were in first year, possibly because pedagogy was similar to that experienced in primary school. The boys participated in a number of projects and they were involved in small groups when completing these. Noel's mother recalled how he loved to participate in small groups doing projects:

> In primary school, Noel had done a great project at the time when the European Union was at a time of expansion. 'Twas totally at his level. If more project work took place at second level it would be great. We know that exam pressure begins in second year but education is meant to be broad and more than exams. If they had a project to do, say for a term it would be great. They never forget what they do in their projects. They may be out somewhere or off on a holiday somewhere and they may point out something that has a relevance to one of their projects (Transcript 33).

The mothers of both boys recalled how difficult novels were read and enjoyed in first year as their sons were then in a group of six students for their English lessons. Based on their experiences of their children's schooling to date, parents had a developed view on the kinds of teaching approaches that they perceived to have best supported their children's learning. This awareness may not have been there among many of the boys' teachers who possibly were unaware that pedagogies needed to change in order to cater for a more diverse group of students. Consultation with parents would possibly have helped to inform curricular approaches.

Kevin and Noel appeared to adjust to the demands of second level when they were in first year. However curriculum and pedagogy changed in second year. Norah one of the SNAs explained: *"Once second year started here, it was all about Junior Certificate" (Transcript 29).* The exams are one of a number of 'rigidities' that influence provision in second level schools (Wedell, 2005). It emerged at times during interviews with adults in this study that they almost expected the two boys to prove that they were worthy of a place in second level. One of the SNAs who worked with Noel and Kevin made comments to this effect: *"Integration is so much more than just having them in the school. For integration to work the child must have a certain level of ability. If a child cannot converse and be good at certain things it will be very difficult. There has to be a common denominator"(Transcript 29).*

Noel and Kevin's school was a community college where the philosophy espoused was that all students would be catered for regardless of ability. All classes

were "mixed ability" in formation and teachers were teaching students who wanted to take subjects to honours level. This was also the expectation of parents. Teachers in mainstream classes experienced difficulties in providing 'differentiated' work for the boys. The SNAs suspected that Kevin and Noel were extremely bored in classes throughout second year and especially in third year. The material covered in the mainstream classes appeared to be too difficult for them. The Learning Support Teachers also became aware that the boys were having extreme difficulties in mainstream classes. Margo, a learning Support teacher explained the situation that developed:

> Kevin and Noel were upset at certain stages and you could see that they were deflated coming out of classes...they were frustrated with their own learning...Their confidence was affected even in small groups, what was it like for them in large classes *(Transcript 30).*

It was possible that the range of methodologies deployed by teachers were unsuitable for students with GLD. Traditional teaching methods were unsuitable for this group (Wehmeyer, Lance and Bashinski, 2002). There was little evidence of teaching approaches being differentiated or varied to provide for different learning styles. Lessons were conducted mainly as whole class instruction where question and answer format was the dominant mode. There was a reliance on interpretation of textbook information supplemented by transcription of notes from the board. The following observational notes illustrated this point:

First Incident

> *Noel and Yvonne sat at the top of the class. There were thirty other girls in the room for this lesson. Noel was the only boy as all of the others were off at metalwork, woodwork or Art. The teacher sat at her table and the class was taught in a most traditional fashion. There wasn't a murmur in the class and the students were immediately instructed to 'Open your books on Chapter Thirteen, page ninety-four. This Chapter was all about 'cereals'*

and they were revising this in case it would appear on their examination paper. She directed questions at various girls such as: Why do we need fibre in our food? What are fortified foods? What protein value is in cereal? Noel appeared to be listening and paying attention but the content of the lesson was extremely abstract and technical. The teacher then proceeded to write extensive notes on the whiteboard about the 'protein value' in cereals. The SNA wrote this into Noel's copy but she left a few blank spaces and Noel had to insert words in these. The teacher returned to her table and continued to talk to the class. Thirty minutes into the lesson and she had no direct contact with Noel. However, as the first period of this double Home Economics class drew to an end, she sneezed and Noel said 'God Bless you' and the teacher replied 'Thank you Noel'. This was her only interaction with Noel in the course of a very difficult and technical lesson (Fieldnote 12.5.08).

It was approaching exam time at this stage but it was difficult to assess what Noel gained from this class because of the abstract content and by the form of delivery used. After leaving this class I observed Kevin in a practical lesson to see if he would experience learning in a different fashion:

Second Incident

There were thirty students in the Art room and they were all busy completing their Art Portfolios due for submission as part of their Junior Certificate. There was a relaxed atmosphere in the room and several students chatted with each other as they worked. The teacher circulated among them. Kevin and Norah sat together at a table with other students. He was painting his 'hot-dog' bag. On three occasions the teacher came over to Kevin and examined his work. She praised his efforts and said "perfect work Kevin". His face beamed with pride on each occasion when this happened (Fieldnote: 12.5.08).

In Shelly's school, the Junior Certificate Schools' Programme (JCSP) operated. This programme encouraged students to complete project work and these would go towards grades in the Junior Cert. I observed Shelly completing a project in Home Economics that was concerned with the early development of her nephew John. It was completed solely with her SNA but it held Shelly's attention and she was doing what all of the other girls in the class were doing. A number of other classes offered no opportunities for participation in projects and there was no use made of

information technology to enhance lessons. I observed lessons on the 'Voyages of Christopher Columbus' and on the 'Dead Sea Scrolls' in which textbooks, and transcription of material from the board were the main teaching methods used. A lack of preparation in initial training was identified as one reason for teachers' inability to differentiate (Spooner, Dymond, Smith and Kennedy, 2006). A teacher in Shelly's school echoed this point when she remarked to me at the end of one of the periods where I acted as an observer: *"I'm an honours graduate but I had no training as to how one should teach young people with GLD"* (Fieldnote 25.1.08).

Suitability of Curriculum at Second Level for Students with MGLD

There was disagreement among the adults at second level concerning the suitability of the second level curriculum for students with MGLD. The mainstream teachers in Shelly's school were of the view that it was extremely difficult for someone with MGLD to succeed at second level. Her teachers thought that a lot of the expectations placed on Shelly when following a second level curriculum in a mainstream school were quite daunting. She was expected to complete a Junior Certificate at the end of the following year and this was a great challenge according to one of her teachers: *"I don't feel any sense of confidence for her when it comes to the Junior Cert"* (Transcript 15). She maintained that Shelly would pass a few subjects but that an alternative curriculum would have been more appropriate. Her envisaged programme would place more emphasis on 'life skills' and this was essential for students with MGLD, in her view. This same teacher believed that Shelly was coping at present because of the support that she got from her family and the flexible approach that the school operated when it came to resource provision. She would not cope if she only received the time allocation as specified by the Department of Education and Science. This teacher went on to explain the situation

as follows: *"I've been to a Special School and I've seen the 'life-skills' programmes that they do, like going on the bus. We just can't do that here. Three and a half hours of resource time is just not enough. Without the support from staff and that received from home, Shelly would not manage here"* (Transcript 15). One of her teachers who taught one of the core subjects was also very pessimistic about Shelly's performance in the Junior Cert. He made the following point in this regard: *"She will handle it with great difficulty. What is expected of her is very great"* (Transcript 14).

Her Resource Teacher disagreed with this viewpoint. He was confident that Shelly would perform well in the Junior Certificate especially as she was following the JCSP. This allowed students to accrue a vast amount of marks ever before they sat the Junior Certificate. He explained how Shelly would cope as follows: *"I expect her to pass her Junior Certificate. That expectation would be there with all of her teachers in mainstream...we expect Shelly to achieve but we will have to look at the amount of subjects that she's doing and also the curriculum. Say, for example, the Maths paper, eighty per-cent is doable. Shelly gets lost when you go from the concrete to the abstract but still there's a pass in that and we play to her strengths"* (Transcript 12). This was the view of a teacher who had undertaken courses in special education and had considerable experience in teaching students with SEN. However, it was his view that the curriculum offered at senior cycle bore no relevance or worth for a student with MGLD. He made this point as follows:

> I would say, at the end of fourth year she will have learnt as much as she can from us and then I would like to see her get involved in independent living programmes...Why do the Leaving Certificate Applied? For what? Is she going to go to university? Is she going to do a post leaving certificate course? Is education not about Life-skills? *(Transcript 12)*

This was the view of one person who believed that the second level school curriculum held promise for those with MGLD but he was not as confident when it came to curriculum provision at senior cycle.

There was constantly one suggestion given at adult interviews and this was the belief that much of the work covered in schools went 'over the heads' of students with MGLD. One of Kevin and Noel's resource teachers expressed a view that it seemed that the boys had already *"switched off"* before they went into mainstream classes as *"everything was beyond them"* (Transcript 30). Another colleague expressed her opinion on this matter and it was that: *"They were deflated coming out of classes"*(Transcript 30). This observation was the impetus for change and so, it was decided in third year that the boys would spend the majority of their time in the resource room or in the company of their two SNAs. They believed that this brought about an improvement in the boy's level of happiness as they now undertook work in school that was *"pitched at their level"* (Transcript 30). There was an expectation among those who worked with the boys that the ASDAN programme was more suitable as it gave an opportunity to develop life-skills. The two SNAs who accompanied them while in mainstream classes felt that they enjoyed the experience but that academically they gained very little. They were in agreement for example that: *"They liked having History and Geography to do for homework but they really didn't understand much of these"* (Transcript 29). Rather than exposing the boys to an academic programme they saw more value if the school offered them life-skills instruction. They had reached the conclusion that this could not happen in a large secondary school. They explained this in an interview:

R:	*What areas could be improved for the two boys in this school?*
Y:	*More work experience.*
N:	*More life-skills.*
Y:	*Yeah, life-skills.*
N:	*Training towards independence. But then again this school cannot deliver this. This is a mainstream secondary school and it does not cater for having to teach 'life-skills' to pupils (Transcript 29).*

Kevin's mother was a teacher in an all girls secondary school. She expressed confidence in the JCSP programme as suitable for students with MGLD. She would love if this programme were available in her son's college. Noel's mother was equally disappointed in this regard. She outlined her views in this regard:

I am disappointed that possibly Art wasn't taken as a subject at least. I know that if you complete the projects along the way that it is possible for everyone to pass this subject. With readers and scribes it is possible for the boys to make an attempt in certain subjects" (Transcript 33).

Both parents believed that more effort was given in first year at making work accessible for the boys. They accepted that their sons couldn't cope with a system that was so exam focused. They acknowledged that the school authorities and teachers had taken a stand now to alter the situation. They praised the school for specifically sourcing ASDAN as a more suitable programme. The school was at this point making new efforts to meet the learning needs of the boys. Noel's mother stated: *"They could have left them in mainstream classes with all of the stuff going over their heads. However, they correctly took a stand and withdrew the boys so that they could implement a new programme that was more appropriate at meeting the boy's needs"* (Transcript 33).

Discussion

The students who were benefiting most from the general curriculum were those who had access to a special class. There, the work was set at the student's level of ability and they were able to succeed. Observations also indicated that the students in the special classes had curricular access that offered more breadth and balance. Aaron and Nathan spoke of their love for their special classes and they spoke of their achievements. Parents had an expectation that their sons and daughters with MGLD would have access to a broad and balanced curriculum like all other students without disabilities. However, in this study it emerged that this was not the case for a number of students. Observations in a number of schools indicated that much learning was confined to functional literacy and maths. This instruction was performed to a large extent by SNAs and in certain schools away from the mainstream class. Spending an inordinate amount of time in a separate room with SNAs separated students from peers and gave students with MGLD a different status in the school to all other students. Where this occurred in this study there was a clear indication that those involved in this practice were not participating or included in the routines and various happenings in the school. There was evidence from the 'voice' of two of the participants that these structures reinforced and conferred an identity of difference. There was no balance for these students with the amount of time spent in both settings.

Mainstream teachers in both primary and second level schools questioned the suitability of the curriculum for students with MGLD. They believed that students with MGLD needed to be exposed to more practical subjects and to those that would develop their life skills. However, in this study students were observed in a number

of practical subjects and at times there was a minimum of practical participation and involvement on the part of students. Teachers, apart from one or two exceptions continued to teach practical subjects in a traditional didactic way. This was disappointing as the students spoke of liking subjects that had practical elements. Two of the students identified the fact that even practical subjects were discontinued when exam pressures dominated and they were then only able to sit and listen in these classes. The students spoke of not liking when this happened. Similarly, adults who worked in the mainstream schools felt that they had not the resources or the opportunities to develop the life-skills for students with MGLD. They identified the rigid structures as preventing this from happening in mainstream settings.

Teachers who had been given professional training in ways of adapting the curriculum so that it would be suitable for students with MGLD were more likely to include practices in their teaching to ensure that these students would participate in lessons. Parents understood, possibly more than a number of teachers, the forms of pedagogy that best suited their sons and daughters with GLD. Students with MGLD in this study demonstrated that they wanted to be involved in mainstream subjects. They demonstrated that learning had occurred during their time in mainstream classes. However, in this study it emerged that as the students grew older they became more withdrawn, became more aware of difference and had a lower perception of their capabilities. Kevin's perceptions of his capabilities were significant in this regard. He appeared to lack confidence concerning what he could and could not do in school. It was possible that he had reached this understanding following the re-organisation of his timetable and from the comments of

professionals who worked in his school. If this was in fact the case, it demonstrated how practices in schools shaped one's sense of self and identity.

Further Reflections

The evidence that emerged in this study from observations and interviews suggested that students with MGLD were not having access to a broadly based curriculum. The curricular demands of sixth class and those at second level proved to be immensely challenging for students with MGLD. This would suggest that the aspirations behind the Revised Primary School Curriculum (1999) are not being reached in respect of students with MGLD. The traditional second level curriculum was problematic in the case of Kevin and Noel. This was concerning especially as the boys were included in mixed ability classes and in a community college where the ethos was one that welcomed and supported diversity among students. They now received a very restricted curriculum compared to their peers. Another Irish study highlighted how young people were denied access to various subjects at second level (Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela, 2002). Noel and Kevin's situation in this study depicted the vulnerability of students with GLD. Their learning disability was used as a reason to exclude them from having access to the general curriculum. They expressed the view that they would like to be reinstated in their mainstream classes and to have access to the full range of subjects. However, this view was given to me who was an outsider. It appeared that there was no opportunity afforded to them to 'voice' this desire to the school authorities. However, their 'voice' indicated that they were keen that a wider curriculum, including formal assessments should be available to them. In Shelly's school, structures were in place to ensure that she had access to a broadly based curriculum and this meant that she was able to follow a

number of subjects like all of the other students in her school. This was a challenge for her teachers and three teachers interviewed questioned their effectiveness in this regard.

Previously in the section dealing with 'identity' I felt that teachers and other adults did not use dominant labels to confer an identity on students with MGLD. However, this study suggests that the same could not be said regarding curriculum and pedagogy. In this study the majority of teachers were convinced that students with MGLD were unable to benefit from having access to the general curriculum. Both primary and post-primary teachers and SNAs equally stated this. They used the dominant label to explain why students were unable to learn in the mainstream classes. They rarely questioned their own efforts to promote and facilitate enhanced learning for students with MGLD. A number of students demonstrated that they in fact remembered what transpired in mainstream classes, despite a lack of augmentations and a variety of teaching modes.

From my observations it would appear that Shelly was able to show progress using the Junior Certificate Schools Programme. This is an alternative curriculum that encourages project work and on-going assessment. This programme was unavailable to Kevin and Noel, as it was not permitted in schools without disadvantage status. This therefore resulted in no form of certification available for students similar to Kevin and Noel mainly because they did not live in an area of socio economic disadvantage. Kevin's mother taught the programme in her school and she spoke on its potential for students with MGLD. The next section in this study discusses the difficulties experienced in gaining a suitable second level school

for students with MGLD. If schools were permitted to operate the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, there would possibly be more willingness on their part to enrol students with MGLD. The ASDAN programme was viewed as a suitable alternative to the traditional second level curriculum but the school, where this was introduced, was constrained in its implementation due to a lack of teacher allocation.

The students in this study never spoke of difficulties that they experienced while included in mainstream classes. In fact they were able to recall a lot of what they learnt. It appeared that it was the adult professionals who saw difficulties for students with MGLD in terms of their learning in mainstream classes and here is another area where the views of adults contradict those of the students. It appeared that the adults were using the dominant label referred to previously in the 'identity' section of this chapter to explain why learning was problematic. These students required adaptations and augmentations, alternative teaching methods and materials if they were to benefit from the general curriculum. I was surprised at the lack of Information Technology, DVDs, Computer packages used by teachers when working with students with MGLD. Peer-support rarely featured in classes. All of these contribute to encourage learning (Argen, Alper, Wehmeyer, 2002). Mainstream schools were possibly not aware of the benefits to be gained by including these resources for students with MGLD. Teachers, in the majority, continued to teach using traditional modes and where student participation was not encouraged. Professional development courses are required to rectify this lack of understanding for both teachers and SNAs. The next section outlines difficulties experienced by parents when it came to choice at the time of transition from primary to post-primary school.

Theme Four: Transition to Second Level

In Chapter One reference was made to research carried out by Flatman Watson (2004). She surveyed over two hundred and fifty schools in Dublin and Kildare and discovered that a large number of schools refused to enrol students with GLD. Flatman Watson's research was concerned with entry to primary school. There is limited research published on the experience in this regard at second level in Ireland. Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley (2008) reported that schools in general have great difficulties when it comes to accepting students with GLD. This became clear in this study for two students who were about to transfer to second level. In the case of two other students who were currently in second level their parents recalled how they had to do a lot of convincing with their local schools to secure places for their sons. For another student, local structures were already in place so that on leaving his special class in primary, he will automatically transfer to a similar special class in a mainstream secondary school. This study provides additional evidence on the lack of choice that was available to parents and their son\daughter when it came to transition.

In the Literature Review I drew attention to the work of Naughton (1997) where he outlines the different practices and expectations that exist in both primary and secondary schools. He maintains that by sixth class in primary school the child-centred nature of teaching begins to disappear. Other researchers draw attention to the constraints and rigidities that operate especially in second level that make learning difficult for students with GLD (McConkey, 1998; Wedell, 2005). Among these are rigid timetabling, examination pressure and the vast amount of content that has to be covered in each subject area. These difficulties have previously been

commented on in this study under the theme of 'Curriculum and Pedagogy'. However at this stage consideration is given to 'transition' to second level for students with MGLD. This was a pressing concern for all of the parents who participated in this study. A number also expressed concerns regarding transition after the completion of second level. Word constraints restrict me from the consideration of that issue. Here, the difficulties regarding transition from primary to secondary school are outlined.

Student Perceptions Regarding Transition

During observational visits and when Alice was interviewed, I was conscious that there was a lot of talk taking place concerning the schools that the students in her class were transferring to. As they were going to a number of schools, there was a lot of preparation and talk concerning the various placement assessments that they were taking. I sensed that Alice knew that she had reached a time of transition as parents and teachers were constantly alerting her to this fact. At our second interview she informed me that a man had visited her class from one of the local mainstream schools to specifically meet up with her:

R:	*And what did he say to you?*
Alice:	*Good work...am....a...everything nice in school.*
R:	*Did he look at your books?*
Alice:	*Yes.*
R:	*What did he say?*
Alice:	*Good* (Transcript 3).

He was in fact a resource teacher from a local fee-paying school, one of the options under consideration by her parents as a possibility. I asked Alice if she had a preference concerning the school that she would transfer to. She said that she would like to transfer to the fee-paying mainstream school, possibly because a number of

the other children in her class would be attending there. I asked if she enjoyed her visit to the special school, another possibility, and she appeared not to be too enthusiastic about it:

R: *And where will you go to school next year?*
Alice: *Am.....I think it's St. Ambrose's. (Mainstream fee-paying school)*
R: *What school would you like to go to?*
Alice: *St. Ambrose's.*
R: *Did you like St. Mary's? (Special school)*
Alice: *A little bit* (Transcript 3).

Alice may have been influenced by the discussions that her parents were having concerning the various schools. They had negative views concerning the special school. There was also the possibility that she was concerned about losing her current friends if she transferred to the special school. No other student in her class was going to transfer to that school. She had lost good friends in a similar way in the previous year. At the time of my observations in Alice's school she had gone to visit the local special school that catered specifically for students with GLD. Alice was aware of the possibility that this was where she was going to transfer. In a photo voice interview she showed me a picture of a girl in her class who like all of the others she considered to be a 'best friend'. I asked her if she would miss this girl next year if they go to different schools. However, Alice interrupted me to state: *"Patricia is going to St. Ambrose's and I'm going to St. Ambrose's"* (Transcript 4).

Neither Alice nor Aaron appeared to be overly anxious about their upcoming transfer to a new school. This was despite the fact that it was a constant topic of conversation in their homes and schools. Aaron spontaneously related an account of his visit to the special school in the course of an interview. The presence of

'machinery' in this school made it highly attractive for Aaron. The following were his words concerning this visit:

R:	*Did you do any nice things in Miss Black's room?*
Aaron:	*am………am…….. No. I went to see a new school.*
R:	*Did you like it?*
Aaron:	*Yes.*
R:	*Do you think, will you be going there?*
Aaron:	*Yes, maybe.*
R:	*Maybe.*
Aaron:	*Yes, maybe, but we might try a few more.*
R:	*What did you see when you were there?*
Aaron:	*Am….. a tractor.*
R:	*What was this tractor doing?*
Aaron:	*Am….*
R:	*Tell me about the tractor?*
Aaron:	*It was there when we went in and when we came out; it was pulling out the gate.*
R:	*What did you like about the school?*
Aaron:	*Am…… am…… don't know but it was nice* (Transcript 25).

Aaron appeared not to be concerned that his best friend Liam was transferring to another school. I had previously informed Aaron that I was visiting another girl in the country called Alice and that she was also visiting a number of potential second level schools. In the last interview that we shared he surprised me by enquiring about the girl in the country.

Aaron:	*How was that girl like you went to see far away?*
R:	*Oh, she was lovely.*
Aaron:	*Is she?*
R:	*Oh, she was lovely.*
Aaron:	*Was she?*
R:	*She wants to find a nice secondary school like you* (Transcript 26).

This was an interesting revelation for me and extremely relevant to this study. It showed that a student with MGLD was able to sustain a conversation on an issue

central to his or her own life. He was also able to relate his experience to another girl who was going through the same transitional process as himself.

Adult Perspectives on Transition

Aaron's parents were desperately trying to source a suitable second-level school for their son. There was no special class for students with MGLD in his local second level school. His mainstream teacher echoed the words of other teachers in this study concerning the suitability of mainstream second level schools: *"I'm not sure that a mainstream setting would be appropriate"* (Transcript 21). The principal teacher shared this belief. He claimed that the traditional subject and exam based post-primary schools were not suitable for Aaron to finish off his education. He summed up this dilemma: *"Aaron's transfer to second level; it's fraught with uncertaintities. I wonder if the flexibility will be in the system to accommodate the challenges that may arise"* (Transcript 19). Aaron's mother had come to realise for a student like her son, that there was no clear pathway when it came to entering second level education.

Aaron had visited a number of potential second level schools. One in particular catered for students with MGLD and it was initially felt that this would be an appropriate setting. However his mother felt that he was not impressed when he went there. She described his reaction to the place:

> We went down and met the fantastic teachers there but Aaron hated it and was terrified. He found the entire environment totally alien to him. He held on to me for dear life. One girl kept popping up and saying 'Hello, I'm Claire, Hello, I'm Claire' but Aaron just kept looking at her and finding the whole experience so weird (Transcript 20).

Aaron had spent his entire schooling in a mainstream setting and therefore had very little interaction with children who had SEN. This was possibly his first time coming into contact with other young people who had such a great diversity of need. He may have been intimidated and frightened by the whole experience and this could explain his sense of fear on his initial visit to this school. Alternatively, the reservations that his mother had concerning special schools may have transferred and influenced his way of thinking.

Schools that traditionally catered for students with mild GLD were then considered as an appropriate option. His mother was anxious that he would retain his love for reading and writing but she would also like to see him exposed to some new subjects such as horticulture and woodwork. However, the local special school that catered for this category of students refused to consider the possibility of a student with MGLD becoming a student there. A similar school at a distance from Aaron's home facilitated a visit. The significant people in Aaron's life who contributed to this research were all concerned with the challenge that Aaron would have to face when he entered a new school. The familiar routine that he now enjoyed and his acquaintances would disappear out of his life. His mainstream teacher acknowledged that Aaron was possibly unaware of the enormity of challenge. She stated:

> I wouldn't say that he is aware of what is involved. I don't think that he is aware of the consequences; his SNA won't be there, his special class teacher won't be there either. The familiar faces will no longer be there and this will be a huge change in his life. But I hope that wherever he goes, the supports that he needs will be in place *(Transcript 21).*

There were enormous difficulties and tensions in existence when it came to selecting an appropriate setting for Alice and Aaron, as they were about to finish in

primary school. This was all the more concerning as Legislation in the form of the Education Act (1998) and Education for Pupils with Special Educational Needs Act (2004), both promoted inclusive education for students with disabilities. However, in this study, when parents approached local second level schools they felt that there was little or no support in existence for students with MGLD. I first met Alice and her family in March and her father stated: *"We have a nightmare to deal with"* (Transcript 7). He was speaking about the difficulties that they had encountered in trying to find a suitable second level school for Alice. There were three local secondary schools in the locality. One was a Community School and the others were religious run second level schools. There was also a special school in the town and this traditionally catered for students with mild GLD. However, the enrolment policy had changed over the past number of years and there were now students in attendance that had MGLD. The principal of Alice's primary school had the view that this special school was the most appropriate setting for Alice. He stated this in an interview:

> *My view is clear and I have made this point known to the mother. I believe that none of the secondary schools in the town here are equipped to deal properly with the needs of Alice. They are not set up properly for the challenge. I feel that the local special school would be the most appropriate environment for Alice. There, she would be able to do practical and appropriate programmes up until she reaches eighteen. She would also be in a more protected environment that she possibly needs* (Transcript 6).

Alice's mainstream teacher was also anxious about the issue of second level but shared the view of the principal that Alice would be unable to cope in a mainstream second level school. She outlined some of the difficulties that Alice would find impossible to cope with: *"I think the pace will be too much for her, change of room, change of subject, change of teacher happening constantly throughout the day...As*

regards History, Geography and Science, I just can't imagine how they'll create a programme for her that will be suitable" (Transcript 5). On listening to this teacher I was struck that she was articulating the same points made by Shelly's, Kevin's and Noel's teachers as to why they felt that mainstream second level schools were unable to cope with students with MGLD.

At this time both of Alice's parents wanted her to transfer to one of the local second level schools as opposed to going to the special school. They hoped that Alice would be in a position to complete some subjects at least, in the Junior Certificate and felt that this would only happen if she were enrolled in a mainstream post primary school. Alice's primary school principal outlined the tensions that the parents were experiencing regarding the selection of a suitable second level school for their daughter:

> They realise that the local special school is not overly academic whereas the local second level schools are too academic. The parents long for a more academic environment but deep down I think they realise that the special school is a better and safer environment for their daughter to be in. One of the traditional second level schools has gone co-educational in recent years. They are still coping with this change. They have no experience in coping with students who have special educational needs. I wouldn't like being the test case (Transcript 6).

The school mentioned here was the preferred option of both parents. However, they maintained an open mind on the matter and visited all of the second level schools. At this point in time they felt that they were back again to when Alice was four when they initially tried to find a suitable mainstream school. However they visited the local special national school but they left with huge reservations. The father explained:

This is not to fault the children there or mentioned to demean the work of the teachers and assistants there, however, on walking through the classes, there seems to be a huge 'gap' in terms of their level of attainment and Alice's. I could therefore see that there was nothing to be got in this school that would be suitable for Alice. I couldn't see her progressing there. Some of the students were unable to communicate with each other. I found the environment there to be very depressing (Transcript 7).

Alice's parents visited all of the mainstream second level schools and they experienced a lot of negativity there towards Alice. One of the schools maintained that the parents had missed the enrolment date even though they had accepted payment and completed forms a year ago. Another school outlined the lack of success that they had when there was a student with Down Syndrome enrolled previously. Alice's father reached the following conclusion: *"The attitude of management in second level schools is not one of acceptance, it is in fact the complete opposite. The attitude in secondary schools seems to push you away"* (Transcript 7). They felt that they were on their own trying to convince second level schools to enrol Alice. They received no assistance from the Special Educational Needs Officer. Alice's mother wished for a special class in the local post primary school. They shared a dream that Kevin and Noel's parents possessed three years previously, that their daughter would be included in a local second level school.

Discussion

Nathan's situation never featured under this theme. However, his situation had a real relevance to this study. He had one year remaining in primary school but he was already assured of a place in a special class in a local second level school that catered for students with MGLD. If this continuation of structure had existed in Alice and Aaron's local areas, their parents would have been saved a lot of anxiety. Lauchlan and Boyle, (2007) demonstrate how when schools generalise on a student's ability

often their generalisations are associated with psychological labels. In this study it was obvious that participating students had to prove that they were able to achieve in order to gain a place in the mainstream second level school. However, even if entry was permitted, there was no guarantee that they would have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. Noel and Kevin's experience illustrated this fact. Despite the enactment of legislation in recent years there are still situations where access is denied to people with GLD. This perpetuates the vulnerability of a group in society who experienced persistent exclusion from mainstream settings in the past.

Both Alice and Aaron appeared to have very little to say about their transition. Although Alice made it clear in interviews that she wanted to transfer to the same school where her friends were going, beyond this, she appeared to have very little to say about her transition to second level. The same appeared to be true of Aaron. Both students probably knew that their parents and professionals would make this decision. It was difficult to determine if they were aware of their own personal challenges that they would experience in the move to a new school. These did not surface in the interviews that we shared as part of this research.

When linked to the findings from the Curriculum and Pedagogy theme, findings on transition suggest that second level schools and primary schools at senior level require support and training for all staff if attitudes have to change. A lasting impression that remains with me from this study is the lack of choice afforded to parents along with the barriers that remain in schools, therefore denying a possibility of a place for a student with MGLD even on a trial basis.

Further Reflections

Usually teenagers assert their preference concerning the school that they want to transfer to at the end of primary school and they are frequently listened to. They like to transfer to where the majority of their friends are going. This study indicates that this level of choice was not available to students with MGLD. This is concerning but supports similar findings of Kelly (2006) and Bagley, Woods and Woods (2001). In certain cases mainstream schools stated that the curriculum available was subject based and examination focused. They advised parents that a special school would be more appropriate. There was no consideration given to the possibility of altering existing structures in order to accommodate students with MGLD. Previously the findings of Flatman-Watson (2004) were cited as demonstrating how primary schools were reluctant to enrol students with GLD. The findings in this study indicate that the same applies at second level. Barriers such as this could impact seriously on the identity and sense of self of students with MGLD. In situations where this happens there is a possibility that students with MGLD may realise that it is the dominant label that gives them an ascribed identity and that this sets them apart from their peers in terms of the opportunities that are on offer to them in life. This study demonstrated the lack of choice that was afforded to parents in terms of post-primary provision. It further demonstrated the lack of continuity in terms of structures that were available for students with MGLD at local level. They were directed towards the special school as this was considered to be the most suitable setting. There was no consideration given by primary and second level teachers to the possibility that these students should be entitled to go to the same school as their friends. This was the view of Alice but it possibly went without notice. This indicates the vulnerability of students with MGLD in having their 'voice' silenced.

Having considered the findings of this study it is now appropriate to consider the research methods deployed.

<center>Review of Research Methods</center>

In this section the effectiveness of the research methods are reflected upon and critiqued in the hope of answering the second research question associated with this study:

- What research methods allow students with MGLD to express their views?

I utilized a range of methods that helped students with MGLD to have a 'voice' on their social and educational experiences of school. The methods used and their potential use for future researchers contributes to the strengths of this study.

At the outset of this study I was forced to question the methods used to locate potential participants. I now realise that I relied too heavily on one organisation or 'gatekeeper' as a means for contacting students to answer my research questions. The organisation had layers of bureaucracy in place that had to be dealt with. I can only surmise a number of reasons that may explain why all the efforts on my part at fulfilling this organisation's requirements yielded no contacts in the end. I was setting the research agenda and it may not have been an area of research that was viewed as a priority. Heath, Charles, Crow and Wiles (2007) are adamant that this is one of a number of reasons why 'gatekeepers' deny access to researchers. In the early stages of the study my status as a direct employee of this organisation changed. I ceased to be a teacher working for this organisation. Effectively I became, what Sixsmith, Boneham and Goldring (2003) describe as an "outsider". The gatekeepers would therefore have limited control over my research. In the end the participants for

this study were sourced through personal contacts. This resulted in a stronger sample as they came from a variety of geographical locations and from a wide variety of schools. One large 'gatekeeper' did not vet them. This frequently occurs where 'gatekeepers' in large organisations nominate participants viewed as reliable and who will not offer views contrary to the spirit of this organisation (Sixsmith et al.). In the end it was the students themselves along with their parents who consented to participate in this study.

As observation and interview were dominant methodologies throughout this study their effectiveness are considered with more depth in the following sections.

Observation

Once access was achieved to six participants and their schools I allowed time so that a certain sense of rapport could be established between them and myself. Stalker (1998) recommends this practice. The five days spent as an observer in each school were crucial in this regard. I believe that the students saw me as an enquirer rather than a teacher. In each case they readily accepted my presence and I was never asked not to accompany them to various settings. Each participant was afforded equal time in getting to know me and therefore no participant had an advantage over the other in terms of familiarity.

Spending five days as an observer in five schools was extremely time consuming but this proved to be hugely beneficial in the collection of data. As a research method, observation provided first hand experience of the context in which the participants learn (Morris, 2003). This study was concerned in looking at what

Robson (2006) termed real world contexts. I used a framework recommended by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005) as a guide in collecting data. This was supplemented by the inclusion of critical incidents that I observed during this period.

The advantage that observation holds over other research methods such as interviews and questionnaires is that one has a direct entry into the lived experiences of participants. This is what this study set out to achieve. Morris (2003) states that being with people with GLD is one of the most appropriate methods of gathering information about their experiences. In this study the students were observed in all areas of school, classrooms, resource rooms, lunchrooms, playgrounds and on school outings. As a research method, observations provided stimuli for points of discussion at interviews. Chapter Four in this thesis contains several accounts of observations that are used to present supportive evidence in relation to the four main themes that emerge: personal identity, friendship, curriculum\pedagogy and transition. These recorded observations provide extensive accounts of the social and educational experiences of six students with MGLD in five mainstream schools.

To ensure rigorous standards in any research study Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend that researchers spend periods of prolonged engagement in each case. In doing so, this allows time for the researcher to become aware of the complexities associated with each context. In this study the five days spent as an observer and subsequent return visits to schools ensured that this requirement was adhered to.

Interviews

In addition to observation this study adopted 'interviews' as another method of data collection. In terms of students with GLD Brewster (2004) recommended that consultation should be on going rather than a once off event. This was the reason why I decided that each participant should be provided with an opportunity to share in at least four interviews. These were held on additional visits to schools subsequent to the five days of observation. Interviews never ran over forty five minutes in duration and there was a short time frame between interviews where possible. Beresford (1997) recommends this practice, as it allows for recall among participants as to what transpired in previous settings and it also prevents boredom and tiredness.

I attempted to carry out interviews in a calm and relaxed way. My immediate concern was to put participants at ease with the process and not to cause any distress. Each interview began with students being given an explanation as to what would occur in the session by means of an illustrated consent form (appendix 3). They were then asked to circle the correct 'face' on this form to indicate their decision regarding participation in the research on that day. The work of Mason (2002) and Swain, Heyman and Gillman (1998) was influential in this regard, advocating a need for informed methods of gaining consent. Similar illustrated consent forms proved to be effective for another researcher (Rodgers, 1999). This encouraged me to devise an original illustrated consent form for the purpose of this study (Appendix 3). One advantage of this consent form was that it did not rely on one having an ability to read or write. Students retained their consent forms. Following on from this they were then familiarised with two interview tools that they could use to assert control over the interview - 'stop' and 'go' signs – which they were encouraged to

manipulate. Nathan was the only participant who decided to use them. On one occasion, he used them at the start of an interview when he held up the 'stop' sign twice and on asked if he wanted to conclude the session, he declined and pointed to the 'go' sign. This suggests that he realised that he had control over proceedings.

After this introduction, I asked participants to talk on any topic of their choice or on anything that occurred in their life since I had previously spoken with them. This was an interview technique favoured by Agnew and Powell (2004) and used when interviewing adults with GLD. Agnew and Powell recommended that this should take place as an introductory activity before any questions were put to participants. The following is an extract from the beginning of an interview shared with Alice:

Researcher: Any nice things happen since I saw you last Alice?
Alice: Yeah.
R: What did you do that was nice?
A: am........(long pause) I like playing with my friends.
R: What nice things did you do with your friends?
A: Play games with them.
R: What games?
A: am..........(long pause) Skipping.
R: Oh, how did the skipathon go? (a recent fundraising event)
A: Very good.
R: What did you like best about it?
A: Because we had a photo taken.
R: Did you?
A: It was in the newspaper.
R: Oh was it! And were you in the newspaper?
A: Yeah.
R: And how did that make you feel?
A: Very happy (Transcript 4).

A number of prompts had to be given before any revelations were given and even at that the utterances were very short. I thought that the use of Clicker 5 software would have made this a more lively and engaging experience. Participants sat next to me and as I typed their narrative on the laptop, Clicker 5 software inserted images on to

the screen. It was my intention that this would serve as an icebreaker activity but in hindsight I now consider that this activity may have been stressful for participants as they possibly had difficulties with word findings in situations when they were asked to talk freely. Other researchers suggest that students with GLD have great difficulties with the retrieval of vocabulary in order to complete activities such as this (Dockrell, Messer, George and Wilson, 1998). However this opening activity was used successfully in a similar study carried out by Ring and Travers (2005), where a young boy was interviewed about his school experience. In the course of this study, a means of enhancing the elicitation of speech in this opening activity was discovered. This was an accidental discovery while interviewing Aaron. He demonstrated great difficulty with my introductory activity as illuminated in this extract:

> *Researcher: Any nice things happen to you this week Aaron?*
> *Aaron: Ah...am... ...am.. (long pause).*
> *R: Did you do any nice things in the big class?*
> *A: The sin.....(unclear)*
> *R: Tell me again?*
> *A: The singing.*
> *R: Will mammy come to see you in the concert?*
> *A: Am...a....a.... I think so.*
> *R: And did you do any nice things in your other class? (special class)*
> *A: Am....a....a.... (long pause).*
> *R: Art?*
> *A: Am... No* (Transcript 24).

However, there was always 'news' written on the blackboard in Aaron's special class. I began to glance at this and note anything that was of relevance to him. I used this information to initiate conversations. One day for example, I read that his dog had gone missing and this was used to initiate discussion:

> *Researcher: What happened to your dog?*
> *Aaron: Ah.... I lost my dog and I had to go and get her.*
> *R: I don't believe you! Where did she go?*
> *A: She went all the way to the pound.*

R: To the pound?
A: To the pound, walking.
R: Oh no! How many days was she gone?
A: Just two.
R: Were you really worried?
A: Yes, a bit.
R: When you got to the pound, where was she?
A: Someone found her in a river.
R: Why did she run away?
A: The gate blew open.
R: Oh no!
*A: We came home from holidays and we found the gate open. We went and had a
look but she wasn't around.*
R: Oh, that was very tough (Transcript 26).

This finding in Methodology shows that some prior-knowledge of happenings can be used as an icebreaker before commencing interviews with students who have MGLD. This for me, proved preferable to asking them to talk freely on the unknown.

There are other recommended alternative introductory activities that might have worked better such as getting participants to take me on a tour of the school similar to that carried out by Stalker (1998). However, I felt that this would draw unnecessary attention to the young participants in this study and this I was determined to avoid. I also believed that accompanying the researcher on a school tour would be disruptive in a school setting where as for Stalker, it worked because her research took place in an institutional setting.

Rather than relying on a schedule of questions I adopted an unstructured approach when it came to interviewing students. In the course of this study, interviews with young people were allowed to flow freely but in reality many of my questions were always influenced by the pre-determined themes that I had arrived at following the review of literature. They were also influenced by the themes that I

wished to highlight. I had discovered from pilot interviews that a schedule of questions constrained the spontaneity of the situation. I therefore decided not to use a formal schedule of questions with students. Open-ended questions are recommended as being most conducive when trying to elicit views from those with GLD (Wright and Powell, 2007; Dockrell, Lewis and Lindsay 2002; Ceci and Bruck, 1993). In this study I therefore relied heavily on open-ended questions when interviewing students. It was a rare occurrence for any student to offer extended answers when they were talking about activities in school. I wanted Alice to talk about the activities that she enjoyed in her mainstream class and therefore used open questions to encourage dialogue:

Researcher: Tell me what you like doing in your sixth class?
Alice: Am..... am...... playing games with my friends.
R: Tell me about the games that you like to play?
A: Dodge ball.
R: I saw you playing that yesterday and you were brilliant. Now tell me
    about the games that you like to play with your SNA?
A: Shopping.
R: Anything else?
A: No (Transcript 1).

The following extract from an interview with Shelly demonstrates the fact that she had equal difficulty in answering open-ended questions:

Researcher: Tell me what you liked in school this week?
Shelly: Am..... am..... (long pause)....I don't know.
R: What nice things did you do in school this week?
S: Yeah
R: Tell me what you liked doing in school this week?
S: am........ (pause).....Home Economics.
R: Anything Else?
S: am...... am...... (pauses)....Geography (Transcript 9).

There was the possibility that the pauses here indicated that Shelly was reflecting on what happened during the week and what she might wish to talk about. On the other hand the pauses could also signify difficulties experienced in the recall of events or

in finding the right words to express herself. In the end Shelly provided a minimum amount of information in answer to the questions posed. Though open questions are recommended for use when interviewing people with GLD, the evidence in this study suggests that this form of question presents great challenges for young people with MGLD.

Kevin and Noel participated in joint interviews. There was no noticeable difference in the amount of information given by them. Sharing an interview with another student did not appear to encourage more dialogue. It was a rare occurrence when either student spoke spontaneously. However the following were exceptions:

> *R: Last week your teacher showed me a photo of the two of you in the school Magazine.*
> *Kevin: Oh yes!*
> *R: Tell me what was happening? Why were you in the magazine?*
> *Noel: Because we were wearing a black tie for our local charity. We were in a fashion show and had to wear a suit.*
> *K: Oh yes we were in a suit in a fancy dress, fashion show.*
> *R: And what were ye doing in the fashion show?*
> *N: We had to model and raise money.*
> *R: And was the money for this college?*
> *K: No, it was for charity* (Transcript 27).

In another interview, we were talking about the 'house exams' that the boys were taking in a few weeks instead of the Junior Certificate. Here again there was an exceptional occurrence when Kevin and Noel talked spontaneously without prompts:

> *Kevin: Me and Noel have to do six subjects.*
> *Researcher: And what will they ask you in Geography?*
> *Noel: About maps.*
> *K: About rocks and rivers.*
> *N: About rain.*
> *K: About erosion.*
> *R: Frozen?*
> *N: Erosion.*
> *R: Oh Erosion!*
> *K: Erosion is when rocks break* (Transcript 28).

It is interesting to note that in the spontaneity of this conversation both boys remained focused on the topic under discussion. More extensive analysis of the transcribed scripts of interviews with Kevin and Noel revealed that it was rare for the words of one student to trigger a memory for the other that promoted a spontaneous response. On one other occasion Noel corrected Kevin as he felt that he provided inaccurate information. We were talking about exams and where they undertook them:

> *Researcher: Were you in the room with all of the other boys and girls?*
> *Noel and Kevin: (together) No we were in a different room.*
> *R: What room?*
> *K: 9A.*
> *N: No Kevin, it was outside the PE hall?*
> *R: And who was in the room with you?*
> *K: Nora and Margo (SNAs)* (Transcript 27).

There was therefore no conclusive evidence in this study to suggest that interviewing students with MGLD in pairs encouraged the elicitation of more dialogue. For the most part both students waited for the researcher to direct questions before they offered a comment on any topic.

Alternative Interview Techniques

In the Literature Review I made reference to the advice of Lewis and Porter (2004) who encourage researchers not to overly rely on the spoken word or traditional research tools when seeking the views of students who have GLD. In this study I attempted to match appropriate research methodologies that were suited to the interests, maturity and communicative ability of each participant. In doing so it was my intention to make involvement an enjoyable and worthwhile experience for participants. I employed a range of qualitative methods that allowed students with MGLD to share their experiences of mainstream schools.

In Chapter Two, those researchers who encourage the use of alternative approaches and techniques when interviewing young people are considered (Lewis and Porter, 2004; Begley, 2002 and Thomas and O'Kane, 2000). In this study I made use of games, photos and puppets to encourage conversation. These I believe facilitated and encouraged longer elicitations from Nathan. I made use of a puppet along with games. Nathan particularly took to Toby the tortoise and talked freely with him about events in school. On one occasion I was aware that Nathan had been out and about with his class on the previous week and I made use of Toby to find out how this outing went:

> *Researcher: (pretends that Toby is whispering something in my ear) Toby says*
> *he heard that you went to the park with your teacher?*
> *Nathan: Oh yes there was music and dancing.*
> *R: Toby wants to know if you liked that day?*
> *N: Oh yes, I liked that day.*
> *R: (again pretends Toby is whispering something) Toby says he heard that you*
> *were playing with an umbrella?*
> *N: Yes, it was a guitar* (Transcript 35).

This outing took place during my week as an observer in Nathan's school and he recalled it accurately for Toby. In another interview I used the same open-ended question that I used throughout this study as an introductory one. Nathan provided an answer immediately for Toby unlike when this question was posed to other participants:

> *Researcher: (Toby whispering in his ear) He wants to know what good things*
> *happened in school this week?*
> *Nathan: Yes.*
> *R: What things made you happy?*
> *N: I do play.*
> *R: Were you playing football?*
> *N: No, sports day.*
> *R: So you had no football?*
> *N: Yes I had* (Transcript 38).

Closer analyses of the transcripts of Nathan's interviews show how he readily offered answers to Toby with very slight pauses before answering. In this study the use of puppets was a useful stimulus in enabling students with MGLD to express their views.

The provision of cameras to participants provided photos that served as an additional stimulus for conversation in interviews. This technique was also used effectively in other studies (Aldridge, 2007; Germain, 2004; and Booth and Booth, 2003). In these studies participants with GLD were provided with disposable cameras. However, participants in this study found disposable cameras difficult to operate. Following instruction on the use of a digital camera, students readily mastered its use and this type of camera proved to be more user friendly. As photos were taken in my absence between interviews, I had no knowledge as to the amount of control that participants had in this process. Shelly for example, featured in a number of photos and it was therefore obvious that she was not the person who was in control of the camera. The photos taken by Shelly, Kevin and Noel featured no young people or friends. Possible explanations for this could be reluctance on their part to ask permission from mainstream students to be photographed. It was also possible that mainstream students asked that they would not be photographed. The findings from this study support the use of cameras as a technique for enhancing interviews with students who have MGLD. Taking photos allowed students to accurately depict their reality or lived experience. Aldridge (2007) maintains that as a method it emphasises the capacity of vulnerable respondents rather than their incapacity. I believe that photographs incorporated in interviews encouraged reflection on the part of students on their experiences. This was therefore another

means by which participants were afforded a 'voice' concerning their everyday experiences in mainstream schools. Viewing an image permitted them to talk on happenings that had taken place in school. Kevin for example took a photo of his artwork and spoke of it proudly as follows:

Researcher: What is it?
Kevin: This is my artwork.
R: And what is this?
K: This is my hot-dog bag and my fruit bowl (Appendix 12).
R: Who helped you make them?
K: I did it on my own.
R: And was it hard to make?
K: Easy.
R: And do you like going into the Art room?
K: Oh yeah (Transcript 31).

In a similar way, a photo that showed Noel in the Home Economics room allowed him to talk about a subject that he really enjoyed in school:

Researcher: And here's a photo of Noel in the Home Economic's room. Tell me about Home Economics?
Noel: I like to cook spaghetti bolognaise and chicken curry.
R: And do you do hard work in Home Economics?
N: No, not that hard. Nora (SNA) helps me with anything that's hard (Transcript 31).

Aaron had captured a photo of his mainstream class when the room was turned into a cinema for a day. He spoke about this event as follows:

Researcher: What were you doing there? (Photo shows rows of children)
Aaron: Cinema.
R: In the classroom?
A: Yes.
R: What film were you watching?
A: World War Two.
R: What is everyone eating?
A: Popcorn.
R: Who gave ye the popcorn?
A: I had a packet of treats (raisins) that I had in my bag.
R: Oh I know because you don't like popcorn (Transcript 25).

In the course of a photovoice interview with Shelly she spontaneously selected one photo from her bundle showing her resource teacher:

Shelly: Oh there's Miss Walsh?
Researcher: What do you do with Miss Walsh?
Sh: am......(pause) .... Am.......money.
R: Anything else?
Sh: am..... (pause) ...... work.
R: Writing?
Sh: Writing (nods head in agreement).
R: Reading?
Sh: Reading....no.
R: Just writing and money?
Sh: Yeah.
R: And when you go to Miss Walsh, do you go there on your own?
Sh: Miss Walsh?
R: Anyone else go with you?
Sh: Derek (Transcript 10).

Shelly makes very good use of photos to explain what she does in school and how she feels while involved in various activities. Aldridge (2007) used photovoice in a research study where adults with GLD gave their opinion on a recent horticulture programme that they were involved in. She states that the participants were unable to expand verbally on the meaningfulness or significance of the images captured in photos. This was not the experience in this study. All students spoke about the significance of photos as is illustrated in the excerpts of interviews quoted in this chapter.

As a concluding activity to photovoice interviews the students were asked to select their six favourite photos. Aaron for example wrote a letter to his sister in Dubai as follows and enclosed his favourite photos:

Dear Emma,
Here are some of my special photos of school. You can see my teacher and Pat.
Anne brings me to school every day. Liam and Cian are my friends. You can
see a photo of my painting. Ned does the jobs in school. I will be going to a
new school soon. I hope you are well?

Love,
Aaron (Transcript 26).

The findings from this study show this to be an effective technique when concluding photovoice interviews. It encouraged dialogue among participants as to why they selected photos.

An alternative format was used with photos while interviewing Nathan. Over the course of one week as an observer in his school, I captured photos of his involvement in various activities. We talked about these photos at interviews. I supplied bundles of grumpy and smiley faces and he placed the appropriate face on each photo to indicate how he felt while participating in these activities (Appendix 9). There follows a brief extract of this interview format:

> *When Nathan is playing football, show me your face?*
> *When Nathan is messing in the yard with friends, show me your face?*
> *When Nathan is doing 'news' in class, show me your face?*
> *When Nathan is doing writing, show me your face?*
> *When Nathan is playing with the parachute, show me your face?* (Transcript 38)

Nathan placed smiley faces on all of his photos apart from the one that showed him playing with the parachute. We talked about this photo:

> *Researcher: Why do you hate playing with the parachute?*
> *Nathan: In case you blow away.*
> *R: In case who'll blow away?*
> *N: Me.*
> *R: Oh poor Nathan, you'll never blow away* (Transcript 38).

This activity proved enjoyable for Nathan but it also allowed me to gain his perspectives on various school activities. The 'posting game' was also successful as it showed the subject areas that Nathan liked in school. I would therefore recommend that games similar to those used in this study, have a significant beneficial role to

play in helping students with MGLD to articulate their perspectives.

Safeguards

I asked in every school for an adult to be present in the room during interviews. Following on from the pilot interviews where some mothers were inclined to speak on behalf of the young person, a protocol was observed in the main study where adults were asked to refrain from making contributions during the student's interviews. This proved successful. Schools directed that the student's SNA should remain in the interview room. I subsequently realised however, that having SNAs present possibly compromised the confidentiality of students. In one of the interviews it became apparent that what transpired was reported back to the resource teachers and to the Deputy Principal. This Deputy Principal approached me on a subsequent visit to the school and asked if I was going to relate what was said in the student interviews to parents, as this could portray the school in a negative manner. This represented one instance in this study where it appeared that having an adult present in the room served to negate the promise of anonymity given to the participants and this was regrettable. It may also suggest a flaw in the protocol that SNAs were asked to observe concerning what they heard at interviews with students. It was regrettable that I did not emphasise the importance of the guarantee of confidentiality given to student participants. Their role in preserving this should have been clearly stated when explaining their role in the interview process.

Validity

I was mindful that I placed the proper interpretation on the views of students. In order to do this, students were provided with verification sheets at the start of each

interview, which gave a written, pictorial summary of what transpired at the previous interview. Here again the work of Stalker (1998) was influential in this regard. At times these verification sheets resembled a reconstructed story as defined by Papadopoulos, Scanlon and Lees (2002). The comments of students and those of adults were included in these sheets to form a story relevant to the young person's life and they were asked to verify that this was indeed accurate. At the start of the study, the young people were informed that I would be talking to their teachers, parents and SNAs about school experiences. One way of showing respect to participants is allowing them an opportunity to verify their own account (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Of the six students, Aaron was the only one who challenged me on what I had written on one of his verification sheets. I had constructed his verification sheet from what had transpired in an interview with him and from the comments of other adults and this was used to stimulate more conversation at interview. He was not at all happy, as I had written that on occasions he was moody and disliked going to school. The verification sheet read as follows:

> *I like going to school. I love swimming. I especially like writing and I call*
> *this penmanship. I also like singing in the choir. Sometimes I get grumpy*
> *in school. This happens when I am tired…… (Transcript 26).*

This illustrated how students with MGLD were capable of challenging the accuracy of information written about them. Aaron demonstrated how he was able to disagree with the way that he was portrayed. He was prepared to disagree with the researcher and to show that he had views of his own and could forcibly 'voice' these if necessary.

A total of twenty-seven adults participated in interviews over the course of this study. In a similar way to the young participants they were given the opportunity to

verify my interpretation of what transpired in interviews. They were all provided with transcripts of their interviews and asked to amend where necessary. Five people asked for amendments to be made and their wishes were duly adhered to. Transcripts were returned to interviewees in envelopes that were marked 'private and confidential'. They were also provided with their own personal stamped addressed envelope in which they could return their verified transcripts. However, in one of the schools the amended transcripts were returned in a single envelope. This was a breach of my guarantee of confidentiality but was beyond my control. I will return to this review of methods in Chapter Five and reflect on the lessons learnt from this study concerning the suitability of various methods used to interview young people with MGLD.

Summary

The main reason for conducting this study was to discover the perceptions of students with MGLD about mainstream schools. In the main what emerges from the Findings Chapter is a strong sense of the students' views and of how these are juxtaposed with those of the adults. There are several instances where the 'voice' of students contradicts what the adults say. Students spoke of their friends and how they interacted with them. Adults who worked in the schools gave a dismal picture of the participants being unable to share in meaningful friendships. Students spoke of their achievements and what they learnt in mainstream settings. Here again is a view that was contradicted by many adults. They stated that most of the work was beyond the capabilities of students with MGLD and that this meant that they were constantly deflated in mainstream settings.

This chapter indicates that the students are capable of providing information on their perceptions of school. The students spoke on their sense of identity in their schools. They were proud of their achievements and only some were aware of their learning difficulties. The participants selected subject areas or sporting activities in which they were able to demonstrate their accomplishments. They spoke with pride of their achievements in practical lessons such as art and cookery. Schools allowed the participants to demonstrate their achievements among their peers on occasions. Their achievements outside school in Special Olympics were always celebrated. The six participants therefore spoke proudly and with confidence concerning their achievements in mainstream schools. This study demonstrated how encouragement, praise and acknowledgement on behalf of schools gave a sense of achievement to students with MGLD. It is also a possibility that these procedures possibly raised the self-esteem and sense of self among students.

A number of adults felt that the students achieved very little in school. They expressed the view that the curriculum was inappropriate and that the students were deflated by their experiences in mainstream classes. They felt that the curricular demands of the general curriculum in schools prohibited students with MGLD from benefiting from this. The students in this study had a different view in this regard. They demonstrated an interest in subjects such as History, Geography and English and were able to demonstrate in interviews that much learning occurred for them in mainstream classes. This contradicts the views of a number of adults who claimed that the content of lessons held no significance for the participating students. A number of professionals but in the majority, parents, stated how traditional forms of delivery were unsuitable for students with MGLD. This study indicates that there is

a need to re-consider the teaching approaches adopted in schools, where students with MGLD are enrolled in mainstream classes. Alternative forms of curriculum such as JCSP and ASDAN may possibly offer increased learning opportunities in schools. However, the students in this study expressed the view that they want to be included with their peers in mainstream classes and this presents a challenge for schools. Two of the students expressed a desire to be allowed to take certificate examinations. The findings in this study suggest that there is a certain rigidity in mainstream schools that hinder the learning opportunities for students with MGLD. This study suggests a need for more flexibility and reform when students with MGLD are taught in mainstream classes.

For the older students there was awareness that they had an ascribed identity because of their GLD. However, this was accepted on their part and they wanted to be just like all of the other students in their school, where possible. Some adults expressed the views that due to difference in interests and difference in leisure activities that mainstream students and those with MGLD could never form friendships. In the photovoice discussions the students contradicted this view. They placed significant values on their social experiences in mainstream classes. Having proximity to teenagers of their own age was important for participants. They expressed no feelings of exclusion in schools. A number of adult participants held different views in this regard.

Students experienced friendship in a number of different ways. Best friendships occurred for the most part among themselves and other students with disabilities. At times, students provided them with help but this was mainly in sporting and leisure

situations. There were times when the mainstream students treated them as regular classmates. There were occasions when three participants felt bullied by mainstream peers. The participants derived much satisfaction and friendship while participating in social outings, concerts and sporting activities with their mainstream peers. This realisation was absent for a number of the adult participants in this study.

Certain structures exist in mainstream schools that prevent or hinder inclusion. Notable examples of this were demonstrated in this chapter. Here, I am referring to students spending the majority of their day in resource rooms. Others spent considerable amounts of time engaged in independent activities or in the exclusive company of SNAs. This study demonstrates how supportive SNAs can at times restrict the social experience of students with MGLD in schools. This person's presence discourages peer assistance and peer tutoring. There were occasions at interviews where students expressed a desire that mainstream students would sit with them rather than SNAs.

Two of the students spoke on the second level school that they would like to attend. They wanted to transfer to the school that the majority of their mainstream peers were going to attend. The findings in this chapter concur with other studies where the lack of choice for students with SEN in terms of school placement is demonstrated. Parents have to negotiate access for their children and this study shows that there are still barriers in place when it comes to school entrance for students with MGLD. There was a strong belief among many of the adults that special schools were most appropriate in terms of accommodation for students with MGLD. This indicates that there is still a body of people who question the whole

policy of inclusion for students with disabilities in mainstream schools. Parents, on the other hand wanted mainstream placements for their son or daughter. However, this study demonstrates how this is not always possible when it comes to post-primary entrance.

This study shows the importance of taking time to get to know the students with MGLD before deciding on the format of interviews. It is also worthwhile to incorporate a sense of fun into the interviews by using games, photos and puppets. The process of collecting data through a variety of means added depth to this study. Insights recorded on days of observation offer authentic accounts of the lived experience of students with MGLD in mainstream schools. Strategies used in interviews facilitated more in-depth reflections and comments from students. From the outset it was my intention that the student 'voice' should be a central focus. The methods used permitted this to happen. The final chapter that follows summarises the key finding in this study and offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This study aimed at discovering the perceptions of students with MGLD who were enrolled in mainstream schools. It also focused on the methodologies that enabled these students to articulate their views. This chapter summarises the main findings from the study and the conclusions that can be drawn from it. An outline of the implications at school, classroom and national policy levels is presented. This is followed by a reflection on the methods used while listening to the 'voice' of students with MGLD. Consideration is then given to the effectiveness of the theoretical framework that underpinned this study. Consideration is also given to areas of further research on this topic. This study aimed to ensure that the 'voice' of students with MGLD was given prominence. This in itself makes this a unique study in an Irish context. To date there have been no other studies, to my knowledge in Ireland which have similarly attempted to allow students with MGLD to speak for themselves. Other Irish studies that looked at inclusion have involved participants with mild GLD or those with physical or sensory disabilities (Shevlin and Rose, 2003; Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela, 2002). This study provides a comprehensive account of the social and educational experiences of six students with MGLD in mainstream schools and the 'voice' of students is privileged. It demonstrates that adults' views can be at variance and in so doing highlights the dangers of assuming that others can and should speak on behalf of pupils with MGLD. There are clear indications in the study findings that young people with MGLD do have views about their schooling and that, with appropriate support they can express these.

The lack of research concerning the social and educational experiences of students with MGLD in mainstream schools was highlighted in the literature review. The limited studies carried out previously were single case studies and focused on students who were in primary school or in a special school (Mullen White, 2005; Ring and Travers, 2005). This study, though small-scale, provides more extensive data on the experiences of students in mainstream schools. In addition, it goes further than previous studies as it includes a greater number of students, from a variety of schools, at primary and second level and from a number of different geographical locations. As far as the author is aware, this is in fact the first Irish study to consider the social and educational experiences of students with MGLD in mainstream second level schools. It is therefore a significant piece of research that will add considerably to the knowledge of inclusive education in Ireland. As this study combined interviews and observations it contains real life accounts and stories. This was an intention that I hoped to achieve when planning the study initially. It does not rely on others to validate the views of students but instead uses classroom occurrences and observations to verify the students' views. The findings have implications at school, classroom, and national policy level and it is therefore important that each of these areas is considered separately.

Main Findings at School Level

The experiences that one has in schools have a fundamental impact on the development of self-concept (Zeleke, 2004). The participants in this study reported having positive, satisfying social and educational experiences in their schools. All of the students had what Beart, Hardy and Buchan (2005) term an ascribed identity

given to them when assessed as having MGLD. In a similar way to the findings of Connors and Stalker (2007) the six students in this study saw themselves as being no different to their peers. There was no indication that the four younger students viewed having MGLD as an indicator of their own identity. By contrast the two older students did indicate to some extent that they saw themselves as having MGLD. Organisational structures at school level could well have had a significant part to play in bringing students to this realisation.

Previous studies suggest that students with GLD rate themselves lower than their peers in terms of their academic self-concept (Chapmann, 1988b and Zeleke, 2004). For four students in this study this was not the case. They saw themselves as being as good or better than their peers in terms of academic achievements. The participants took pride in talking about their academic abilities and of showing artwork that they had produced. A key discovery in this study is that students with MGLD can focus on other areas apart from the academic ones, such as sporting and practical subjects. Their perceived ability in terms of competence in these areas helps to boost their self-concept. The data that emerged in this study suggested that students with GLD do not rate self-concept as one-dimensional. They were able to rate themselves positively in areas where they experience success in life. This resonates with and extends other studies that were considered in the literature review chapter. An alternative view of this would be that students with MGLD have an unrealistic view of their own competence, and that their positive self-concept might be shaken if they were to realise the discrepancy between their own and their peers' achievements.

Renick and Harter (1989) indicate that the self-concept of students with GLD lowers with age especially if they are in mainstream classes. The evidence in this study possibly supports this claim, as there is tentative evidence to suggest that two of the older students had lower self-concept, but this was not measured using psychological assessments. In order to form a definitive view, further research is required in this area. The professionals interviewed in this study, believed that two older students had been more positive and confident in the early years of mainstream second level. However, they felt that this had lessened as they progressed in the school. This would suggest a need for schools to be pro-active in putting strategies in place that would help to sustain the self-concept and self-esteem of these students as they continue with their studies in mainstream schools. This further supports the importance of student 'voice' and the importance of putting structures in place that enable this 'voice' to be heard. Enabling students with MGLD to 'voice' their concerns and anxieties in mainstream schools may help to sustain their sense of self and their spirit of confidence.

The students with MGLD enter an educational system where enormous rigidities remain in the form of subjects and examinations (Wedell, 2005). These are present in mainstream schools by the time a student enters the last two years in primary school (Naughton, 2003). This study highlights the reality of this situation for students with MGLD and their mainstream teachers. By the time the student enters the senior classes in primary school, they are undertaking work that is at a much lower level to that of their peers. This in turn, sets the students apart from their peers and it continues to be the case as they move into second level schools.

This study incorporates the views and opinions of adults who support students with MGLD in mainstream settings. A disconcerting conclusion emerges when their perceptions are analysed. Their views paint a disconcerting picture of inclusion for students with MGLD in mainstream schools. These people potentially represent the strongest allies for students with MGLD, as they are the ones who constantly provide support. There was only one teacher and one SNA who considered mainstream schools to be appropriate locations for students with MGLD. The majority take the opposite view and conclude that mainstream schools are not appropriate settings for students with MGLD. Teachers and SNAs make this assertion throughout this study. It is their belief that the social and educational demands are too great in mainstream schools and that students with MGLD are unable to achieve what is demanded and expected. Previous research concludes that teachers' attitudes concerning the inclusion of students with low incidence disabilities in mainstream classes are less favourable in comparison to the inclusion of students with high incidence disabilities (Wishart, 2006; Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). This point emerges in the course of dialogue with adults in this study. There is an assertion made by many teachers and SNAs that students with MGLD are not benefiting socially or educationally from their experience in mainstream schools. This represents another instance where there is an expectation that the students 'fit in' to the traditional educational system. This supports the view of McConkey (1998) in which he maintains that schools never undertook systemic changes in order to accommodate students with GLD. There is evidence in this study in which the tensions experienced by teachers and SNAs becomes apparent. They know that the system is unsuitable and maybe would even support change to accommodate the young people they support, but don't see that

change as happening anytime soon. This is an area that will be returned to when the findings at classroom level are considered.

Friendship

A positive finding emerges in this study concerning the nature of friendship of students with MGLD in mainstream schools. One major issue raised in the literature in relation to students with MGLD in mainstream schools concerns the extent to which these students experience friendships in these settings. Previous studies have suggested that students with GLD remain isolated in mainstream schools (Matheson, Olsen and Weisner, 2007; Mand, 2007 and Frostad and Pijl, 2007). However, the students in this study were all of the view that they did have friends in their mainstream schools. Analysing the data from the participant interviews using Meyer's (2001) frames of friendship along with Allan's (1997) descriptors, a clear 'voice' emerges showing that they experience most forms of friendship. This included times when they were treated as a regular friend, occasions when they received assistance in social situations, few examples of assistance in academic settings and occasions when they were ignored but not rejected. They also appeared to enjoy the proximity of other students, even when not interacting with them. It should, however, be noted that the views of adults who were interviewed were to some extent at variance with those of the students about the extent to which these were 'real friendships'. Further research is needed on the nature of friendship as seen from the perspective of young people with MGLD themselves. Listening to these 'voices' tells us what structures and policies promote and possibly hinder friendship in schools. The participants spoke of having positive interactions with their peers and again this contradicts the findings in a similar study carried out by Scheepstra, Han

Nakken and Pijl, (1999) which claimed that students with Down Syndrome remain isolated from their peers. There were occasions in this study when the participants remained apart from their peers but they appeared to do this by choice and it was not a source of concern or anxiety for them. There were revelations concerning bullying but the students spoke of this happening on rare occasions and they did not see themselves as being victims in this regard. Overall, it was evident that participants enjoyed the mere proximity of being surrounded by students of their own age in mainstream settings.

One disconcerting finding in this study, which is in agreement with previous research, is the lack of 'best friendships' among students with MGLD and their peers without a disability. These types of friendships were not there for the participants in this study. By contrast, in the three instances where there were other students with significant disabilities in the same class, participants and staff alike saw these students as 'best friends'. It is noteworthy that schools facilitated these friendships. The significance of these friendships has been undervalued by other researchers who looked at this area (Meyer, 2001 and Allan, 1997). This is an area that requires further research. Later in this chapter I am proposing a new model of provision in which special and mainstream classes co-exist for students with MGLD in mainstream schools. Research needs to determine if a model such as this would enhance the social and educational opportunities for students with MGLD in mainstream settings.

Allan's study suggested that a 'governmental regime' operated in schools where students with GLD were enrolled in mainstream settings. This involved students

without a disability helping, protecting and making allowances for those with disabilities. This was not apparent in this study. Most of these functions were undertaken by SNAs. The following paragraph illustrates how SNAs can adversely influence the social experiences of students with MGLD.

In terms of friendship there is evidence contained in this study that illustrates how structures for those with MGLD can impact adversely on the possibilities afforded to them to interact with their peers. Having an SNA shadowing students for the entire day impedes social interaction. In a similar way, spending lengthy periods of each school day in a learning support room discourages friendships from developing with their peers. This may possibly not occur if time spent in separate provision is balanced and staggered for a number of periods throughout the day rather than spending entire periods in these locations.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

There is evidence arising from this research to suggest that existing curricula at second level do not meet the educational needs of students with MGLD. This point has been stated elsewhere by the NCCA following consultation with a number of stakeholders who work with students who have low incidence disabilities at second level (NCCA, 2009). Teachers are sourcing alternate programmes such as ASDAN but there is no additional allocation of teaching support so that these programmes can be implemented. On the other hand involving students in ASDAN can set students further apart from their peers. Porter (2005) and Nind (2005) hold the view that the distinctive learning needs of students with MGLD are certainly likely to distance them from their peers if teachers include specific accommodations in their

practice that take account of these needs. Teachers in this study expressed difficulties at making the general curriculum accessible to students with GLD. This is despite a recommendation from the NCCA that the revised Primary School Curriculum and the Junior Certificate Programme are now viewed as suitable for all students regardless of ability (NCCA, 1999). However, observations as part of this study would suggest that students with MGLD received a very restrictive curriculum. They were excluded from participating in many subjects. It was apparent in the course of data collection that teachers are still relying on traditional didactic teaching methods. This resonates with the findings of others who claim that little has changed in terms of teaching methods in schools (Callan, 1997; NCCA, 1999; Naughton, 2003). Scanlon and McGalloway (2006) report that Irish teachers accept the principle of inclusion in general but that large class sizes, a lack of professional training and a shortage of supports prevent them from altering their practices in schools. Researchers in the US have called on teachers to move away from traditional methods of teaching if students with GLD are to have access to the general curriculum. Teachers need to be made aware as to how these students learn and how information technology and modified supports can enhance learning. It is also accepted that life skills can be taught within the general curriculum.

This study highlights a major need for reform in terms of assessment and certification at second level. The Junior Certificate Schools Programme offers potential for students with MGLD although a number of teachers in this study questioned its suitability. Currently its availability is restricted to areas of socio economic disadvantage. This study highlights how students with MGLD are following courses in mainstream settings but when it comes to assessment and

examinations they are unable to complete these. This results in many students with GLD leaving school with no form of certification in recognition of their many achievements. In Chapter Two I outlined how this shortcoming is being addressed by those who have a responsibility for drafting curriculum guidelines in Ireland (NCCA, 2009). There are currently initiatives being considered that will introduce a new Junior Cycle Curriculum Framework so that schools can provide teaching materials for those students with low incidence disabilities that take account of their interests and the skills needed for future living.

Main findings at Classroom Level

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I stated that having taught students with MGLD in a special school I was interested in the provision that was now provided in mainstream classes. Special schools have been criticised in the past, as it was perceived that they offered students with MGLD, a curriculum mainly aimed at the development of functional skills. Those who advocate inclusion believe that the possibilities for learning are broadened in mainstream classes (Spooner, Dymond, Smith and Kennedy, 2006). I visited mainstream classes in five schools in a range of different settings. Practice varied greatly in each context. In certain instances there was a huge gulf between the curriculum on offer to the student with MGLD and his\her peers. Teachers were making efforts to include the students in the mainstream classes but this proved to be an immense challenge. In a previous study carried out in Ireland, teachers expressed a view that they felt unable to offer a common curriculum to students with MGLD (Ring and Travers, 2005). Teachers who participated in this study give a similar view.

Reasons to explain why students with MGLD experience difficulties in having access to the general curriculum are noticeable in the data that emerged in this study. In the majority of classrooms traditional modes of teaching are still the norm. Previous research indicates that these methods are unsuitable for students with MGLD (Wehmeyer, Sands, Knowlton and Kozleski, 2002). Research considered previously in Chapter Two demonstrates that access to the general curriculum can happen if teachers make use of supplementary instructional materials, group teaching, peer support and alternative forms of assessment (Wehmeyer, Lattin, Lapp-Rincker and Argan, 2003). These are not common in mainstream classes and that is a major finding of this research study. The present study suggests that teachers continue to use traditional forms of assessment by which students demonstrate what they have learnt. Similar to teaching modes, these forms of assessment do not permit students with MGLD to demonstrate progress.

Another key finding that emerges in this study is the discrepancy that exists between the adults' perception of what students are capable of learning and what students in fact learn. In this study the students spoke of the enjoyment they had from their involvement in academic subjects. They demonstrated that they could talk on many of the topics covered in mainstream classes. However, SNAs and many teachers believed that students experienced no learning in these classes. The 'voice' of the student participants in this study contradicts this belief.

The parents of the six participants had a strong belief that students with MGLD were able to learn in the mainstream classes. Parents were able to indicate the various modes of teaching that suit the learning needs of these students. These

include group work, project work, and practical lessons. One would expect that teachers would be aware of the benefits of incorporating many of these modes of teaching. However, this study highlights that this in fact is not the case in certain classrooms. Many teachers in this study were not incorporating these distinct modes of teaching. This therefore contributes significantly to the difficulties in terms of learning that students with MGLD experience in mainstream settings. There is a contrast between the parents and teachers expectations and this creates another tension that becomes obvious in this study. Teachers are pressurised so that the majority of students will perform well in state examinations. This affects the amount of time that they can give in supporting the learning needs of students with MGLD.

A new model of provision is required in respect of pupils with MGLD who are enrolled in mainstream schools. Fox, Farrell and Davis (2004) and Lorenz (1999) express concerns that many of the additional supports given in respect of students with low incidence disabilities are being used inappropriately and ineffectively in schools. There is evidence contained in this study to suggest that this may be the case in this country.

The findings from this study suggest that opportunities should be allowed where students with MGLD can receive instruction in the core curricular subjects in separate special classes. They should have access to a qualified teacher during this period. This view is supported by research that looked at the learning outcomes of students with low incidence disabilities in over seventy different schools in England (Ofsted, 2006). Ofsted discovered that quality teaching provided by experienced and qualified specialist teachers improved the learning outcomes of students with low

incidence disabilities. Allowing SNAs to perform teaching duties in these situations represent unequal provision for this group of students. Ofsted (2006) are critical where this is the main form of support offered to students with low incidence disabilities and claim that it does not lead to good academic progress for the students concerned. Following the receipt of specialist teaching for a set period of the school day, students with MGLD could return and participate in mainstream classes. This model, supports and recognises a need for inclusive and specialist provision in schools. There needs to be a balance between the amounts of time that the student spends in both settings. In this study the model of provision that operated for Aaron provides one example as to how this can successfully operate in schools.

National Policy Implications

The Irish Government has a strong commitment to inclusion with the enactment of the Education Act (1998) and the Education of Persons with Special Education Needs Act (2004). The findings in this study strongly support the literature that claims that policies of inclusion do not guarantee that a student with MGLD shares in equal participation and access to schools like all other students who do not have a disability. Evidence in this study suggests that students with MGLD continue to have difficulties surrounding placements in mainstream schools. In this study this was most problematic at second level. Findings in this study echo but also extend those of Bagley, Woods and Woods, (2001). Students wanted to transfer to a second level school with their friends. In the course of my research parents spoke of a sense of marginalisation and isolation at the time of transition to post primary school for their young people. However, automatic entry to local second level schools was not afforded to this group and instead much convincing had to be carried out by parents.

Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) as established under the EPSEN Act (2004), in this study, had little impact at improving the transition process. There was evidence to show that parents were unaware of the role of SENOs, and those who were aware of their existence found them unhelpful. Further research is necessary to determine if this experience is generalisable. There were only six pairs of parents involved in this study and for some their sons had transferred to second level several years previously. This study, however, demonstrates how parents were still unaware of the existence of SENOs, four years after the enactment of legislation, which established them as a support structure. Parents continue to approach schools on their own and there is a need for policy makers to inform them that SENOs can offer support in these situations.

The introduction of the General Allocation Model (2005) has enhanced the support structures available in schools for students with MGLD at primary level. Students with MGLD are now entitled to receive additional teaching support. However, this study demonstrates the ambiguity that exists in relation to the policy of general allocation. This policy does not apply to second level schools and participating second level teachers in this study highlighted this inadequacy. Students with MGLD receive Learning Support but scarce resource teaching time in mainstream second level schools. Schools make local arrangements so that students with MGLD receive additional teaching support and as this study has demonstrated there is variability and inequality in this process. Professionals who participated in this study highlighted a need for the introduction of the general allocation model at second level, as this would increase the amount of teaching support available to students with MGLD.

This study highlighted the importance of having special classes available in mainstream schools for students with MGLD. Students with MGLD can spend part of their day in these locations, working on core curricular areas. The remainder of the day can be spent in the mainstream class. This study demonstrated how a special class originally designated to cater for students with mild GLD was of considerable support for a student with MGLD. There is evidence in this study that indicates that the students who had access to a special class received a broader curriculum than the students who had no access to a special class. We are now living in a time of economic recession and a recent policy decision promotes the closure of special classes that cater for students with mild GLD in primary schools. This represents a diminution of supports for students with GLD and will certainly impact on provision. In this study it was clear that two of the students benefited greatly by having access to a special class. They spoke highly of their academic achievements in the special class and of the social experiences that they enjoyed with their friends while there. Policy makers should consider this fact on behalf of students, teachers and parents. Evidence in this study suggests that the provision of special classes in mainstream schools enhances the social and educational experiences that students with MGLD have. Proposing special provision in an inclusive school represents a contradiction. It signals a call for what some authors would call 'segregation' and special treatment for certain students because of their disability. However a number of 'voices' in this study, including those of students spoke on the necessity and value associated with this model of provision. Parents indicated that there was a need for special classes to be established in local second level schools and that this would promote greater access and help to resolve the current difficulties regarding a lack of choice at times

of transition. Parents believed that part, but not all of the young person's day would be spent in a special class.

Based on the findings from this research study, it is immediately noticeable that the enactment of legislation and the formulation of inclusion policies do not guarantee the inclusion of students with MGLD in mainstream schools. Evidence in this study suggests that these students are expected to 'fit in' with existing structures and this can be problematic. There are numerous incidents portrayed in this study, where students with MGLD remain as outsiders or spectators. They spend most time with an SNA rather than with their peers, they undertake different work in class and they cannot undertake the exams that their peers take. I return to the analogy from O'Brien (2003), which I quoted in Chapter Two, in which she concludes that there are times when students with disabilities appear to be looking through a glass wall at the activities and happenings of other students. While at times during this study, I shared this perception; the students' views did not echo this. They never spoke of being an outsider and their perception therefore contradicts what was apparent for me as a researcher while acting as an observer in their schools.

Implications

Arising from this study, there are a number of implications that are now considered. These are outlined across school and classroom levels and the systems and structures that need to be addressed in terms of national policies.

School Level

- Every student in school should be consulted as to how learning could be improved. Periods of consultation must be included so that students with MGLD can share their experiences regarding learning. The evidence that is contained in this study would suggest that these students are capable of analysis concerning the context in which they learn.

- Alternative modes of teaching and assessment are required for students with MGLD. Active and participatory forms of teaching and learning are recommended. These students have to be given an opportunity of showing what they learn in school. Their achievements need to be acknowledged with certification.

- Structures should be in place to promote the social interaction of students with MGLD and their peers both within and outside classes.

Class Level

- Professional development courses need to be provided for all teachers and SNAs who work with students with MGLD. This should focus on the learning styles of pupils and offer advice on differentiation, individualized planning and augmentations that promote learning in mainstream classes. The potential that Information Technology holds in respect of learning for students with MGLD needs to be addressed in professional development courses.

- There is a need in professional development courses for teachers and SNAs to consider collaboration practices. The education of students with MGLD will be enhanced if both teachers and SNAs engage in joint

planning. This greatly extends the role traditionally given to SNAs by schools and the DES.

- All students with MGLD enrolled in mainstream classes should have access to the general curriculum similar to all of the other students. In order for this to become a reality, teachers require professional development. All students in a school will gain from this regardless of ability.

- Support structures and provision should not separate students with MGLD from their peers for an inordinate amount of time. There is a tension here in recommending separate support structures as it could be seen as going against inclusion policy. However, what is required is a more equitable balance surrounding the amount of time that students spend in separate locations and in mainstream classes.

National Policy Level

- DES inspectors should monitor the inclusion of students with MGLD in mainstream schools. There is a need to ensure that these students are enabled to participate fully in the life of the mainstream school.

- Students with MGLD in mainstream schools should have access to a teacher for the entire school day. SNAs should not be undertaking the role of teacher for these students.

- The General Allocation Model has resulted in the provision of additional supports for students with MGLD at primary level. This model should now be introduced to second level schools when students with MGLD are enrolled.

- Special classes should remain as a feature of both primary and second level schools. These are of particular benefit to students with MGLD in mainstream settings. For certain students within this group it is essential that they have the opportunity of spending a certain period of the day in a special class. There is evidence in this study to indicate that these both enhance the academic and social possibilities for students with MGLD. However, I repeat the need for an equitable balance to exist between the amounts of time that students with MGLD spend in both settings.

- There is a need to ensure the involvement of Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOS) in supporting parents at times of transition for students with MGLD.

Findings Regarding Research Methods

One of the research questions underpinning this study was concerned with the research methods and specifically with trying to establish those that enable students with MGLD to articulate their views. This question remains a difficult one to answer even at the end of this study. There is a necessity on the part of the researcher to match research techniques and tools to the individual, based on their communicative ability, interest and maturity. Of the variety of methods used in this study it is not possible to say that one method is more effective than another. However, there are important lessons emerging from this study that offer advice for other researchers who wish to interview students with MGLD. I would recommend supplementing interviews with photos, games and puppets. These provide a concrete frame of reference for participants. The findings in this study show that to discover the most appropriate communication format for interviews, researchers should spend a

lengthy period of time as an observer in schools. In this study it was possible to spend five days in each context and this provided a glimpse of the day-to-day reality of participants. During these days a rapport developed between the students and myself. In the course of these observation days specific recordings were made of occurrences, which illuminated the themes that I wanted to highlight in this study. Days of observation provided an immediate entrance into the world that these students experienced and they provided suggestions of topics that could be further evaluated in interviews.

There is no conclusive evidence emerging from this study to suggest that open-ended questions are more appropriate than others. These proved challenging for participants in this study. It is my belief that on-going interviews over a longer period of time would yield more information on areas of interest and concern for these students. It is my contention that the participants had a lot to say about school and how they experienced it. Their views were collected over a relatively short period of time. More in-depth consultation would require far more interviews with students than were possible given the constraints associated with this study.

Opportunities need to be commonly put in place so that both adult and young research participants can verify the interpretation placed on what was said by them at interviews. Pictorial verification sheets encouraged students in this study to agree or refute my interpretations of what was said by them. This is respectful of participants and goes some way at ensuring that their 'authentic voice' emanates in research. My reflection on the theoretical framework used in this study follows.

Evaluation of Critical Realism Framework

Realism accepts the notion that the world is very complex and that it is made up of a number of different layers. I needed a framework that would allow for this and felt that the framework developed by Layder (1993) was appropriate to use in this study. Layder's framework allows for the incorporation of meanings that participants experience in given settings. This was a central feature of this study. The framework allows for the participants to identify the various mechanisms that operate in various contexts and how these impact on the social and emotional feelings of participants. This framework places significant importance on the power and influence of settings as to how they impact on a person's sense of self. This is another area that I was determined to include in this study. I wanted the participants to express their views as to how the various mechanisms that operated in their schools influenced their educational and social experiences. I felt that the framework developed by Layder allowed for this to occur. I will now consider the strengths and limitations associated with this study.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

There were initial difficulties encountered in terms of access to participants. It was necessary to broaden the search and this in fact strengthened the study. While the number of participants in this study was small, they were a heterogeneous group, with different ages, in schools of different types and sizes and from a range of different geographical locations. The findings are unique to the respective schools and this is acknowledged as a major limitation of case studies in general (Yin, 2003). However, the schools in this study had a number of features, which are common to a range of schools. These features are: size, location, primary, secondary, socio-

economic disadvantaged, streamed or mixed ability in organisation and the support structures deployed. Twenty-five full days of observation were spent in schools as part of this study. There were in addition another twenty-five days when return visits were made to schools for interview purposes. This is a significant amount of time but it facilitated the writing of six in-depth case studies that strengthen the quality of this research. By selecting case studies as a methodology I wanted to give a comprehensive picture of school life in each context. As an observer I was able to get a strong impression of the daily experiences and events for the target students at the particular point in time. The study would have been improved and be of greater substance, if more return visits could have happened throughout the year. This would have allowed more research on the response of pupils to various changes that occurred throughout the year in the schools such as the arrival of substitute teachers, school outings and sport days to mention a few.

This study was based on the experiences of six students who were enrolled in mainstream schools. Ethical constraints and time deadlines prevented me from asking their mainstream peers as to how they interact and learn alongside students with MGLD. Their 'voice', if heard, could also offer valuable insights as to their perceptions on improvements that are needed so as to facilitate greater inclusion and acceptance of students with MGLD in mainstream settings.

The overall findings of this study were not presented to participants. This meant that their impressions and reactions to the findings are missing from this study. Time constraints and pressure to complete the thesis did not permit this to happen. It is my intention to seek the views of student and adult participants at a later stage but their

views will not form part of this present study. This serves as another limitation to this piece of research.

Areas for Future Research

This study lays a solid foundation for future research in the area of inclusion and students with MGLD. It provides insights from five schools. A fuller picture needs to be obtained of educational provision for students with MGLD and this needs to be conducted with an increased number of schools participating. Certain types of schools were not included in this study: primary schools with less than six teachers, single sex schools at both primary and post-primary levels and fee-paying schools. The inclusion of additional types of schools such as these would result in a more extensive account of practices that operate in respect of this group. This study suggests that students with MGLD receive a very restricted curriculum in mainstream schools. This requires further research to verify if this is true in general. There are possibly schools where this is not so. These schools need to be sourced and their practices documented so that other schools can learn from the ways in which they structure their provision.

The NCCA propose to develop and offer a new Junior Cycle Curriculum Framework for students with GLD (NCCA, 2009). The introduction of this framework needs to be monitored carefully by all stakeholders. It is also important that the 'voice' of students with MGLD is not excluded when this new framework is being reviewed as to its suitability and effectiveness.

One disconcerting finding that emerged in this study was that some students with MGLD are spending an inordinate amount of time in the company of SNAs and with SNAs having to fill the role of teacher. Other researchers have also highlighted this occurrence (Shah, 2007; Tews and Lupart, 2008). If this practice is a widespread occurrence throughout Ireland, it remains unknown and warrants further research.

Research contained in the literature review (Renick and Harter, 1989) and evidence that emerged in this study suggests that the self-esteem of students with MGLD lowers as they progress in our educational system. This needs to be confirmed or negated. This might be best achieved through conducting a longitudinal study that investigates this issue. Conclusions in this regard were based on my perceptions, observations and from the comments of students and adults. The use of assessment scales that allow students to give their own perception of self-worth over their time in school would yield further evidence in this regard.

Previous research attempted to discover if the learning outcomes are greater or lesser for students with MGLD when they are enrolled in mainstream schools (Farrell, 2000, 1997). This is an area that requires more extensive research in light of recent policies that promote inclusion in mainstream schools for all students including those with MGLD. An alternative approach is required. This would not simply compare special and inclusive provision but instead look at the types of practices that are associated with particular types of outcomes.

I proposed a new model of provision in this thesis in which students with MGLD would spend part of their day in a special class. This model warrants further

research concerning its effectiveness. Research may possibly determine if this model leads to improvements in terms of learning and social participation for students with MGLD in mainstream schools.

In the previous section that focused on the limitations of this study I made reference to another missing 'voice' in research. Here I am referring to the views of mainstream peers. Their views concerning the social and educational experiences that they have with students with MGLD should also be listened to. The mainstream students possibly hold the key to vital information on changes that need to occur so that their interactions with students with MGLD can be extended and enhanced in schools. The voice of mainstream students without disabilities should be included in future research that looks at the inclusion of students with MGLD in mainstream schools.

Conclusion

In summary this study provides a contribution to our knowledge base in terms of inclusion in Ireland. It provides evidence of the social and educational experiences of students with MGLD who are in mainstream schools and classes. It is a unique study in that the 'voice' of students is privileged throughout and their insider knowledge is afforded due recognition. This study contributes to our understanding of how inclusion policies impact at school and classroom levels.

In the introduction to this thesis I explained how the number of students with MGLD continues to increase in mainstream schools throughout Ireland. I wanted to establish what in fact the experiences of these students were. This study would

suggest that students with MGLD are extremely capable of articulating their 'voice' on topics of concern. The six participants spoke openly on their experiences of friendship, identity and what and how they learnt in schools. They spoke of difficulties experienced in these areas. At times they spoke of improvements that were required in order for their social and educational experience of schooling to improve.

This study offers evidence, which shows that students with MGLD have very limited access to the general curriculum in mainstream schools. It also demonstrates how they experience friendship in a number of different forms in mainstream schools. The participating students indicate that they value the social experiences that mainstream schools offer in their lives. They also demonstrated an air of confidence as they went about their daily lives in these schools. For the majority they were able to distance themselves from their ascribed identity and they wanted to be like their peers in many ways.

Teachers and schools experience difficulties in accommodating students with MGLD. There is a need to provide in-service for all teachers on the various teaching methods that promote learning and access for this group of students. Observations in this study indicate that classes are, for the most part, conducted in a didactic way. One of the points highlighted in the literature review in this study, that emanates from US research is that a variety of teaching modes are required by students with MGLD. In this study it was evident that learning occurred during project work and in practical lessons. US research promotes peer support as an effective mode of teaching for students with MGLD. This was not observed as a form of practice in

schools apart from isolated incidents mainly in PE lessons. US researchers also recommend information technology as a means of enhancing learning but in this study it was utilised most for functional literacy. Effective teaching methods need to be brought to the attention of schools and especially to those who have students with MGLD as part of their enrolment.

This study further recommends making opportunities available in all schools where every student can have a 'voice' on matters of concern and interest. It is important that students with MGLD are afforded this opportunity. In the past they were denied this 'voice' and this study offers evidence to suggest that in some schools this might still be the reality. I have demonstrated how the provision of time and appropriate research methods enable these traditionally 'silent voices' to be heard.

The relevant provision of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2002) gives children the right to have their views offered due regard in all matters affecting them. Article twelve is significant as it recognises the child as being a full human being with integrity and personality (Lundy, 2007). Consulting with young people in schools improves teaching and learning and encourages the formation of a more democratic ethos (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004). Students with MGLD are vulnerable to having this 'voice' silenced in schools. McConkey (1998) believes that schools have the potential to provide students with valuable social skills that will be of benefit in their future lives. This happens when schools encourage this group of students to articulate their views.

This study highlights the fact that students assessed as having MGLD are clearly capable of providing comment and analysis on their experiences in mainstream schools. The views of participating students in this thesis may provide the impetus for change happening at school, classroom and at national policy levels in the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Case Study 1

Aaron
"Aaron is Aaron. He is fourteen so he is nearly an adult now. I don't need him to get Junior or Leaving Certificate. I want him to be able to do things that will give him a sense of achievement, as he loves this. In the last month for example he has mastered the task of being able to fasten the buttons on his shirt for the first time. I like to find new things that he can have a go with. He loves when someone provides him with choice" (Aaron's mother, Transcript 20)

A case study was developed in Aaron's school over a seven-month period running from December 2007 to June 2008. Initially five days were spent observing Aaron in school as he followed his usual routines. Aaron shared four interviews with me in which he gave his experiences of school. These interviews were supplemented by using Clicker 5 software and photovoice discussions based on photos that Aaron had taken. Aaron also wrote a letter to his sister in Dubai in which he enclosed his six favourite photos of his school. In addition to Aaron's interviews a number of other people who were significant in Aaron's life offered contributions at interviews that lend weight to Aarons views. Additional people interviewed included the school secretary who brought Aaron to and from school daily, the school principal, Aaron's mainstream teacher, his special class teacher, his special needs assistant and his mother.

Holy Rosary Primary School

This Primary School was located in the middle of housing estates in the suburbs of Dublin in a middle class area. There were numerous green sites and parks adjacent to the school and there was an absence of litter and graffiti. The school had a welcoming aspect with open gate, games marked on the playground, shrubbery and a bright welcoming entrance. As you entered this school, you were immediately struck

by the orderly appearance and fabric hangings, artwork done by the children, and certificates of achievements and with trophies on display, all suggested that there was a lot going on in this school and that the school community valued their successes and achievements.

The school had sixteen classes from junior infant level up to sixth class, an administrative Principal and eight resource teachers. A number of the resource teachers worked with special needs children but others also worked with international children. There were over four hundred students enrolled in the school and over sixty percent of the student population were international children. The school was in existence for over twenty years but it was evident that it was maintained to a very high standard in terms of physical structure and appearance.

There was a special class in existence in this school. The Principal stated, "there were a lot of uncertaintities surrounding its existence" (Transcript 19). Official policy over the years threatened to put an end to this class. However, it survived and it had been of huge benefit to Aaron. Officially he was only entitled to five hours of additional support every week. However, having this special class meant that he received in excess of the official time allocation in terms of support.

A Biographical Sketch

Holy Rosary Primary School was where Aaron attended since he was in Junior Infants. Previous to this he was in a Montessori pre-school. His parents selected this school for Aaron because according to his mother "I wanted my son to be in an environment that was as normal as possible" (Transcript 20). He had now completed eight years in this school and was now ready to transfer to a new school where he

could complete his secondary education. However this was proving to be problematic.

Aaron was one of nine children enrolled in the special class that formed part of this school. The nine children were aged from four to Aaron who was fourteen. All returned to a mainstream class at intervals during the school day for Art, PE, Lunch and Religion. The sixth class that Aaron joined had twenty-nine male and female students. Aaron had his own seat there and his Special Needs Assistant usually sat next to him at the same table. He also went to the playground for regular breaks with all of the other children in the school.

Aaron was assessed as having a MGLD but in addition he had Prader Willi Syndrome (PWS). He had spent his entire primary school years in the present school and was accepted by teachers and pupils because of his outgoing personality. The educational implications associated with PWS were taken into account by the school and all of the people who worked with Aaron. One particular consideration to be borne in mind was the nutrition and dietary difficulties associated with this syndrome. One of the symptoms associated with the syndrome was an insatiable appetite. Aarons mother had always controlled his diet and the school had also cooperated fully in this regard. Aaron was therefore not overweight in appearance. It should also be stated that Aaron had recently been the subject of a television documentary.

Aaron had a fixation with machinery. The resource teacher confirmed this point by stating "Anything mechanical he loves" (Transcript 18). His Christmas present

last year was an electric leaf collector. He loved cutting the grass with his dad. The school caretaker was also one of his idols and he was always preoccupied with the jobs that this caretaker was doing.

Aaron was an eager student. He was reading books of fourth class standard or possibly higher. He was motivated and had a particular interest in "penmanship". He was able to copy lengthy items of news from the blackboard and at times would also copy writing on the laptop computer. Like all children with this syndrome he needed to have a very structured routine to his day. The teacher had to observe a daily timetable and if any changes were due to occur in this Aaron had to be prepared for this occurrence. He returned to his mainstream class at intervals with no hesitation and would also readily go on jobs for any teacher throughout the school.

Case Study 2

Shelly

This second case study developed from a number of visits to Shelly's school from January 2008 to May 2008. Initially a full week was spent as an observer in Shelly's school. Shelly subsequently shared four interviews with me following these days of observation. Incorporated in these interviews were specific computer packages and a technique known as 'photovoice' with the intention that these methods would help Shelly to talk about school. Interviews took place in her school and never lasted longer than forty minutes. Her resource teacher, a mainstream teacher of hers, a Special Needs Assistant and her parents all shared interviews that added strength to Shelly's viewpoint concerning her personal experience of school.

Nestling's Community School

This secondary school had been in existence for thirty years and was located in the centre of a sprawling housing estate in the suburbs of a large city in Ireland. A huge metal railing ran around the perimeter of the school and this would immediately suggest that there were security issues over the years. The grounds were extensive but not abundant in shrubbery, trees or flowers. This school itself was a grey concrete structure that was not overly appealing to look at from the outside. However, there was a vast green park adjacent to the school and this detracted from the bareness of the building. I subsequently discovered that the students could not use this as a recreational amenity as there were occasional anti-social activities and drug dealings taking place that could pose safety risks for them.

There were approximately five hundred students attending this school aged between twelve and eighteen years of age. There were fifty teachers working here. Those teachers who decided to work in this school faced particular challenges on a daily basis. One teacher believed that twenty to thirty per cent of the student population had additional educational needs arising from Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), emotional behavioural difficulties and tensions arising from debilitating home situations. The school had disadvantage status, which made additional grants and supports available from the DES. It had modern facilities in terms of a gymnasium, six computer rooms, two art rooms, two home economic rooms, science laboratories, technology and woodwork rooms and a dance and drama studio.

The school was non-selective in its admissions policy. It assessed all students before they joined the school and they were then placed in streamed classes

according to ability. At Junior Cycle students followed the Junior Certificate in the traditional sense or they could take the Junior Certificate Schools Programme. At Senior Cycle the school offered Transition Year, Leaving Certificate, along with leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The school was therefore committed to meeting the needs of a diverse body of students. This was summed up in the mission statement of the school where it promised "to foster the personal social and spiritual development of students and to help them achieve their full academic potential".

The school had a reputation for its acceptance and support given to students who had special educational needs. The Special Education Team consisted of twelve teachers and four Special Needs Assistants. The commitment of this team was always acknowledged when Inspectors carried out whole school evaluations.

A Biographical Sketch

Shelly (pseudonym) was about to turn fifteen at the time of this research. She had Down Syndrome, wore glasses and had long hair. In her school uniform she did not stand out from the other young people in her school. She had an outgoing personality and this endeared her to both teachers and pupils alike. She lived nearby with her parents and a very large close-knit family. This was her second year in Nestling's Community School. She completed all of her primary education in mainstream Junior and Senior schools. She had a full-time SNA who shadowed and supported her throughout the entire school day.

Shelly was in the lowest stream of second year. There were approximately nine other students in her class for all subjects. She had an exemption from Irish. She did

not take other subjects such as French, Science and Technology and during these periods she received extra tuition from the Resource Teacher in the Resource Room. She would possibly spend ten periods in the Resource Room in any week but there were other students present in this room during these periods. The following was an outline of her timetable:

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
9 o clock	Home Ec R.42	Geog R. 37	Eng. R. 46	Computers R. 14	Irish
9.40	Home Ec R. 42	Maths R. 6	Geography R. 37	Computers R. 14	Maths R. 4
10.20	Irish	Irish	SPHE R. 31	JCSP R. 4	Geog R. 37
11 o'clock	Eng. R. 1	RE R. 15	JCSP R. 4	RE R.33	TECH R.42
11.40	RE R. 33	JCSP R. 4	Home Ec R. 41	Eng R. 47	TECH R.42
13.15	Maths R. 32	Art R. 39	Home Ec R. 41	CSPE R. 37	Home Ec
13.55	Maths R. 32	Art R. 39		Irish R. 1	Metal R. 41
14.35	Gym PE	Geog R. 37		Art R. 39	Eng R. 37
15.15	Gym PE	Eng R. 35		Art R. 39	Maths R. 47

She was expected to make her way from room to room like all of the other students for various subjects.

Shelly had ambitions for herself in life. Many of her family worked in TESCO and she wanted to do likewise on finishing school. With this in mind she saw herself as able to "Walk to my class on my own, I'm a big girl" (Transcript 8). In her eyes she had a clear pathway laid out for her.

I mentioned previously that Shelly was in the lowest stream in second year in this school. Most of the pupils in this class had mild general learning disabilities or

other behavioural problems. There was a constant struggle for teachers to motivate these students to perform a minimum amount of work in class.

Case Study 3

Alice

A Case Study was conducted in Alice's school from March to May 2008. During this period Alice was observed on five consecutive days. Alice shared interviews with the researcher on four occasions and each interview lasted no longer than forty-five minutes. In addition to this significant people in the life of Alice such as her mother, father, resource teacher, mainstream class-teacher and the school Principal all participated in interviews.

St. Christopher's Primary School

This was a rural country school located on the outskirts of a very small village in the midlands of Ireland. It was decorated to a very high standard and the grounds surrounding it were extremely well maintained. There were football pitches and concrete playing surfaces where the children could participate in sporting and recreational activities. There were twelve teachers in total working in this mainstream school. These consisted of an administrative principal, eight classroom teachers, two resource teachers for students with special educational needs and one learning support teacher. There were three Special Needs Assistants working in the school supporting students who had specific learning needs. There were approximately two hundred and fifty students attending this school.

Three coaches brought the majority of students to and from school every day. On arrival children usually dropped their bags outside the main door and scattered around the grounds and played in groups. This was indicative of the relaxed atmosphere that existed in this school. Missing were the constant messages over intercom and constant ringing of bells that were common in many schools. What was immediately apparent after spending a few hours in the school was the musical culture that was pervasive and facilitated on an ongoing basis. Students were free to practice their piano in the hall at break time. There were recorder groups, choirs and performances to be heard several times in any given day.

A Biographical Sketch

Alice (a pseudonym) was fourteen years of age and had Down Syndrome. She had long hair, wore glasses and had a reserved personality. She lived at home in a rural town with her parents. She had an older brother and sister who were now finished school and both working in Ireland.

Alice had attended Saint Christopher's Primary School for the past nine years. This was her second year in sixth class. Last year was a traumatic year for her family due to the serious illness of a member, so her parents decided to postpone her transfer to secondary school for another year. She therefore remained in sixth class this year with a totally new group of students but with the same teacher that she had last year. She appeared to have had a better relationship with the students who were in her previous sixth class as they were all together in the same group since they were in Junior Infants. Alice was now considered to be achieving levels of success in her reading and writing that were typical of students who were in first or second-

271

class in primary school. It was now opportune to locate a suitable second level school and this was proving to be a traumatic experience for her parents.

Case Studies 4 and 5

Kevin and Noel

"I love my school, I love my friends and I love my helpers. I really like this school. No bad things here" (Noel, Transcript 28).

This fourth case study was compiled from data that I collected between April 22nd and June 5th 2008. There were two students in this context who were the focus of attention. The students were observed in their school setting over five days. There followed three joint interviews with the two boys and on the final interview we discussed their photos that they had taken as part of the 'photovoice' exercise. I incorporated verification sheets for the students to accept or reject my interpretation of what transpired in the previous interviews. Interviews usually lasted for forty-five minutes. Significant people also shared interviews with me as part of this research. This included a joint interview with the boys' two resource teachers, one with their year head and finally a joint interview with the mothers of the two boys.

Mill Row Community College

This was a very large Community College with over 1,100 students enrolled who were all aged between twelve years of age and eighteen years of age. The teaching staff in total exceeded 110. It was now in existence for ten years and in that time the school had developed a very high reputation in terms of the academic achievement of the majority of their students. It was situated in a vast housing development where the families were mainly middle-income earners. The school

building was modern in appearance and the grounds were extremely well maintained with numerous floral arrangements and shrubbery around the grounds.

A school of this size requires a lot of administration and adherence to rules and policies. This was immediately evident after spending some time in the school. It appeared to be managed by a very dedicated principal and team of teachers. On my first morning I heard the Principal speak over the intercom regarding the protocol that had to be observed at all times concerning the wearing of school uniforms. Full uniforms were to be worn including blazers. Ties had to be worn in the correct way and shirts; blouses had to be inside trousers and skirts. Teachers were encouraged to monitor this throughout the day in classes. On the website for the school their philosophy is outlined: "We adopt the seanfhocal 'Mol an oige agus tiocfaidh si', where praise and encouragement and a positive learning environment formed the foundation of our philosophy. It was a school with a track record of gold medal winners in state examinations. There were awards given to students by the school, for those who achieved more than five hundred points in the Leaving Certificate.

It was non-selective in its intake and classes were formed in mixed ability groupings, in other words there was no streaming in operation. However streaming was introduced in second year for Irish and Maths and for English at third year. In the Senior Cycle classes were streamed for Irish, English, Maths and languages. All other subjects were formed in groups of mixed ability.

There were usually twenty-four teachers involved in the provision of resource and learning support teaching in the school. However, not all of the teachers had

received training and a qualification in SEN. There were twelve SNAs assigned to support individual students. For a number of students who had SEN the school operated a 'reduced timetable'. These students worked with their SNA during 'study' periods. The school provided Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programmes. For a minority of students who had SEN the school was now introducing the ASDAN programme. This was mainly a life skills and vocational programme for senior students.

A Biographical Sketch

The two young men who were central to this case study had spent their entire schooling to date in regular mainstream schools. Noel was seventeen years of age, wore glasses, tall, and had Down Syndrome. He was very articulate and clearly easy to understand. Kevin was eighteen and also had Down Syndrome. His speech could be difficult to understand at times. The Department of Education and Science had agreed that Kevin could remain on in this school for an additional three years so it was likely that he would remain there until he was twenty-one. There were two SNA's who worked with the boys. The boys were both completing their third year in the school. Incidentally it was worth noting that there were seven class groupings in third year.

Three years of integration in mainstream classes reached a point when teachers decided that the boys were no longer coping. The teachers in consultation with both sets of parents decided to review the situation and to look at alternative programmes. With this in mind the boys were now following the ASDAN programme, but much of this took place in the resource room. The boys only joined the mainstream class

for Art, PE, CSPE and Home Economics. At other periods they engaged in study periods that were directed by their two SNAs. Unlike all of the other students in their year they would not take any subjects in the Junior Certificate. They would complete house exams instead.

The following was an outline of their revised timetable that had been implemented since February 2008. They were now having minimal contact with the mainstream classes as was evident from looking at their timetable:

TIMETABLE

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
9.50	Tutorial	Tutorial	Tutorial	Tutorial	Tutorial
9.00	Study	LS Math	LS Maths	Study	Study
9.40	LS Maths	Study	Study	Study	Study
10.20	CSPE	Study	Study	LS Maths	LS Maths
11.00	LS English	PE	Study	Study	Art
11.40	LS English	PE	Study	Study	Home Ec.
12.15	L	U	N	C	H
12.30	L	UN	LS English	C	H
1.05	L	UN	Study	C	H
1.15	Study	Study		LS Maths	Study
1.55	Study	Study		LS Maths	Study
2.30	Study	Kevin -Art		Art	Art
3.10	Study	Home Ec		Home Ec	Home Ec

It became apparent that the majority of the boy's timetable was made up of study periods. These periods were supervised by the two SNAs as opposed to teachers. They were spending on average of two periods every day in the mainstream class but on Wednesday this time was reduced to a mere ten minutes of tutorial time. There were no specifically allocated rooms for the Study Periods and the SNAs were constantly searching and locating available rooms. In the course of one interview we

had to move rooms on three occasions as other students and teachers were allotted the rooms where we were talking (Fieldnote 19-05-08).

Case Study 6

Nathan

"From the time he started school, he loved it. He would always say 'I want to go to school today'" (Nathan's mother, Transcript 37).

A case study was developed in Nathan's school over the month of June 2008. Five days were spent as an observer in his school. In addition Nathan shared two interviews and these were structured to include activities that were engaging. These included the use of a hand puppet, discussion on photos and a 'posting' activity. Interviews lasted no longer than forty minutes. Nathan's mother, his special class teacher and his SNA also participated in individual interviews.

Good Shepherd National School

This school was centrally located in a coastal harbour town close to Dublin. It had disadvantage status. However, the school was extremely well maintained and built on the grounds of a former convent. Some of the adjoining land had recently been sold to a private developer but there were ample playing facilities including a tennis court for the students. The school building was one of two storeys in structure and there was no necessity for any pre-fabricated classrooms as there was sufficient accommodation for all classes in the existing building. There was a nice tree lined avenue leading to the school entrance.

The following table illustrates the population that made up this school:

Personnel	Numbers
Administrative Principal	1
Mainstream Teachers	7
Special Class Teacher	1
Learning Support\Resource Teachers	4
Special Needs Assistants	8
Total School Enrolment	120

The figure given as total enrolment also included a sizable number of International children. The majority of them came from Poland and India.

The special class that formed part of this school catered specifically for students who had MGLD. At present there were eight children enrolled in this class who were aged between eight and thirteen. A student from Nigeria had recently joined this class and she presented with severe challenging behaviour. This had created difficult situations for the teacher, the SNAs and for the other children. There were always three SNAs present in the room and a Resource Teacher provided one and a half hours of additional support for some of the children. The children remained in this class for the entire school day and only interacted with other children in the school at playtime while out on the playground. Some of the boys including Nathan also participated in football training with the children from mainstream classes.

A Biographical Sketch

Nathan (a pseudonym) was a twelve-year-old boy who had Downs Syndrome. He was small in stature and wore glasses. He communicated verbally and had a bright personality. He lived alone with his mother but he had very good social interaction with a number of other children who lived in his locality. This mainly happened at a supervised club that ran in the local playground on a daily basis. He also attended a mainstream football club. He viewed himself as being an actor or a

comedian of sorts and liked to amuse people. He disliked going into dark places or those where crowds were making lots of noise.

Nathan has attended Good Shepherd National School since he was in Junior Infants. Initially he was fully included in a mainstream class with his peers. However when he reached third class a place became available in the special class and he now attended this class daily. Nathan's weekly timetable revealed the learning opportunities that were provided for him in this school:

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8.50-920		ACTIV	ITIES		
9.20-9.30		RO	LL		
9.30-9.45		SPEECH	AND	LANGUAGE	
9.45-10.00		RECEPTIVE	AND	EXPRESSIVE	
10-10.15		WRIT	ING		
10.15-10.30		READ	ING		
10.35-10.45		MORNING	BREAK		
10.45-11.15		LITTLE	LUNCH		
11.15-11.30		STORY	RHYME	POETRY	
11.30-12	M	A	T	H	S
12- 12.30					
12.30- 1.30	GEOGRAPHY	GEOGRAPHY	ART	SCIENCE	INTEGRATION
1.30- 2	LIFE-SKILLS	COOKING	ART	LIBRARY	GAMES
2-2.30	PE	PE	PE	PE	MUSIC

On looking at the timetable it was immediately apparent that the teacher followed a definite routine daily and this appealed to the children. They knew what to expect on a daily basis.

278

Appendix 2:

Parents' Questions

General

1. Is your child attending the local school?
2. Why did you choose this school?
3. Had you ever to change schools?
4. What makes a good school for your child?
5. What would be a good day for your child in school?
6. What would be a not so good day for your child in school?

School

7. What does your child tell you about school?
8. Would you say that your son likes or dislikes school?
9. What does your child like\dislike in school?
10. What has your child gained from school?
11. What kind of an experience has school in general been for your child?
12. What works well in school for your child?
13. Are there areas in school that are not working that well for your child?

Social

14. Does your child have friends in school?
15. Does s\he enjoy playing with other children?
16. Does s\he ever bring school friends home?

Academic

17. What do you think of your child's academic progress in school?
18. Are there particular difficulties that your child has in school?
19. Are there subject areas where s\he has particular strengths?
20. Are there subjects that pose particular difficulties?

Overall

21. Are you happy with the education provided for your child?
22. What would you like to change?
23. Have you worries about school in future years?
24. Is there one area in education for your child that you would like me to highlight in this study?

Is there anything else that you would like to say regarding your child's experience of school?

Consent Form

My name is Mike.

I am writing a big book.

It is about young people and school.

Can I ask you questions about your school?

Yes   **No**

If you do not understand the questions, please tell me

If you want to stop you can show the 'stop' sign.

If you want to start, show me the 'go' sign.

Do you want to ask me any questions?

How do you feel about helping me with

my book?

Interview: Tuesday 22nd January 2008 with Shelly

The RT and myself collected the students from their assembly point. Shelly had news that her cousin had a baby boy. She has already collected the register to give to her teacher- this is her job throughout the day, looking after the register and giving it to teachers at the commencement of each new lesson.

Shelly opts to sit in the middle of four boys in the classroom. The other girls are at the other side of the room. The teacher asks them all to take out geography homework given last Friday. While waiting for him they have to transcribe facts from page 78 of their Geography textbook into their copies. 9.05 to 9.20 Shelly works on her own, writing as the SNA is out of the classroom. Her teacher helps her to find the correct page in her text book.

9.25:	**Shelly calls out a boy's name sitting near her. He doesn't acknowledge her.**
9.30.	Teacher reads words that Shelly has written: Inland, Waterway, Access, Barges and says that he will explain them later (he never does) However before he goes Shelly notices his wedding band and asks:

Shelly:	Is that your ring sir?
Teacher:	Yes.
Shelly:	Who gave it to you?
Teacher:	My wife.
Shelly:	What's her name?
Teacher:	Lisa.

9.30	**She asks a boy to stop shaking her table.** She looks over at the girls and giggles at them **(10 students in total in the class at this time).**
9.35	**Teacher monitors Shelly's work and says: "Don't forget the margin, we're trying to save the trees". She replies "Oh yes".**

The bell sounds to signify the end of the lesson and like all of the other children in the class she puts away her file independently.

9.45.	Follow Shelly to Room 6 for Maths. She greets teachers and students on the corridor: "Hello Miss, I like your hair". **On entering Room 6 she goes to the back of the room saying "I want to sit with my friends SNA brings her to the front and sits with her. Teacher asks Shelly what she can remember about 'area'.**

Teacher:	What do you call the space that you lie on in the sand?
Shelly:	Area

Like the previous day the kids are talking to eachother in the background. One male teacher had to bring in a male student who was refusing to enter the room. Teacher encourages him to avoid getting a 'conduct sheet'. He continues

arguing "I didn't think this was my classroom". The SNA leaves the classroom, boys are flinging pencils. Shelly begins to direct her attention at the boys. The SNA arrives back with a large calculator for Shelly and redirects her attention towards her teacher. There are eight students in the room and Shelly is the only one engaged in work as directed by the teacher. The teacher moves the trouble makers to the top of the class in an effort to restore some order.

Time	Description
10.00	the SNA is writing work from the board for Shelly into her exercise book, helping her to use the calculator in order to work out the area on diagrams in a worksheet that was distributed earlier.
10.05	Teacher asks SNA if Shelly is ok?
10.10	Shelly is the only one working. The girls are talking about 'sponge ball square pants' , others are talking and the boy moved earlier to the top of the class is constantly rolling a battery on the surface of his table.
10.15	Shelly still working with SNA. The difference between 01 and 10 is explained to her. The battery is still rolling and the other boys are now arguing about the price of chicken curry.

REFLECTION; Shelly did more work than any other student in the room for the entire lesson. However, the assistance and encouragement provided by the SNA is crucial when it comes to keeping her attention focused on work in progress.

Time	Description
10.25	10.25. Returned to Resource Room. All walk down the corridor with the teacher for a toilet break.
10.30	back in Resource Room; Shelly asks can they read Wilderness book but teacher insists that it is 'Beat Dyslexia' time. Teacher asks Shelly what was covered yesterday in this lesson. "I can't is her reply" and the teacher reminds her that they worked on the words 'their' and 'there'. Today she has to practice joined writing. Teacher reads the line of writing that she will write: "Vin has a vast vest" He asks her to repeat this fast: "Vin has a nest vest", "Vin has a lost nest". She is having difficulty repeating what he said. He repeats the line again and gives her a chance to do lkikewise: "Vin has a nist" and "Vin has a vast nest". Teacher reassures that this is difficult to do because it has joined writing.
10.40	SNA gone on break. Girl entrs class after being thrown out of her English Class for throwing a penny. Teacher now helps another boy to write a letter of complaint to the metal work teacher. He claims that he did four metal work exams at Christmas and only received grades for two of these. Teacher encourages Shelly to listen as this letter of complaint is composed.

Teacher: What would you write Shelly?

Shelly: Dear Mr. B. I am in 2a.... The other children make comments about the recipient of this letter calling him Mr. Baldy. Shelly shares in their laughter.

Teacher asks Shelly to spell words needed in the letter such as problem, subject. These she can spell.

10.55	The boy has now finished writing his letter of complaint and the teacher reads this aloud for the class. Shelly is allowed to listen and she appears to be interested. SNA returns to the room from her break and says "Shelly, you don't need to be listening to the letter". The teacher says "No, it's ok. She's just listening". Class finishes and all students including Shelly replace their folder on the shelves.
11.05	Shelly is helped to read the timetable for her class that is mounted on the wall outside of the Resource Room. She has to discover what subject is next and what room number does she need to go to. She reads RE, Room 15. On the way to this room she again salutes students and staff.

Boy:	Shelly, what class have you now?
Shelly:	RE
Boy:	With who?
Shelly:	Ms …
Boy:	Will you be talking about God?
Shelly:	Yeah God.

2nd Interviews: 25th June 2008 with Nigel

R: **You never asked how my friend is today?**

N: **Your friend?**

R: **Yes, who was my friend that I brought here last week?**

N: **Am…..**

R: **Can you remember his name?**

N: **Pepe?**

R: **No, Toby. Will I get him again?**

N: **Yes, where is he?**

R: (slowly dragging him out from the bag)- **Oh here he is, do you remember him?** (talking to Toby) **He says he's tired today and he'd love to stay in bed.**

N: **Me too.**

R: **Toby wants to know are you tired like him?**

N: **Yes.**

R: (pretends Toby is talking to R) **He wants to know can he ask you a few questions?**

N: **Yes**

R: **First thing today, he wants to know are you happy or sad today?**

N: **Happy**

R: **Now he wants to know, why do you come to school?**

N: **Because I love school**

R: (as always R pretends Toby is talking to him) **He wants to know what do you love in school?**

N: **Doing my work and sums.**

R: **Toby says that he's the best at eating grass in his school. He wants to know what are you the best at**

N: **Me?**

R: **Yes Toby wants to know what are you the best at?**

N: **Reading a story**

R: **Toby , did you hear that. Nathan says he's the best at reading stories.**

N: **Yes.**

R: **What else are you the best at?**

N: **Listening to tapes**

R: **Toby says that he had sports day in his school this week.**

N: **Me too.**

R: **Toby, Nathan had sports day as well!**

N: **Laughs- he he.**

R: **Toby says that he won the crawling race-the slow race.**

N: **Me too.**

R: **Did you?**

N: **Yes the slow race. I'll show you now. (He produces the medal won from his pocket)**

R: **…Oh Toby says it's lovely.**

N: **Yes.**

R: **Toby wants to know had you to run or walk in the race?**

N: **Run.**

R: And when you won the medal, how did you feel?
N: Happy.
R: Brilliant. Toby says he's raging because he got no medal.
       Toby wants to know if you were ever sad in school?
N: No.
R: Toby said that he was really sad in school this week.
N: Why?
R: Oh he says that the bold boy…..
N: *interrupts* Oh yeah calling names.
R: Do you remember the name that they called him?
N: Yeah.
R: What?
N: Wuff.
R: No Shelly and smelly old Toby.
N: Ah.
R: Not a very nice name?
N: *No.*
R: *Did anyone ever call you a name?*
N: *Yeah.*
R: *What?*
N: *Scumbag.*
R: *Oh that's a horrible name Toby?*
N: *Yeah.*
R: Toby says he hopes that you told your mammy?
N: Yes I did.
R: Toby says he hates having to run in races. He can't run fast. Toby wants to know what do you hate in school?
N: I hate doing work.
R: Do you hate doing work?
N: Yeah.
R: You hate doing your writing, you hate doing your sums…..*(N interrupts)*
N: I like doing sums.
R: Ok do you hate writing?
N: I like writing.
R: Do you like reading?
N: Yes I do like reading.
R: Toby says he remembers that you hate playing with the parachute?
N: Yes.
R: Why do you hate playing with the parachute?
N: Because it blows all the air.
R: And … (Nigel interrups and rubs the tortoise)
N: He's nice.
R: Toby says that he loves reading books! Do you like reading books?
N: Yes.
R: And Toby says he has a friend in school. His name is Ciaran.
N: Ciaran?
R: Yes Ciaran.
N: And is he nice?

R: Toby says he's great and that they always play football together.

N: Football? I like playing football.

R: Toby says he loves playing football...... No Toby I can't ask him that.

N: Don't ask me what?~

R: Ok; but he wants to know if you have any friends in school?

N: Yes I do. Tom, Frank, and Marco.

R: He wants to know what ye do together.

N: Play games.

R: do ye ever fight?

N: No.

R: How do your friends make you feel?

N: Funny.

R: Do they ever make you feel sad?

N: Yes. Once.

R Just once?

N: Yes, they called me names.

R: Was that in this school?

N: A different school.

R: (pretends Toby is talking to him) Toby says that he's really sad now because he has no school for the summer.

N: *Me too.*

R: *But he says he'll have no friends to play with when he's at home.*

N: *Yes, I will.*

R: *Who?*

N: *My friends, like Tom.*

R: *Toby wants to know where you'll meet them?*

N: *In the playground.*

R: *Who'll you meet in the playground?*

N: *Pauline and Jill.*

R: *Toby says he's going to be in a summer club!*

N: *Ah, me too.*

R: *Toby says he's going to go to Joe's football club.*

N: *Ah, me too (excitedly shakes hands)*

R: *(Toby whispers something) He's trying to get into this club but his mammy has to sign his form.*

Would they let a tortoise into Joe's football club?

N: *Yes.*

R: *(Toby whispers into Rs ear) He wants to know did anything really good happen to you in school this week?*

N: *Yes.*

R: *What things made you happy?*

N: *I do play.*

R: *Were you playing football with the boys?*

N: *No sports day.*

R: *Ok and you had no football?*

N: *Yes I had.*

R: *How did you feel at football?*

N: *Happy.*

R: *(Toby whispers to R) Toby says that he's dead tired now from talking to*

you.
N: *Yeah.*
R: *He wants to know can he go back to bed?*
N: *Yeah, bye Toby.*
R: *Toby says Bye Nathan*

Appendix 6

Consent Letter to Principals

November 7th 2007

Dear Principal,

I am a lecturer in the Special Education Department in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. I am currently working on an Ed. D. course run by this college. My area of interest is students, who have moderate general learning disabilities and their experience of school. I have spoken with Mrs O'Gorman whose daughter Shelly attends your school. She has agreed to allow Shelly participate in this study. I would now like to request permission from you as Principal and from your Board of Management to become involved in this study.

The research will involve visiting Shelly in school on a number of occasions between November 2007 and May 2008. During these visits I will hold interviews with the student and also with significant teachers who work with her. The student's parents will also share a number of interviews with me. I may also ask Shelly to photograph events and places that are a particular source of pleasure for her in helping to describe 'me and my school'.

Anonymity is guaranteed. Pseudonyms will be used to protect identity of both school and student. All data that emerges in the course of this study will be kept under lock and key in my office in St. Patrick's College and will only be made available to my three supervisors. Following completion of my final thesis, a number of articles may be written in relevant journals where findings are outlined.

Your cooperation in this research would be highly valued. If you require any further information, you can contact me directly in college at 8842154. A consent Form is also enclosed so that I can gain written approval from the Board of Management. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Michael O'Keeffe

Informed Consent Form

I _____

The Principal of

_____on behalf

of the Board of Management would like to formally grant permission to

Michael O'Keeffe to carry out the above outlined research. I understand that

the research will include all of the following methods:

- Observation of the student in school.

- Photographs taken or (assisted to take) by the student of 'Me and my
  school'.

- Interviews with the student.

- The student taking the researcher on a tour of the school in order to map
  the context in which they learn.

- Interviews with parents and practitioners to gain their perspectives and
  insights into their son's/daughter's experience of school.

Signed_____

Date _____

Appendix 7

Picture of Toby

WE LOVE THIS SCHOOL.   WE

WE LIKE OUR HELPERS. THERE ARE NO

BULLIES IN THIS SCHOOL.

NOEL WANTS TO MAKE LOTS OF

CRAFTS   NEXT   YEAR.   KEVIN   WANTS   TO   DO

WORK EXPERIENCE IN THE

CINEMA   KEVIN HATES

WHEN BOYS   AND GIRLS

MESS   IN   CLASS.   THEY   GET   INTO

TROUBLE. NOEL WAS HAPPY

WHEN HE SCORED A GOAL

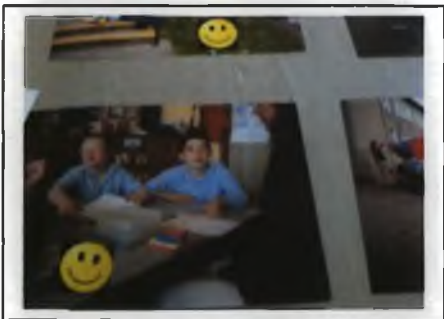IN PE. WE LIKE GOING TO THE SHOPS

FOR BREAKFAST

ROLLS.

Appendix 9

Games

Appendix 10:

Aaron's Favourite Place

Mural Wall

Playground

Secretary's Office

Staff-room

Kevin and Noel's Favourite Places in School

The Computer Room

The Basketball Court

The Book Corner

Games Corner

Appendix 12

Kevin and Noel's Achievements

Kevin's hot-dog bag and bowl of fruit

Noel's project on 'hats'